

Her Unwanted Mate On The Throne by Caroline Chapter 202

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Chapter 202 As sacred as a mate

Immediately William was pulled away by lords in the kingdom. He sought her out with his eyes over the crowd. He towered over everyone around him and it wasn't hard to keep track as he moved through the room. He, of course, drew attention from the some of most beautiful women Doris had ever seen and she had to swallow every ounce of jealousy that bubbled as a result. It wasn't the time to focus on that—especially when he didn't even seem to notice them all around him. He looked at her as if he was helpless to those that demanded his attention. She smiled and waved him away, it was his time to shine. It was his time to prove he was the right choice, she didn't need to take him away from that, The crowd had broken off into the ballroom that connected to the main room. There was wine and food flowing while people watched William even more intently than she did. Doris disappeared into the crowd and went straight for the buffet with two guards on her heels. She didn't have to guess who sent them to look after her for the night-and she didn't blame him in the slightest. "Doris," A familiar voice called. Doris blushed a little as she turned to face Enzo. She held a plate piled high with all sorts of food but he only smiled at her as if the sight of her was merely charming. "Do you have a moment to talk? There's something I've been meaning to talk to you about." "Of course." Doris glanced to where William was across the room. He seemed deep in conversation with a group of men that looked at him as if he was a diamond. Doris smiled a little and followed Enzo away from the buffet. He led her through the wide doors and outside where many had ventured. She assumed they needed air with how stuffy it became in there. Doris seated herself on a wooden bench and moved her skirts for Enzo before she started to dig into her food. "What did you need to talk about? Are you thinking about going back to the north?" Enzo smoothed out his fancy jacket before he seated himself. He looked utterly elegant today, much different from his normal attire that screamed rogue. Somehow, this attire seemed to suit

him better. It looked more like something he would wear on a regular basis. "No, it's not that. Though if you want me out of your hair, all you have to do is ask." Enzo said half heartedly as he bumped his shoulder against her own. "You know that's not what I meant. You're welcome here as long as you want." Doris bumped him back. "Tell me what's on your mind. I'm always dying to know." "Ah, you never want to see what's in this mind. It would scare you off." Enzo said as he gazed at the people around them. None of them were close enough to hear them. "Tell me! You know I'm not very patient." "I believe that your best friend is my mate." Enzo blurted. He took a deep breath and turned to face Doris. • Enzo put his fingers under her chin and closed her mouth for her. "My mother used to tell me that I would catch bugs if I held my mouth open like that." "I'm sorry... what did you just say? Are you talking about Beth?" Doris set her half eaten plate aside and turned her full attention to Enzo. "How... what? She doesn't have a wolf!" "Neither did you before you met William. He brought it out of you, didn't he?" Enzo kept his voice calm and low, she tried to do the same. "How... how do you know that she's your mate? I thought it was rare for a wolf not to show itself like mine did." "It is rare, but not impossible. Usually it occurs when people suppress a lot of themselves into something else. When you two became slaves

to the palace at such a young age, you were forced to be someone you weren't and suppress all of your feelings to the palace. It's possible that it caused both of you to suppress your wolves." "I just... I don't understand." Doris glanced around for Beth, but clearly she wasn't in this crowd. "I feel her... my wolf feels her when she's near. It's like a distant hum in my bones that calls to her. She doesn't answer yet, but my wolf can feel her own deep inside her." "How long have you known?" "Since we met in the cells. I felt it instantly the moment I touched her." Enzo wiped his hand across his face. "I haven't been able to sleep since I met her. She is... she is all I can think about. My wolf wants to claim her as my own already, but I know I can't do that." "Oh no, you definitely can't try that. You're going to have to have her warm up to you on her own terms. She's been terrified of rogues since she was a child—but I can see that she's already started to warm up to you." Doris bumped him lightly. The thought of her best friend having a mate was wild to Doris. It wasn't that long ago that both of them were just normal maids trying to make it through the day. Now... now it felt as if they were in another universe that was no where near the one they belonged in. "What are you going to do?" Doris asked. "How did William get you to come around?" Enzo asked. He leaned back against the seat as if he was exhausted. "Oh... well... It didn't happen overnight. It took quite a long time for me to see him for who he is. I resisted it for a long, long time. I didn't want to have any feelings for him. I didn't want to have a mate or a wolf. And it didn't help that he was so grumpy and mean all the time. One minute, he would be kind—the next he would tell me he didn't need me." Enzo stared at her as if she was crazy. He glanced at the door. "What on earth are you still doing here then? I can sneak you out of here before he comes around for you." Doris laughed. "He said those things to protect himself, as awful as that sounds. I resisted him as much as I could and he tried to do the same to me, but we always came back around. I used to promise myself every night that I wouldn't have a single feeling for him. Somehow, all the prep talk to myself didn't work. I fell right into him and I can't even remember it happening. All of our fights and our resentment made us pull into each other more." "You both are quite mad, aren't you? Perhaps I've been going at this flirting thing all wrong. I should shove her down hills and insult her dress and see where that takes me." 1 Doris laughed and shook her head. "No. She wants someone nice, she doesn't want anyone like William." "Well... I suppose I didn't know what exactly I wanted. I never saw myself as someone who would be in love, I just... thought I would find something normal once I left the palace." "Normal is quite boring, isn't it?" Enzo smiled. "It is. I didn't think I would ever admit that." Doris sighed. "I think you're on the right track with Beth. I wouldn't tell her you're mates just yet, I would wait a bit before that conversation." "I imagine she would run as far away from me as she could get if I told her that." "I definitely think it will scare her, yes. She's never been in love before. She's never had a man show her interest, the last thing she wants is some rogue telling her he's her mate when she had no idea she even had a wolf. When William marked me, I resented him and didn't believe anything he said. I think if he went about it differently, I wouldn't have resisted as much as I did." "Ah, I can't imagine why you wouldn't want to be marked against your will and forced around him." Enzo rolled his eyes to the sky. "As handsome as William is, he doesn't know a thing about romance." "My advice is to let things grow naturally. If she ends up falling for you, let all your thoughts loose when the time is right." "And if she ends up thinking I'm a complete fool?" Enzo asked. "What if she never sees me as anything but a rogue?" "She will. I know Beth better than anyone. She will see you as so much more than a rogue, and I believe she has already started."

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Chapter 203 The other half

Enzo left Doris with a bit more confidence in his movements. He looked like a man on a mission and she didn't have to guess who he was seeking out in the crowds. The music was lovely inside the halls. She watched as couples moved to the dance floor and glided around the area with silks swirling around them. A part of her envied them, she had never been asked to dance before and they all looked so happy. Doris searched for William and found him in the next room by the buffet speaking with a different group of men. As if he could sense her staring, he lifted his eyes to her and she smiled. A ghost of a smile touched his lips as he offered a small shrug. He clearly still wasn't able to get away from the crowd that demanded his attention. He must have been making some *good* impressions if they all looked so thrilled to be speaking with him. She turned her gaze away from his golden appearance when someone grabbed her arm. "Doris! I've been looking everywhere for you!" Beth said. She pulled Doris away from the crowds and down a small hallway that servants usually used when they had to carry food back and forth. "What is it, Beth? Did something happen?" Doris made sure the door closed behind them so they were alone before she gripped her friend's hand. "Did someone offend you out there?" "No, no. I've had a few men think I was someone special and tried to dance with me but-that's not why I wanted to talk to you." Doris felt like someone had deflated her fear. The last thing she wanted to do was murder a man for touching her friend during William's celebration. But she would have in a heartbeat. She gripped Beth's hand and led her to a nearby bench by a large window. "What is it?" "I saw you and Enzo talking and... I—I wanted to know if he mentioned me." Beth said quickly. Her cheeks burned bright red as she forced herself to look Doris in the eye. "If he mentioned you?" Doris grinned. "All we talked about was you." "Don't make fun of me! Tell me the truth! It's alright if he didn't say anything, I just want to know." "I am telling you the truth!" Doris laughed. "He wanted to ask me about you. I think he's quite smitten, if I do say." Beth twirled a piece of her fallen hair around her finger as she bit her lip in thought. She studied Doris as if she was trying to detect a lie. "Well, what did he say?" "I can't tell you that, Beth. You know I couldn't! He just wanted advice about you, is all. He knows how close we are." "Hmm." Beth hummed and leaned back. "Is there something else that's on your mind?" Doris asked. "I just...I—I feel confused. About a lot of things." Beth admitted. She dropped her head in her hands. Doris moved closer to rub her back. "A week ago, I wanted to get as far from here as possible and now... now I want to stay." "Stay at the palace? Or stay near...someone?" Beth looked up at Doris with a hopeless expression and Doris knew instantly. She wanted to stay Enzo. "Now I understand how you feel. I quietly thought you had lost your mind when you wanted to stay here *for* William. But now... I don't know. I don't want to be out in the world alone like I thought I did. It scares me just to think about it." "You don't have to be alone in the world, Beth. You are free to stay as my guest for as long as you want. In fact, I really hope you do." "I know that but I—" Beth stood and started to pace the small area in front of them. "I don't know what's happening to me. I don't know if I'm being foolish because the first boy has given

me attention. Am I being foolish? You didn't let William in your heart for months." "It's not foolish to like someone so soon. Enzo is charming and a good person. William is... well, complicated. I fought everything I felt for him and resented myself for even thinking of being nice to him. You don't have those thoughts for Enzo." "No, he's charming and perfect—what if he's flirting with every girl he sees and I'm just reading into it? I've never been flirted with like that before—what if my brain is just thinking he cares but he doesn't?" "Beth, I guarantee you that Enzo isn't flirting with anyone else since he met you. You're not reading into anything, I think he really does like you. No, I know he likes you." "That's even worse! What am I going to do about that? I wasn't prepared for a lord of rogues to find me appealing! I wasn't prepared to be stared at in every room he's in! I now fix my hair and care about what I look like!"

Doris smiled as Beth continued on her frantic rant.

"I can't even have a quiet moment to myself! My brain reminds me of him every second I'm alone. I stay up all night wondering when I'm going to see him next and the thought of him leaving back to his home—I didn't expect to feel so sad at such a normal thought. What is wrong with me?" "There is nothing wrong with you, Beth! You're talking about having feelings for him. All of those are normal things, even when you don't want them." Doris gripped Beth's arm and made her sit down again. "I'm just... I don't know if I'm ready to love someone, Doris." Beth whispered. "I don't know if I would survive a heartbreak. I'm so used to people leaving me in my life, I became numb to it. But

– I know if I let myself fall for him... I wouldn't survive it." Doris frowned. How could she explain that Enzo would never leave her? Doris couldn't make that promise for him, even if they were mates. The future was never clear, there were so many paths that people took that could change the outcome of what they promised. One day, someone could tell you they loved you and never want to see a day without you. And then ... and then they leave. Whether it's a friend choosing someone else to replace you or a lover finding another woman to warm his bed. Doris wanted so badly to take away her fears, but she couldn't tell her that he wouldn't leave. Doris had the same fear about William always in the back of her mind. Even with a baby in her tummy and a mate mark on their necks, "I think..." Doris gripped her hand and placed it in her lap. "I think that I felt the same way you did. I wanted to push William as far away from me as possible so I didn't let those rotten feelings overtake my heart. I told myself he would leave me, every night. I told myself it meant nothing when he expressed interest in me—because he would just lose interest in me one day."

Doris sighed. "I can't promise you that Enzo won't hurt you, even though I highly believe he never will. Love is pain in itself. It's a wonderful, horrible thing and I didn't want to feel it either. But now that I do, I realize that I wish I hadn't held out for so long. I wish I allowed myself to feel happy as I do now." "Do you still think William would leave you one day?" Beth asked as if she was reading her mind. "I want to say no, but I can't see what the future holds. I do know one thing, I wouldn't take back all the days I spent in his arms for anything." Doris brushed the hair from her friend's face. "Men don't complete us, Beth. They make us feel like we're walking on air sometimes, but they don't complete us. We don't need them to feel whole. If something happens in the future between you two, you will be whole again. Even if it takes months or years. He could never take your worth, so don't be afraid to fall." Beth squeezed her hand. "If he breaks my

heart... can William ban him from the kingdom?" Doris laughed. "Absolutely."
"Doris?"

They both turned to see William coming up the hall. His cloak swayed around him and his crown glinted in the light as he moved. He looked glorious. Doris stood and smoothed out her skirts. "Yes?" William bowed his head to Beth. "I hope you don't mind, I'd like to have a dance with my lady."

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Chapter 204 A dance for the ages

A pathway separated immediately as William led Doris to the middle of the dance floor. Everyone moved off to the side to allow them their space. Doris stared forward and silently prayed that her face wasn't as red as she felt. She tried not to think about the whole palace about to watch her dance—when she had no idea how to. "I've never danced before." Doris whispered to him. She squeezed his arm tightly. "I don't think this is a good idea, I'll step on your feet. Perhaps we should go sit down, I'm getting rather dizzy anyway." The side of his mouth lifted a little. "That's the plan, you step on my feet." "What" William stopped in the middle of the floor and she gasped when he pulled her against him. He

gripped her waist and lifted her slightly until she stood on his toes. "What are you doing—" "I'll lead us, just hold onto me." He whispered back. She could barely hear him over the music that grew into a smoother, louder beat. "I—I don't know if this is a good idea, everyone is watching!" She whispered but he only shook his head to silence her. Doris gripped onto his shoulders as his hands held her waist firm. She swore it wasn't going to work, she swore she was going to fall off and make a giant fool of herself in front of everyone. But

—then he started to move them. His movements were almost natural. She should have guessed that a prince-or a king-would know exactly what to do on a dance floor. They had classes at the palace for all young royalty to take for occasions like this. Doris was told that they started from a very young age so they didn't look like fools at balls. Meanwhile, Doris had always been too busy cleaning up after others. Every step he made, she came with him. He moved to the beat of the song as if it knew it by heart and not one step was off. They spun around the dance floor, her skirts moved around them like a sea of silks and it felt as if she was in a fairytale. He lifted her off his toes and twirled her around before he pulled her right back against him where she belonged. Not once did their eyes break contact. He stared at her as if they were the only two people in the room. Not even others joining the dance broke his gaze from her. He never moved them close enough to the others, she was in his own world. Doris smiled widely. She laughed a little as they moved. "I feel as if I'm dreaming!" "Why do you say that?" He asked against her ear. The music slowed and their movements did as well. She swayed against him as he held her tight. "I've never danced like this before. And... and this dress. I feel like a princess." She admitted as quietly as she could against his ear. "I've never felt like this before. Only in my imagination." William pulled back a little to look down at her again. "You should feel like a queen."

Doris froze in his grasp but he kept moving them as if she didn't. He knew how much his words weighed, and she had to push them away before they overwhelmed her thoughts. William suddenly smiled at her. A real smile. No ghost, or half pull. He smiled at her as if he meant it. It stopped her heart in her chest, she wanted to kiss him and have that smile painted immediately so it was never forgotten. She wanted a portrait to hang above her vanity to brighten each day. Slowly, he leaned down to whisper in her ear. "Come with me." Doris felt her blood heat at his words. He stopped their sways and led them through the crowd as he slipped past the people that wanted to stop him for more conversation. She couldn't hear the excuses he gave them, her ears pumped louder than his words. In just a few breaths, they were alone in a long hallway that Beth and her had been in just minutes before. His guards didn't follow William in for once. William led them down the long hallway and made a sharp right turn towards a darker area. Doris knew that an old storage room was the only place at the end of this hallway, she wondered if William knew exactly where he was going. She wondered if he had been here before with someone else. Doris shoved the thoughts far from her mind before any jealousy or insecurity followed like it normally did. It didn't matter what he did in his past, she was in his present and in his future. He pulled open the door and all she saw was darkness. He reached his arm up to turn on a swinging light to reveal piles and piles of white towels that lined the shelves. When the door closed behind them, she didn't realize how dim it would be. But that didn't matter in the slightest, he found her mouth just fine. William pressed her back against the wooden shelves and she had to catch herself before she tripped. He gripped her waist and pulled her body against him as he kissed her hard. Doris gasped. "You won't be able to get this dress off me, it's too much." "I just needed a taste of you." He said against her lips. "I can have the rest later." William caught her mouth with heat. His tongue slid between her teeth to find her own. Doris groaned when they collided and fought for dominance in her mouth. It was useless to ever try to win against him, but he made it so fun to try. Especially when she bit his bottom lip just to hear his moans.

A tingling rippled through her body. She arched her chest against him as he lifted her up. If her dress skirts weren't so thick, she would have wrapped herself around him and let him do whatever he pleased right there. Even with hundreds and hundreds of people waiting for their king to return to them. He kissed her until she was dizzy, when he pulled away she groaned. "Don't stop." She begged. His hands traveled up her bodice slowly. "I would much rather be in here with you." Doris felt the heat fade away slowly when she looked at him. His crown was tilted on his head and his lips were a little swollen from her bites. He looked like a dream, but her heart was swelling with something other than lust. "I'm so proud of you." She whispered. "You're king now, William."

William lowered her back to the floor and leaned his forehead against her own. They both closed

their eyes and let the moment settle around them. "When I pictured myself being crowned king, I never saw anyone at my side." He admitted. "Not even a brother and certainly not a lover. I thought it would always be me up there alone." Doris said nothing to that. So he continued. "When I looked down at you in the crowd, I realized something." "What?" Doris breathed. Her heart thumped loudly in her chest. A part of her still didn't know what to expect when William spoke. He had the power to break her if he wanted. "I realized that when I looked at you... for the first time it felt like home. I always thought home was a place that people

slept in at night. But when I saw you there, looking up at me as if you were so proud, I realized that home could be a person." 3 Doris felt as if her throat had closed up entirely. She opened her eyes to gaze up at him. But he kept his own closed still. "William—" "Let me finish." He said gently. Doris closed her lips. "I know that I haven't been the easiest person to love. I know that I wasn't what you had in mind when you saw your future... but I wanted to tell you that you are so much better than what I imagined mine would look like. I close my eyes and see you with my children. I see you always there, even if you don't want to be involved with the politics. I still see you there for me." "I'll always be there for you. I love you." Doris whispered. She wiped the tears that fell down her cheeks. William finally opened his beautiful blue eyes and cupped her cheeks. A loud bang almost made her flinch out of her skin, but he held her tight. "Your majesty? Are you alright?" William rolled his eyes to the ceiling and straightened himself. Doris bit her lip as she leaned up on her toes to fix his crown. "Yes. I'm coming."

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Chapter 205 All the little changes

The night passed in a blur of music and celebration. Doris finally snuck off to her room when her feet had enough. She wasn't used to walking in heels, let alone for an entire night. It didn't help that her chest was almost more sore than her feet and she had eaten enough to pop the bodice on her dress. Beth was no where to be found, but another maid was nearby and helped Doris out of the gorgeous dress that would stay in her closet til the end of time. There was no way she would ever get rid of a gown like that. Even on the hanger it looked as if it had been plucked from her dreams. 3 By the time she had dressed and collapsed in bed, she was out. Her body aches and swollen feet weren't even enough to keep her awake.

Eventually, she woke in the night when she felt William slip in the bed beside her. He smelled like champagne and apples as he pulled her body against him. She felt his lips press against her head before he fell into his own exhaustion. The next morning, she woke the second he moved to leave the bed. Already she could tell he slept much past the time he normally did, otherwise she wouldn't have even seen him leave.

His black hair was far from the perfect style he had last night. A few strands stuck straight up in the air even after he ran his fingers through it. She'd never seen him wake up and still look as tired as he did. "What are you smiling at?" He grumbled as he moved around her room. She hadn't even noticed that there was a change of clothes for him on the dresser. Did a maid bring that in when they slept? Or had that been there before she went to bed? "You look adorable." Doris sat up and hugged her knees to her chest as she grinned at him. He snorted and disappeared into the bathroom. A moment later, she heard the sound of water. Simple things sent her heart to the moon, and it was foolish for her to feel so giddy but she couldn't help it. He came to her room instead of his own. She wondered if he realized she wasn't there, and went to find her. Or if he checked here first. It didn't matter-he didn't want to end his night without her. 1 It was

like a dose of caffeine in her veins to have him around. She normally would have fallen back against her pillow and tried to sleep for a few more hours. But now she jumped out of bed and readied herself in a beautiful day dress. It was a lovely pale pink color that reminded her of her favorite roses. When he came out, he looked more like the king he was supposed to be. His hair wasn't as messy and his suit was set right. The look of exhaustion was long gone from his skin as if he slapped it right off. "I have a lot of meetings today. They might last well into the night and continue tomorrow." William grumbled. "I want to make sure the rogues get what's promised to them immediately. Hopefully we will see rogues walk among the kingdom again by the end of the week. But that means I might not see you until late."

Doris's shoulders lowered, but her smile remained. "Of course. You're a fancy king now, I'm sure you'll have meetings all day every day for months." William stepped up to her and gripped her at her waist before he kissed her. It was enough to make her want to melt into him and forget everything he just told her. When he pulled away, she almost latched right back onto him.

"I don't know how much longer you're going to make me do this." William said a little roughly.

Doris furrowed her brows. "What?" "Come and find you in the middle of the night when you should be next to me. How long are you going to insist on staying in this room?" Doris's lips parted. "I—what? You gave me this room when you announced me as your lady! You are the one that had it be mine!"

"That was only for show, you weren't supposed to actually sleep in it." William sneered and tipped over a vase on the dresser. "You're not supposed to have your things in here. I don't want them in here." Doris crossed her arms over her chest. "And where do you suppose I should move them to? My old room in the servants quarters?" "Don't be a smart ass." He shot her a look. Doris had to bite her lip to keep from laughing. She wanted him to say it. "Well?" "That's it." He moved towards the door. "I'm ordering your things be moved to my room before nightfall."

"William!" Doris followed him but he was already heading towards the door.

"I said that's final!"

Doris laughed until her sides hurt long after he was gone. Once she felt composed enough, she wrapped a cloak around her shoulders and left the room before servants came to pack it up for her. Nothing was worse than watching people you used to work with now pack up your things as if they worked for you. She could only imagine how awkward it would be. Doris let her feet carry her through the long halls. No one stopped her or paid her more than a glance as she walked. "When are you going to let me free? I haven't stretched my legs in so long." Cordelia muttered inside her. "Don't you want to brag to everyone that you have a white wolf?" Doris shook her head. "The last thing I want is more people talking about me. I already get enough of that when they realize I'm with the king." "Yes, but everyone knows it's an honor to have a white wolf! Let me free!"

"I will later. I'm not running through the halls right now." Doris rubbed her head. "Why is it considered an honor to have a white wolf? Everyone tells me that but I just don't understand why."

"Of course you don't." Cordelia said with a sneer. "A white wolf is stronger than the average wolf. It's how you're able to take down your enemies quicker. If you didn't have me, you might have been dead ten times over." "Thanks." Doris muttered. "People are only shocked of white wolves because there aren't many. A lot of people believe them to be myths while others don't see the big deal. White wolves before you have done wrong with their power. I believe that I was your wolf because you wouldn't abuse that sort of strength."

"Power?"

Cordelia laughed inside her. "My dear, you have had only a taste of what you can do. Whether it's months or years, I will grow you to what you are destined to be."

was lost in thought. Instantly, her eyes landed on the chair that Martin sat in every day he was here. Doris wandered over to the chair and felt an ache in her heart when she saw the book of poems he always had with him.

She knew she shouldn't, but she couldn't help it. She flipped through the pages and saw a few of his thoughts written across the pages. But that wasn't all—she also noticed her own name written in the margins of some of the poems or on blank pages. Under her name, he wrote: long brown hair, brown eyes, blue dress, flowers, flat shoes, apron, yellow dress, small voice, beautiful laugh, nervous Doris closed the book she she realized he was writing things he noticed about her every day he came in. Doris went to shelve the book and then stopped herself. She couldn't put this back, she had no one else to give it to. His wife was long gone, she left him when he declared his feelings for Doris. William would only hate the idea that he wrote about her near love poems—what was she to do? Doris walked around the library and found the small space she used to hide some of her romantic reads. The space was hidden behind a board on the shelves and no normal eye would ever find it. Doris gently placed the book in there before she covered it up again. One day, she would give the book to William. One day when he was ready to see it. "Doris? Is that you in here?" A familiar voice called. Doris hurried out from behind the shelves to find Daniel standing at the entrance of the library.

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Chapter 206 The last brother

Daniel looked... completely fine. He looked tired and a little worn, but fine. She didn't know what she expected, but it was a relief to see him look so untouched. Doris hurried over to him and he caught her in his arms. "I'm so glad you're okay! I

am so so sorry for what happened to you—" "Doris, it's fine." He set her down, not even a smile cracked his face but she didn't blame him. She wouldn't be smiling either. "How are you? When did you get back?" "I just got here about an hour ago. I was caught up on all that happened while I was gone." He walked further into the library and glanced around as if he didn't want to even look at her. "I see that William got what he wanted." "Daniel, I am so sorry for everything," "It is not you that should be apologizing, Doris. I know that you didn't poison me, so don't bother trying to apologize for that. This is all because of William." Doris didn't know what to say. She couldn't defend William after all that he had done. Daniel went into a coma with all his family alive, and came out of one with only one remaining. Just because she loved William didn't mean that he was free of blame.

Daniel collapsed in one of the chairs by the window. Doris hesitated before she joined him. "He wanted you to be safe. He didn't do it to hurt you, he wanted to make sure you weren't harmed in the war because he knew you would have been out there in the fight."

Daniel stared out the window as if she wasn't there, but she knew he was listening.

"William loves you... he loves you so much. You are the only member of his family he made sure that nothing could harm. He knew the risk when he did what he did, and he made sure that you were going to be fine"

"He poisoned me, Doris. He killed our brothers and now our father is dead." Daniel tightened his grip on the chair. "Listen to yourself, he doesn't care for anyone but himself. He tore through his own family to get the crown. Who is he now that he has it?"

Doris bit her lip and waited for Daniel to take a breath. "I'm not defending his actions. He lives in his regret and I can see how it weighs him down every day. I'm only explaining to you how he felt."

"How he felt doesn't matter." Daniel muttered. He sunk deeper in his chair and Doris realized that she was seeing a new version of Daniel form right before her eyes. This war changed the boy she knew before,

and her heart knew he would never be as easy going as he was before. "I came here to tell you that I'm leaving." Daniel said. "I'm going to get as far from here as I can." Doris placed her hand on her chest in shock. "Daniel—I thought you loved being the general. Where will you go?"

"I thought I loved it. I spent my entire life training to be the best warrior for this kingdom—to protect my family. I couldn't even do that." Daniel sighed and stared out the window again. He looked so empty, Doris didn't know how to help. "I want to travel out of this kingdom and start somewhere new. Somewhere that they don't know who I am."

"I... I understand. I will miss you terribly, I hope you will write to me once you find where you belong." Doris leaned forward and gripped his hand. He glanced down, but still didn't look her in the eye. "I wondered... I wondered how my

brother ended up with someone as kind as you. I know he doesn't deserve you. Being a king doesn't mean he deserves nice things in life, and you are the greatest prize he could have won." "I see William for all of his flaws and I choose to love him anyway because I see more than that." Doris whispered. "It's not always about deserving something. Sometimes you just need to find a person that realizes you're better inside."

Daniel snorted, but it held no humor. "I bet if you cut my brother up, he would be black inside. Black and rotten."

"You wouldn't be wrong." A voice said from the door. Doris turned to see William with his hands deep in his pockets and his crown absent. "If my insides match my actions, I would be rotted."

Daniel stood. "I had hoped to escape you, brother. I didn't realize you would be around with all of your new duties."

William stepped a little further in the room, but not by much. "I hoped we could talk. I've been waiting for you to return—"

"Are you upset that I didn't die too? Were you hoping that you would be all alone in this big palace to have everyone else do as you wish?"

"Daniel, I never—I would never want you to get hurt. You... you are the only family I have ever cared about. I always wanted to protect you." William stepped closer but maintained his distance. "You poisoned me, William. I was in a coma—and when I came out my entire family was dead! I didn't even get to attend my father's funeral and I was told that you had our brothers buried quietly!" Daniel closed his hands into fists. "I don't understand how the crown meant so much to you. More than your blood." "I'm sorry, Daniel. I never wanted it to end this way—"

"How did you expect it to end? Did you expect the war to end with hugs and happy songs? War is always death, William. Do not act like you didn't know that."

William took a breath. "I'm sorry, Daniel. Nothing I can say will make up for my sins." William held out his hands to his brother as if to show him he meant no harm by coming here. "I love you, Daniel. You are the only brother I wanted to protect because I know you didn't deserve to be in the middle of this. I'm sorry I did what I did, I'm sorry I was selfish and didn't take your feelings into consideration." "Your words and actions are so far apart, William. What you did... was unforgivable." Daniel wiped the warm tears from his eyes angrily. "I'm leaving this palace. I don't want any part of your leadership or this kingdom."

"I understand." William said. He lowered his arms back to his side. "You are always welcome back here if you change your mind. This place will always be your home if you want it to be."

Daniel said nothing. He only stared across at William with tears streaming down his face. Doris wanted to hold him until all of his pain faded, but she knew that would take a long time. Losing one family member was heart breaking, losing

three at once could shatter worlds of even the kindest souls. "I don't want to live in fear. I don't want to live here and be reminded of what happened." Daniel finally said. William lowered his head a little. "I'm going to start somewhere fresh, and I hope you won't expect to hear from me."

"Anything you want, any money or supplies, all of it is yours to make your journey easier." "I don't want anything from this palace. I'm only taking the things that I earned." "You inherited a fortune from father. I hope you realize how expensive it is to start a new life." William said gently. "He left it for you because he loved you and wanted you to be okay wherever you went in life. Don't be too proud to take it." Daniel closed his eyes and took a deep breath. William cautiously approached him loudly so he knew he was coming. "You were always the best part of my life when we were young. You always brought out the ounce of softness I had in my heart and kept me from turning to stone." "I should have been around you more, then." Daniel muttered. He opened his eyes and looked up at his brother. "Clearly I wasn't there enough for you." "You were there more than you realize." William hesitated before he gripped Daniel's shoulder. "I will spend my life trying to make up for what I've been. Please don't spend the rest of your life hating me for

it.."

Daniel tensed beneath his touch, but he didn't move him off. "I hope you find your peace, William. I hope you earn that crown in your heart."