

# Her Unwanted Mate On The Throne by Caroline Chapter 140

[/ Her Unwanted Mate On The Throne by Caroline](#)  
Chapter 140 Respect is easy to gain

Guards stood behind the men's chairs as they seated themselves at the table. No food was yet offered to them and it didn't seem like it would be until the deal was set in stone. They looked ragged and tired, but William looked as if he had slept the whole time they were in there despite not leaving his chair once. He was fresh, alert, and ready for any sort of battle about to be thrown his way.

"Talk." William commanded. Her eyes lingered on the stubble that formed around his chin again. She imagined how scratchy it would feel against her skin and suddenly she realized how tired she was. 1

Edward cleared his throat. "We realized that their suffering was worse than we thought it would be. We don't have much experience with going hungry."

"I'm sure you don't." William braced his elbows on the table. "That is not what I wanted to hear. You don't sound as if you understand them at all. I watched as children offered to give up their only meal to help the rogues that were close to their death. You missed one meal and suddenly you can understand what they're going through?"

"We want to make things right." Mal said nervously. His clothes were wrinkled and sweaty. "We may have cut back a portion of their food inventory for some of the villages, but we want to double it."

"You're going to send four times the amount." William interrupted. Their eyes grew a little wide and Doris only felt a strange attraction for him. She'd never seen him in action like this, was he always so... kingly? No room for objections, only his demands.

"Prince William--"

"I don't want to hear it. The north is full of good people just as this kingdom is. Their bad reputation doesn't mean they don't deserve to be treated like people. You can't withhold food and expect them to survive, that would kill thousands." William narrowed his eyes. "They pay their monstrous taxes just for you to cut them their earned food?"

Edward shifted in his seat. She saw a bead of sweat trail down his forehead. "I never took you for a leader, Prince William. I thought you had no interest in politics."

"You've been seeing wrong, then. I know what's best for my people and I won't let money hungry wolves try to take down lower class people any longer."

Edward leaned back in his chair and looked at William in a new light. Doris must have felt a bit delirious from lack of sleep, because she only wanted to laugh. "How long have you been like this, William? We all thought you were reckless and didn't have a care in the world expect about who would lay in your bed next."

Edward's eyes flickered to Doris on William's side and she prayed that her face wasn't as red as she felt it was. She clenched her hands into fists under the table the second he looked. Respect is easy to gain away from her. The utter embarrassment from a single glance was enough to set her on fire once more.

"I've always had an interest in being a leader. Everyone drew their own assumptions of me in their minds and ran with it, that is not my concern. *My* concern is doing what's best for this kingdom and all of the people around it."

"Consider the food agreement already done. We will have the food sent out by this afternoon." Edwards said suddenly. Mal glanced at him in surprise but said nothing to object. A satisfied wave swirled in her chest.

A new glint replaced the irritation and fear that had been previously in Edward's eyes. He almost looked, impressed by the way William was acting. How was that possible? He leaned towards William.

"Now that that is settled, what else are your plans to better help your people? How do you suppose you'll do that when your brother is the one set to take the throne?" Edwards tilted his head. "Are you planning on helping him when he becomes king?"

"He may be set to take the throne, but nothing is ever in stone." William said simply. She could tell that he didn't trust these men yet but his words spoke volumes. He all but confirmed he was now after the throne for himself.

Edward raised his brows as if he didn't expect this to become of their conversation. "That's true. I always thought your brother was too-soft to take on a role like this. He never once took matters into his own hands or thought about ways to make things better for his people."

"Edward, he just threatened us and locked us in a closet." Mal hissed quietly, but they all had heard him just fine. William didn't show a hint of emotion, he kept a straight face.

"Yes, he did. I don't think I've ever seen a prince so determined to make sure things went through the way he wanted. Perhaps your brother could learn a thing or two from you instead of following your fathers shadow."

William lifted his chin a little. "As to your previous question, I have many ideas on how to make this kingdom stronger. *More* strong than my brother would ever hope to make it." William's eyes glanced over the room at each face as if he was now talking to all of them. It sent chills down her body.

"For too long, we have allowed this kingdom to appear weak and selfish to outsiders. *My* father hasn't been the same sort of ruler since I was born. He was

once passionate about what he believed in, now he only cares about control and power. I won't lead with a head full of selfish desires. I only want to improve this kingdom and I will stop at nothing to achieve that."

Edward hummed and looked William up and down. "You certainly don't have any sort of lines that you won't cross." He glanced at Enzo who had just been watching silently the entire time. He clearly knew when it was time to stay silent, but his presence alone was louder than any words.

"I think. I think this is refreshing. I doubt any of the other royal members would take things into their own hands and allow this to happen. They would throw us in a cell and have someone else deal with us until it was settled." Edward said.

It surprised her. She expected rage or fear leaking from his words, not admiration. Did William put them under some sort of spell that left them mesmerized by him? He was probably the only man in the world that could lock another man in a small room and have them come out with some sort of new respect.

William stood. She couldn't tell if he was just as surprised as she was, or if he expected this

all along. "I'm glad we can come to some sort of agreement, gentleman."

It almost didn't even sound like William to her ears. She never heard him be so proper or direct-but then again she had never heard him in a meeting with anyone other than Enzo. And usually that contained more glaring and childish remarks from both parties.

Edward stood as well and tried to pathetically straighten his clothes that were past the point of redemption. Mal soon followed his lead and it was clear who made the decisions between these officials.

"I'll get on that. Don't worry yourself over anything else, those families won't starve."

"You're right, they won't. If I hear anything like this happens again, I'm coming back here and making sure you both know what it's like to starve to death."

Edward stared at William for a moment. The tension thickened and she wondered if that was their last straw. Would they tell the palace about what he'd done? Would they tell them lies?

When a smile broke out across his face, she felt her insides deflate. Edward held out his hand and William glanced down at it with a blank face before he accepted.

"I don't doubt that you will, Prince William. I don't doubt that you will do anything in your power to get what you want. I can't say that I don't respect that. Only the most determined men end up with the pot of gold."

William dropped his hand and stepped back. She dared a look at Enzo who looked just as baffled by the whole exchange as Doris felt. Perhaps he had his fate already mapped out and everyone else was supposed to follow William's straight line. How had she successfully dodged him for so long while everyone else fell under his spell the instant they met him?

Well, perhaps she eventually fell for it all too. And now she only felt foolish for not falling sooner.

"We'll be on our way now."

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**Chapter 141 No amount of assurance is enough.**

Nobody expected William to want to go back to the village, but he did. They mounted their horses and headed straight back to the village rather than to the palace like they all figured they were headed. Edward and Mal were eager to walk them out the door and slam it closed the second they were in the snow. Despite the new respect, the fear was more evident.

He didn't respond to anyone as he led them back to the village. Doris was close to falling off the horse with how exhausted she felt. She could imagine that they all felt the same, but somehow William appeared wide awake. His show of leadership must have lit a fire under him.

By the time they made it back to the village, it was still quite early and no one had yet ventured out of their cabins. She didn't know why it made her so happy to know that they didn't have to answer for where the food was yet.

"We're going to wait until they deliver all of the food that they promised. Then we can go back to the kingdom." William announced. A warm bloom formed in her chest. She didn't expect him to care this much, but he was already treating the rogues as if they mattered. He made sure they saw him in action and that his words held a heavier weight than they expected.

Enzo smiled at William, a warm sort of look that was contagious. Perhaps he realized this too. "You're a good man, William. Why have you hidden this side of you for so long?"

William slid off the horse and helped Doris down. He rolled his eyes at Enzo's words but she swore he almost smiled.. "Perhaps you didn't bring out the best in me."

"Nonsense! I bring out the best in everyone." Enzo grinned as his feet hit the ground. "It's rather nice seeing you like this. I don't think anyone would have

handled it better. I should have thought about locking people in closets years ago. All of this mess would have been solved a lot sooner, that's for certain."

Doris bit her lip to keep in her laugh. William shot her an annoyed look but she only let her grin escape. She'd miss this part of their journey. The easy jokes and longing stares.

"We should all rest before they get here," William said. Doris eagerly headed towards the cabin they resided in and ignored Enzo's laugh from behind her.

The guards they'd left behind were circled around a wooden table playing a game of cards. They stood the second they saw William and bowed instantly. It'd been a while since she saw them act that way towards him. Another sign that they all were trying to prepare for their arrival at the palace.

"Your majesty, the villagers are still resting. They seemed a bit sluggish but overall much better than the days before. They finished off a portion of the food earlier in the day despite our warnings."

"Very well, thank you." William shrugged off his coat. "In a few hours, there will be a delivery of food to the village. If I'm not awake, come get me. I want to make sure they complete their

agreement."

"Yes sir, of course sir!" They all said at once. Each person from their group filed up the stairs and headed straight for the beds.

Doris barely had time to take off her shoes before she collapsed on the bed. It suddenly felt better than a cloud and it pulled her into sleep almost instantly.

Doris felt disoriented when a loud pounding woke her up. William was out of bed before the third knock was over. He threw open the door and was met with a guard who still had his fist in the air.

"Your majesty, I believe the delivery is here. There's a large group heading down the main pathway."

"How long have I been out?" William said. His voice was a little rough from sleep and she couldn't help but smile at the sound of it. It was the sort of intimate sound that left strange flips in her stomach-which she pushed away quickly.

"It's evening now, sir. You've been up here since the morning."

William shoved his hands through his hair as if he was trying to fix it enough before he

glanced back at her. "You may join me, if you wish."

Doris scrambled out of bed and pulled on her shoes. The side of his mouth lifted slightly as he watched her. She quickly followed him out the door and into the night air that felt even colder than the night before. Would she miss this too? It snowed at the palace, but she was rarely allowed outside unless it was to the gardens.

Dozens of horses were stopped at the main cabin where the villagers had been resting. William straightened his shoulders and headed right for them. She could see the invisible crown fall on his head as if it dropped from the sky.

At the head of the line was a well dressed man with a large bag attached to his horse. He turned to William with wide eyes and quickly bowed his head.

"Your majesty! I didn't know you would be here to accept the delivery personally." The man slid off his horse and almost fell face first into the snow. His nerves were starting to get the better of him. He gestured for his men to dismount and they all looked a bit star struck, if Doris was honest.

"I wanted to make sure the correct amount was brought. I didn't want to return to the castle and find out that our agreement wasn't met."

"I assure you that we have gathered enough food for this village for more than a month. It'll last them even longer than when the next stock will be delivered." The man said quickly. He unzipped the bag to show William that it was filled to the brim with food.

"What about the other villages that were shorted?"

"Them too, your majesty! We have different groups going to each one to have it all delivered by nightfall."

William clasped his hands behind his back and walked around each man. They all dropped to their knees and showed him that their bags were just as filled as the first one. He gave them a sharp nod and stood back.

"Very well. the kitchens are that way, make sure they're all properly put away."

"Yes sir!" They all shouted and hurried into motion.

Enzo clapped his hands and made Doris almost flinch out of her skin.

"Well, I suppose your insane tactics worked after all. That is quite a lot of food, your majesty."

William shrugged and glanced up at the dark sky. "I had to make sure. I don't want them to think I'm weak just because I'm not the crown prince. *Many* people have made that mistake before."

"I suppose we should head to the palace now-since all of it is settled now." Enzo leaned against a wooden post. She wiped the sleep from her eyes.

A bit of darkness crossed over his face. "Yes. It's time to face the mess waiting for me."

Chills passed over her skin. Did Luna Queen know they were coming? Did she know that William would have figured out all of her schemes-or did she still think she was the smarter one in this instance?

"Very well. Let's get our men on the road." Enzo pushed away from the wood and disappeared back into the cabin. Within the hour, they were fed and back on their horses to face the final stretch.

Her fear crawled up her throat quickly as she gripped onto William. Faster than she knew it, they would be back in the belly of the beast and she didn't know how to prepare herself for it.

Was there ever truly a way to prepare yourself for possible destruction of the heart and soul? Part of her wanted to erase the maid she had left behind at the palace when she agreed to come on the trip with William. That mousey, frightened girl that lied for people that didn't deserve it and let herself be treated worse than garbage.

The new version of herself, the one that had Cordelia and knew what it was like to be cared for by a prince that irritated her. She finally stood up for herself and found respect for who she was. There was no hesitations anymore, just bravery.

It scared her to think that this part of herself would disappear the second she was screamed at to clean something.

William tensed under her grip and she instantly knew why. The palace came into their view and perhaps he wasn't entirely ready to face this either.

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**Chapter 142 Home sweet home**

More guards approached them instantly. They took one look at William and bowed at the waist before they let their group pass through the tall gates. Something about the air smelled so familiar, it made her stomach turn. She wasn't sure if that was a good thing or bad thing yet.

"Your majesty, we didn't expect you back! It's good to see you!" They called as he passed them. Immediately she could see how more fitted and proper they were compared to the guards that had gone through hell with them. They all straightened themselves on their horses as if they realized it too. Perhaps a part of them had changed on the journey just as it had with Doris.

Light dustings of snow coated the cobblestone walkway. William directed all of their horses right to the front of the main steps. Servants hurried up to assist them as he slid off and helped Doris for the last time.

Their eyes lingered on each other for a moment as he set her down. Two beautiful ocean blue waves—they would haunt her every night before she fell asleep. His grip tightened around her waist before he finally let her go. Half of her heart dropped with him and she wished he would have held on for just a bit longer. Perhaps she might have been able to live in the moment forever if he did.

2

“Prince William. We hadn’t gotten word that you returning.” Said a voice from the top of the steps. They all turned to see Howard Ford—the last general for the royal army—with his hands clasped in front of him as if he was about to give a speech. “A true delight to see you alive and well.”

“Yes, I could say the same.” William muttered as he started to climb the steps.

“I’m sorry, sir. But I was told not to allow you inside the palace.” Howard said evenly. Those words hit all of them like a blow, but not nearly as hard as it hit William. What the hell was this man talking about?

“Excuse me?” William was in front of the man in a few long strides. He had to crane his neck back just to look William in his eye despite being quite tall himself.

“I was given orders that you’re not allowed to step foot inside the Golden Palace. I thought you were aware of this.”

“I don’t give a shit who gave you those orders. I am a prince to this kingdom and you will treat me as such. I should have you hanged for trying to deny me access!”

William shoved past the man and the rest of the group visibly hesitated. Howard straightened himself and immediately went in through another door. He was wise not to try and stop William any further. It wouldn’t end well for him.

Doris hurried her steps to follow him. The back of him alone screamed his rage. His fists were clenched and he was seconds away from spouting fire from his mouth.

“Where is that stupid bitch?” William growled and looked around. Several servants cowered away from him. “Where is the Luna Queen?” He shouted.

“No need to terrify them, my dear. I’m right here.” Luna Queen said from the top of the staircase.” She looked grand in an elegant navy dress the fit tight to her frame and flowed to the ground. Two guards surrounded her on either side, but she didn’t show an ounce of worry when her eyes fell on William.

“You think you can kick me out of my own palace?” William growled. A few guards hesitantly stepped in front of the Luna Queen.

"I thought it would be for the best. Your father is sick, I didn't want you to fall victim next." Luna Queen said with a bit of false concern dripping in her tone.

If she had intended to throw William off, it worked. All at once, he shifted from rage to confusion.

"What the fuck are you talking about? Where is my father?"

"He's in bed resting, of course. He's not allowed visitors at the moment but I'll let him know you came home and..." She peered at the rogues behind them, her face twisted into disgust. "And brought rogues with you. No, I better not tell him that, he might die right there."

"I imagine he'd feel the same if he knew all the things you've been up to, Luna Queen." William said in a dangerous tone. "I demand to see my father right this instant."

Luna Queen lifted her chin. "I told you, he isn't well. He's sleeping at the moment. Perhaps you can try again later when he wakes up."

"Have you kicked out your sons from the palace too? Or was it just me?" William asked bitterly.

"They stay in their own quarters. I see no reason to try and kick them out if they were here through it all."

That seemed to make William snap. He stomped up the stairs towards Luna Queen and was instantly stopped by her guards.

"You think I don't know what you did in the north? You think I'm stupid enough not to realize that you had set me up to walk straight to my death?" William growled.

Luna Queen gasped and had the sense to look taken aback. "William! I've known you since you were a baby, how dare you accuse me of something like this!"

William laughed cynically. "Yeah, you've known me since I was a baby. Everyone knows exactly what you did to my mother out of your jealousy, and now I'm finally up next."

Several gasps sounded around them. Luna Queen narrowed her eyes at William. "I would advise you to watch what you say when we have an audience. I don't take kindly to false sure they had the nicest rooms available before she left them to settle in and headed straight for William's room.

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## Chapter 143 Feelings for a sick man

Doris knocked hesitantly. Two guards eyed her as she approached his room, but said nothing. She wasn't sure if they recognized her or not-she wasn't even in her uniform yet. It was exhausting to even consider having to step back into her old role. Would they put her at the library? Perhaps she should talk to William about it when he felt better.

William didn't respond when she knocked again, louder this time. If his guards weren't at the door, she would have thought he wasn't inside.

"Will – Prince William? It's Doris." She said through the door. Her cheeks reddened when his guards gave her another strange look when she almost called him William. A bit of shuffling came through on the other side before the door was pulled open. He looked disheveled and his room was a mess as if he had thrown everything around inside.

"You should go, I'm not in the mood." He grumbled. Doris had to fight the itch to brush his messy hair out of his eyes. "I want to be alone."

"Are you okay? I can go prepare something for you, or if you'd like some tea—"

"Don't do that. Stop acting like you have to serve me every second of the day." He gripped her arm and yanked her inside before he slammed the door.

She stumbled in and straightened herself with a breath. "I was just trying to help—"

"It doesn't help. I don't want you to act like my maid right now!" He shouted and kicked a fallen pot out of his way. It shattered into a million pieces. "And don't you fucking dare offer to clean this room."

"Prince William, I'm not trying to—"

William stopped where he was and turned to face her slowly. "Say that again."

"I'm not trying to,"

"No, not that, the bit before it." He stepped closer to her, she had to hold her breath for a second.

"Prince William?"

"Why are you calling me that again? You never had a problem calling Daniel his name without his title." William said bitterly. Jealousy seeped through his tone even though she hadn't talked to Daniel since before they left.

Was he actually angry with her?

"We're back at the palace, I thought you would have wanted me to refer to you as a prince especially in front of other people. I didn't want to cause a scandal."

William gripped her chin harshly and forced her to look up at him. "I'll tell you what I want. I don't want you to call me that anymore."

"Okay. I won't." Doris whispered. His eyes lingered on her mouth before he let her go. "Do you want me to go with you when you visit your father?" She asked after she took a moment to regain her composure. Why did his rough side always make her shiver? William shook his head.

"No. That's something I have to do alone when I can handle it." He admitted. She softened a little. Even though she knew he was suffering, she didn't expect him to be transparent. "He must despise me for leaving when he had fallen sick."

"That can't be true. He knew why you left, he even sent his best men with you to make sure you came back in one piece." Doris said gently. He sat on the edge of the bed and put his head in his hands. She lightly placed her hand on his shoulder and sat next to him. "I saw the way he talked with you before he left. He cares a lot about you even if he won't admit it."

William snorted at that as if the very idea of his father caring about him was absurdly ridiculous.

"What if the Luna Queen is responsible for this too? What if she caught wind of my plans and wants her son already on the throne?" William fisted his hands in his lap. "She probably wants my father to die so Martin can take his place."

"If she killed the king, there would be a huge investigation. Especially after what happened to your mother." Doris brushed his hair back. It had gotten a little longer on their journey and her stomach turned when she realized that she noticed these sort of things about him.

"He's still my father. Despite all he's done to damage me, he's still my father even if he doesn't care." William said so quietly, she had to lean closer to hear him.

William suddenly stood and went into his closet. Doris glanced around the mess of the room

and part of her wanted to hurry up and clean it all before he got back, but the other half wanted him to call another maid to do it. He was right, it would be weird for her to be his maid again after all the nights they shared. All the quiet moments and passionate embraces.

No wonder he sent the maids that fell from him away. Would he do the same to her? Or allow her freedom when he was ready to cut her loose? She swore to herself she wouldn't fall into his web, but now she felt so tangled-she didn't know if she wanted to get out. 2

When he came out again, he no longer had any hint of rogue attire on him. He was dressed head to toe in finery meant for a prince. A dark grey suit with gold embroidered along the hem. His hair was brushed back neatly and no longer did he have a hint of roguish stubble on his

face.

"I'm going to see him. I'll shove that bitch out a window if she tries to stop me."

Doris quickly stood and straightened his clothes for him. Her fingers almost dared her to mess up his perfect look to be the one she craved, but it was not the time to want him to be anything but what he wanted to be.

"Are you sure you don't want me to accompany you? I wouldn't mind staying all night with you." Doris said gently.

William shook his head and took her hands to lower them off him. "No. I need to speak with him myself. I don't want anyone else there, not a soul." 2

Doris nodded and smiled sadly at him. She leaned up on her toes to kiss his cheek. "I'll be in my old rooms when you need me."

"You don't have to stay there. You can stay here."

"I don't know if that would be a wise idea. Melody is still around here somewhere, I'm sure she will come running the second she realizes you're here." William made a face at Doris's words as if he'd forgotten all about her. "Besides, I want to see how my friend is doing." 2

"Right." William sighed and brushed past her. With one last glance, he left her alone to his disastrous room. Just outside the door, she heard William speak to his guards. "I'll new two maids from the servants quarters to come clean my room. Don't ask the one in there." 1

Out in the hallways, things felt a little different. It was as if she wasn't really there but her body was. She recognized almost every step in this palace, but now it felt as if she was unwelcome.

The mood felt off, people stared at her as they passed but said nothing. no one greeted her, even the other maids that she had known for years pretended they didn't see her. It should have made her feel upset or unsettled, but she couldn't bring herself to care anymore. 1

There was once a time that she would have ran to her room and cried over being ignored by her former friends-that part of her was gone.

Doris rounded the corner and started heading to the other side of the palace where she shared her room with Beth. Briefly, she wondered if her friend was even still here. It felt like ages ago since they said goodbye-and when William made sure Beth's fate was tied to her own by making her stay.

Doris clenched her hands into fists at the reminder. Inside, there was a constant battle. She wanted to scream at him for all the things he ever did wrong, but the other half of her wanted to erase all of those memories and fall into him like he was the perfect man. There was no sense of peace.

"Ah, Doris!" A voice called down the hallway. Doris quickly turned to see a guard she didn't recognize coming towards her. "Yes?"

"Prince Martin heard you returned from your journey. He's waiting in the library to see you." 2

"Me? Oh," Doris glanced down at her ruined clothes from the trip. "I'm not suitable at the moment, do I have time to change?"

"Unfortunately not. He wanted you to come right away."

## Her Unwanted Mate On The Throne by Caroline Chapter 144

[/ Her Unwanted Mate On The Throne by Caroline](#)  
Chapter 144 Library of possibilities.

The library looked the same as it ever did-and it was just as empty. The large wooden doors closed loudly behind her, the first few weeks she worked here it used to make her flinch. Now, it made her want to sink right back into her daily routine and start her chores. No, she wasn't here to be a maid. She was here because a prince had asked to see her – for whatever reason.

Prince *Martin* sat in the chair he favored near the tall windows. Her feet carried her there automatically and a strange sense of familiarity entered her bones. Did she actually miss this? Of course she did. The smell of old books and the peace she felt from this place it was unreal. It was the only job she ever wanted in the palace, even when it payed lower than the ones offered to her over the years. It was better to keep her sanity rather than have more money.

There with his blond head bent over a book, was Prince Martin. His posture was tense as if he knew she was watching him. She remembered the first day he had come in on her shift and headed straight for this chair without saying a word to her. So much had changed over the years.

Doris cleared her throat and bowed. "Prince Matin, you called for me?"

Prince Martin looked up and his grin covered his face. He looked so happy to see her-it almost left her breathless. She didn't know why she thought no one would care when she was gone, but here was one person that seemed to.

"Doris," Prince *Martin* stood and placed his book down before he went to kiss her hand. Her cheeks flamed instantly at the contact. He never really touched her

before, and she didn't expect him to start. "I'm so happy to finally see you, I feel as if it's been ages."

"Oh yes, it has felt like ages." Doris smiled and pulled her hand back to her side. "How have you been, Prince Martin?"

Prince Martin waved away her question as if it was a bug in the air. "The same."

"The same? That can't be true! I heard you had gotten married when I was gone!" Doris bounced on her toes with a wide smile on her face. He watched her with a grin. "How exciting! I'm sorry to have missed it, I bet it was truly beautiful."

Prince Martin's face fell just slightly when she mentioned the wedding. He cleared his throat and tried to replace the smile. "Thank you, Doris. But I didn't call you in here to talk to me about weddings- I wanted to see you."

"Oh?" Doris laughed nervously. "About what?"

"1- I just hadn't seen you in so long. I thought we could catch up a bit." Prince Martin quickly gestured to the seat beside him. On the small table were plates of sweet cookies and tea. "Please, join me. I hope you don't mind that I brought sweets in here, I know that you like to keep this place tidy."

"Oh, of course not." Doris nervously seated herself beside him. Her stomach was too confused to try and eat any of what was offered. "Very well, thank you for inviting me. I'm sorry I didn't have much time to change -"

"Nonsense, you look beautiful." Prince Martin said. His green eyes sparkled when he looked at her. Quickly, he cleared his throat and kept on before she had time to process what he said to her. "How was your trip? If I had known William planned on bringing a maid, I would have made him take someone else. I'm sorry he put you through that. I didn't even get a chance to say goodbye. When I heard you were gone the next day, I wanted to send more guards up there to bring you back."

His admission shocked her. Why would he care so much whether she went or not? "Oh, it's quite alright. It was... intense, but I think a lot of good came of it too. I never really had a chance to travel out of the palace like that." Doris admitted and brushed her messy hair behind her ear.

Prince Martin looked at her with raised brows. "You didn't run into any trouble in the north? I heard it's very dangerous there, though I haven't been myself. I don't think I've slept much while you've been gone."

She swallowed, "Well, there was plenty of danger." Doris gave a half hearted laugh. She didn't want to admit that she had a wolf inside her yet-that was something she had to discuss with William first. "William protected me, though. I'm grateful for him. And not all of the rogues are as awful as people have made them out to be."

"Did he?" Prince Martin shifted a little beside her. "That's surprising. I didn't take him for the heroic type. And did you say the rogues aren't so bad?" Prince Martin laughed as if she was pulling his leg, but she didn't even crack a smile.

Doris wasn't sure why that bothered her, but it did. William was a lot of things and clearly his family didn't see any of the good parts. She tried for another subject. "Do you know how your father is? I heard he was sick when we got here."

"Ah, yes. He isn't doing very well. I'm glad William made it back before anything else happened," Prince Martin leaned back in his chair. Doris's eyes flickered to the gold ring on his finger. Why didn't he want to talk about getting married? Doris would be so excited to share the news with everyone.

"Does anyone know what he has?" Doris asked cautiously. It wasn't right for a maid to question a prince, but she had been doing that since she left the palace.

Prince Martin didn't seem to mind. He shook his head. "No, we can't seem to find what it is yet. One day he just couldn't get out of bed and all the doctors have been clueless."

"I'm so sorry, Prince Martin. This must be so awful for you." Doris gripped his hand to squeeze. His eyes lingered on her mouth for a moment.

"Did you read the book I had gotten you?" He asked suddenly. Heat crawled up her neck and heated her cheeks.

"I didn't have a chance to get very far. We were ambushed at one point in the beginning of the trip and it must have fallen out of my bag."

Prince Martin looked as if he was ready to deflate from his pure disappointment. "Oh. What a shame, I had written a lot of letters for you near the end."

Doris raised her brows in surprise. "You did? What were they about?"

This time, his cheeks turned red, "Nothing of importance, I assure you. I had just hoped you would have gotten an opportunity to read them." He stood suddenly and walked to the window to peer out. "Would you like to join me for a stroll?"

"A stroll?" Doris stood and smoothed out her pants. "I um, I've had quite the long journey, your majesty-"

"Of course, it was foolish of me to even ask." Prince Martin laughed a little and brushed his fingers through his hair. "Perhaps another time?"

"Yes, of course." Doris bowed. Prince Martin's eyes lingered on her for a moment more before he headed for the door.

"It's good to have you here again, Doris. I missed your company."

The moment the door closed behind Prince Martin, Doris released all of the air inside her. That was...strange. Prince Martin had always been kind to her, but she never thought he would actually think about her when she was gone.

She was only a maid, and he was married to a beautiful bride that probably was somewhere in the palace wondering where her new husband was.

Doris straightened the cushions on the chairs as a habit. It didn't seem like anyone had held this place up while she was gone. Several stacks of books were dying to be put away and all of the shelves basically shouted at her to be dusted off and cleaned. She would have done it if she wasn't so tired,

Never had she felt her energy leave her so quickly. It was as if the journey was finally catching up on her and making her desperate to sit down again and sleep the last few months of her life off. Her body recognized where she was and now it only wanted her to rest.

Doris decided to leave the dust and books for another day. She ventured out of the library and followed her steps back to the room. Just as she rounded a corner, she bumped into a firm chest that reached out to steady her.

"Well, I'll be damned. It's Doris!"