

Her Unwanted Mate On The Throne by Caroline Chapter 66

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Chapter 66 He'll have to trust me.

The ride back to the palace was almost unbearable. The biting wind blew her hair back as he rode as hard as he could towards the camp. Perhaps he wanted to distance himself as far as he could from that scene as she did. He couldn't run from what he'd done. Every time she closed her eyes, she saw blood. Deep down, she didn't feel the slightest bit bad for the men. They tortured her for fun and seemed to love every minute of it. One even appeared to get off on it, perhaps they both did in the most sick and twisted way. She was so sure she was about to die at their hands, she couldn't help but wonder how many other women they had killed before her. Did they do it for fun? She wouldn't doubt it if someone uncovered all the bodies they hid six feet under around their cabin. There was just no way she was their first victim. They seemed too familiar with it, too sure of themselves to get away with it. They almost did.

But still, she wished she didn't have to see them meet their end. It would haunt her thoughts for months to come-she doubted she'd ever get another peaceful sleep again after everything she's seen. She longed for the time when the worst thing she had ever seen was a bathroom that hadn't been cleaned in months. By the time they arrived back to the camp, the sun was up and shining high in the sky. The village was wide awake and going about their duties without a single glance towards the prince. Perhaps that was good even though they meant it as disrespect. Doris wasn't sure how much blood still remained on his skin even after he tried to wipe it off. Doris felt as if her entire body was drenched in it. Could they see it on her face? Was it on her hands and in her hair? Or was she imagining it all? Of course she was, she never touched them, he's the one that ripped them apart and spread this body parts across the clearing Enzo was talking with a group of guards from the palace. When he saw them on the horse, he froze before he stomped across the snow directly to them. His guards followed close behind, it looked

as if he didn't let them know he would be taking a midnight stroll. "What-what happened?" Enzo asked. He raised his arms to help Doris down, but William dropped down in front of him and helped her instead. Enzo stepped back but his eyes still looked for any source of injury on her. "I paid a visit to the men that kidnapped Doris." William said simply as he set her down on the ground. He still had a bit of blood smeared across his chin. She forced herself not to wipe it off him Enzo had clearly already seen it. Enzo straightened his shoulders and glanced at the gathering crowd. Murmurs started before Doris had a chance to realize what was happening. They looked at William as if he was a monster terrorizing their town. Patrick had his arms crossed over his chest as he looked William over. She wondered if he was the one that told him about who the men were, or if he was just disappointed he wasn't brought along "May I talk privately with you, prince?" Enzo asked without a hint of kindness. William lifted his chin and took Doris by

her wrist before he walked off into her cabin. Enzo followed close behind, clearly William wanted to be the one in control. She could see how much he hated having no control here. And no respect. Perhaps that was why he wanted her close by, she would always be his maid. Someone he can control and tell what to do. Everyone else here that wasn't a guard? They would rather spit in his face than listen to a single command. Though, Doris didn't think they'd last long if they did something like that to him. 1 The room had clearly been cleaned and aired out since she left. She was relieved, her old sheets were stained with sweat and the food she ate in bed. The air felt clearer and fresh. Before it was more stuffy and it suffocated her. Once the door was closed, William let her go. She rubbed her wrist and stepped away. Why was she even here? Unless... Enzo thought she was apart of their demise and maybe he wanted to yell at them both for it. "I was told you handled her kidnappers." William clenched his hands into fists at his sides before he stretched his fingers out again. He did it several times before

he relaxed a little. "I was going to remove their hands, I hadn't gotten around to it." Enzo said calmly. It was a wonder how anyone allowed them to be alone together. Doris could feel the hatred, she could almost reach out and touch it. William snorted. Doris was too nervous to say anything, not that she had anything to add to the fire. She seated herself on one of the cushioned seats. "I suppose you thought it would be a better idea to take Doris when she was inches from death just yesterday and make her watch you torture those me." Enzo walked over to the fireplace and leaned against the mantle. William clenched his jaw tight. "She's not your concern, she's mine." "That's not true, I was quite concerned about her wellbeing." Enzo brushed off a bit of snow from his suit. "I think it's time we talk about the reward I'm owed." William said more patiently than he looked. Enzo laughed. "I'm sorry to break it to you, prince. But the offer was only for rogues. Royalty are normally not allowed within a thousand feet of this camp, as

you quickly found out the moment you stepped through the north. *Why* would you even care about having an ounce of power over our little camp?" "I have a plan." William said with a quick glance at Doris. He looked as if he was trying to choose his words carefully. "I have a plan to reunite the rogues with the kingdom." Doris and Enzo both glanced at each other. Clearly they both didn't expect William to say that. Not once has he showed interest in their politics or if they were done wrong by the kingdom. She'd only ever heard William speak about the rogues in distaste-why did he want to bring them back to the kingdom? "And how do you suppose we do that?" "It will take time." William put his hands in his pockets but Doris couldn't stop looking at the splatters of blood on his chest and neck. "I think our partnership could profit us both." Enzo looked completely baffled. He looked at Doris as if he wished she wasn't in the room so he could speak freely. She hated when people looked at her that way. She was a person, not a statue. She had feelings and she felt as if everyone around her forgot that.

"I always heard you were the one least interested in politics. I would have expected the crown prince to knock at my door rather than you. Why the sudden interest?" "I'm private about my opinions." Was all William said. Enzo tapped his fingers against his arm. He watched William as if he was trying to solve a puzzle that was supposed to be easy. "Is that why you're here in the north? Kill a bunch of my rogues and then talk to me about peace? I can't say it's very convincing on if we should work together." "Rogue or not, they deserved what they

got.”

“Fair point,” Enzo pushed away from the fireplace and spread his arms wide. “I’m afraid it’ll take a lot more convincing for me to even consider listening to you. Surely you understand nobody here trusts you and I wouldn’t wait on them to try anytime soon. They’ll be much harder to reason with than me.” William narrowed his eyes a little. “Join me for a drink, then.” “I’m flattered you want to take me out, but I don’t put out on the first date.”

Enzo turned his back to them and walked to the door. “Come for dinner when the sun sets.” His eyes flickered to Doris. “Alone.” Doris tried not to feel stung, she certainly didn’t think she was going to join them or anything. She looked away and focused on the crackle of flames in front of her. Was this why he truly wanted to come to the north? He told her he had a plan, she never considered it would involve being civil with the rogues. There was something here she couldn’t quite grasp yet. There was something he hadn’t told her, and she doubted he would. William nodded his confirmation once before Enzo left. “Do you trust him?” Doris asked. William turned his blue gaze to the flames and all Doris saw was determination. “It won’t matter. He’ll have to trust me.”

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Chapter 67 A bit of gossip.

When William left to go speak with Patrick, Doris didn’t waste a second of her time. She bathed and dressed in something warm before she wandered out to the village. People were gathered around a fire and swapping stories with warm cups of tea and chocolate. Doris smiled at them, but they looked at her and quickly avoided her eyes. She noticed a beautiful woman seated by herself watching Doris as she passed by, but didn’t offer any kind greeting either

— just a curious look. “Doris!” Eliza came out of one of the cabins and hurried her steps to catch up with her. Doris wondered how old the woman was. She had to guess somewhere around her mothers age which wasn’t that old. Possibly in her forties. “Oh hello Eliza. How’re you today?” Doris asked as she slowed her steps to walk with the woman. She followed her to a table that had warm tea and cookies. She wondered if it was a daily thing to gather

around a warm fire together-how lovely that sounded Eliza snorted and bumped her arm with her shoulder. “I should be asking you that. Has the poison passed through your system yet?” “William told me it should have. I was asleep for days while my body fought it. I haven’t felt anything more than the occasional dizziness since I got out of bed.” Doris piled a napkin with the sweets and followed Eliza to a bench nearby. “Thank you for helping me while I was sick, by the way.” “Oh, no thanks are in order. Your lover made sure he took care of you the entire time. He wouldn’t even let us come in to visit you once.” The woman rolled her eyes and sipped her tea. “Male wolves are so possessive of their women. Though, he probably wins an award for being the most possessive one

I've ever encountered. Doris felt her entire face heat. "Oh no no. He's a prince, not my lover. I work for him at the castle. I only came on this trip to aide him as a servant." Eliza raised her brows as if she couldn't believe Doris was trying to make an excuse. "I'm serious, we have nothing

between us." Doris continued. Her silence made her more nervous the longer it passed "No? I don't think my husband would have even waited on me like that when he was alive." Eliza said. Doris frowned and went to say something, but the woman held up her hand to stop her. "It was a long time ago, don't worry yourself. Still, no man I know would sit day and night by your side unless he loved you." Doris stared at her as if she was insane. She felt a laugh bubble up her throat but she swallowed it. Prince William? In love with her? Now she was absolutely mad for considering that. "That's absurd—" "You didn't see him when you were unconscious. He was like a crazy man, desperate for you to get better. He ate next to you and slept in that chair for days. Everyone saw how much you mean to him." Doris shifted uncomfortably. "I assure you that he's not in love with me. I'm nothing but a maid to him. He doesn't like when he loses things that he thinks belongs to him." Eliza leaned back a little as if she was taking a wider look at Doris. "You think

he doesn't think you're worthy?" "What-no, I just know that he doesn't love me. He has a lady back at the castle. She's the reason we're here." Doris brushed her hair behind her ear and suddenly wished she never left her cabin. Was it too late to go back and hide? "You're the most beautiful girl that has ever passed through this village, don't let a man make you think you're less." Eliza said with a lifted chin. Doris sighed. "I appreciate your compliments but I truly think you've gotten the wrong impression. Prince William has a lady back in the palace waiting for him and he doesn't harbor those feelings for me like you think he does. He's just... a good prince." "Hmmm." Eliza shook her head. "I am not the blind one. Come with me." Eliza stood suddenly and started walking away from the crowd. Doris quickly stood and followed her. "Where are we going?" Doris asked, catching herself from falling face first in the snow. A bit of her sickness still lingered in the smallest ways. One being the desperate need for her body to either sit or lay down at all times but she fought against it and kept on.

"Enzo had something made for you while you were out. Since you're finally awake and well, I thought it would be a good time to give it to you since your prince isn't hovering over your shoulder." Doris rolled her eyes and followed her into the small cabin. The air immediately filled her with warmth from the roaring fire and made her want to curl up on the couch with a fuzzy blanket and a good book. If only she had brought a few comfort items from the palace to fill in her cabin. Not that-she would be staying. William would drag her back to the castle himself if he had to. And she couldn't imagine what would happen to Beth if he knew

she was here alive and well. Still, she loved how homey this cabin felt. Littered with Eliza's life in books and decorations across the dark wood. It was nice. Doris wished she had a place like this to call home. One that belonged to her alone. "Sit by the fire, I'll be right back." Eliza said without a glance back at her. Doris seated herself and held out her hands to defrost. The air smelled like cinnamon and spices when she inhaled deeply. Truly lovely When she came out again, she had a

large bundle in her hands. Doris stood

"Oh, this is too much. Enzo shouldn't have went through any trouble-" "He didn't, most of this is leftover stuff that nobody wants. We make a lot of things here since we have so much spare time. A lot of it goes unused, but he did have this made for you." Eliza set the pile on the table and pulled out a leather belt. "You can wear it around your hips or waist. It's meant to keep your knife secure so you don't lose it." Doris took the leather in her hands and inspected the design closer. It had vines and small flowers embroidered in a lovely pattern that made Doris smile. "He had it made just for me?" "Yes, he saw you shove the blade in one of your pockets and knew you were going to get yourself cut if you kept on. Or rip all of your clothes." Eliza patted her cheek. "Enzo is a good man. People try to take his kindness for granted but he will cut anyone that crosses a line without a second thought." Doris nodded and fitted the belt around her waist. "He is a good man. I can see why you love him as your leader. If only more men were like him in leadership."

"I can see your prince has quite the temper on him." Eliza said with raised brows. "He doesn't have a lick of patience like Enzo." "Well—" Doris felt the sudden urge to defend William. It wasn't fair being judged by people that knew nothing about him or what he has been through. She'd been judged her entire life by people who didn't bother to know her. "Well, he's a man of little words and he knows what he wants. I think he's quite smart and knows how to be a good leader, people just underestimate him." "Hmm, I heard his father refuses to give him his own pack." Eliza started to fold the winter clothes that she had brought out for Doris. "I don't know anything about those sort of things, I'm sorry. Maids don't get into royal business." Doris said patiently. The woman laughed a little. "Don't look so tense! I was just trying to find out if the bit of gossip was true or false. The king is a horrible man, so I wouldn't have been surprised if he denied his son something so important for a prince." Eliza said. Doris pressed her lips together and ran her fingers across the belt. It felt wrong

to talk badly about the royals-even if they were awful to them. Doris had been loyal to the kingdom for years and the thought of anyone from the palace over hearing Eliza made Doris a bit nervous. What if they thought she was talking bad about them too? "Thank you for all of this, truly." Doris said quickly and gathered the bundle in her arms. "Oh, you're more than welcome my dear. Please come by any time you wish." Eliza said as she followed her out. Doris released a breath and hurried across the path to her own cabin, She almost dropped everything when she saw William already inside, asleep on her bed.

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Chapter 68 You'll be my wife, then.

She would never get used to the sight of the sleeping prince. So peaceful under the warm covers. Did she enter the wrong room? Doris looked around and saw her cloak by the door and an extra pair of her boots by the wall. It was definitely her room-perhaps he was the one that was in the wrong room. Surely Enzo must have given him one. Silently, she slipped off her boots so her steps wouldn't wake him and quietly went to put away the clothes she was given. Honestly, it

was all too much. She knew they would be leaving soon and she would have no use for a lot of the winter clothing they gave but-still. It was kind and filled her with a sense of warmth that came from more than the layers. Despite the cruel ones, they were trying to make her feel like home here. Slowly, she opened a creaky drawer and set everything inside. When she tried to close it silently, it slammed louder than

she intended. Doris cringed and quickly looked back to see William staring at her. "Sorry, I didn't mean to wake you." Doris said quietly. "I'll be on the couch." William leaned his head back on the pillow and rolled his eyes to the ceiling. He probably realized he was in the wrong room too. "Change out of those clothes." Doris glanced down at her snow covered cloak and peeled off her gloves before she went to change in the bathroom. She put a large sweater on over her nightgown and silently crept towards the couch. "No, come here." He said with his eyes still closed as if he could hear her every breath. Doris swallowed and stood at the edge of the bed, "I think it would be better for me to lay on the couch—" "How long are you going to stand there babbling?" He interrupted. Doris licked her lips and tried not to think of the dream she had when he lifted her nightgown to kiss what was underneath. She blew out the candles and sent the room into darkness, with only the

moonlight lighting her way. The bed creaked from her weight and she laid on the very edge. She would never-ever get used to laying next to him. It made her try to tame every breath she had. There were so many cabins that had empty beds-why was he in hers? She wouldn't dare kick him out after everything he did for her-or even suggest herself leaving. He might take offense and regret ever letting her live by giving up some of his blood. William turned on his side to face her with his eyes closed. She studied his beautiful face and cursed herself for even admiring it. Could he hear how loud her heart raced? If she tried hard enough, would she be able to hear things like that now that she had a wolf? Or was she not fully tapped into that part of herself? The anxious thoughts died out in her mind. She fell asleep much quicker than she ever had before.

He was already up and dressed when she finally woke. Doris felt a bit embarrassed to be the only one that was still sleeping when she was supposed to be the one

that was waiting on him. She slipped into the bathroom and changed into one of the new sweaters Eliza had given her the day before. William was watching the snow fall lightly out the window when she came out. He glanced back at her, his blue eyes looked so bright against his dark hair and the snow out the window. "Walk with me?" Doris hesitated and nodded. The last time she went out for a walk with him, he went and ripped apart the men that kidnapped her and took her with him to watch. She silently hoped it would be nothing like that this time. Just a simple walk. He opened the door for her and allowed her to go first before he met her on the trail. They took one that led away from the camp and towards somewhere more secluded and quiet. Soon she heard the laughing voices of the village fade into the background. She inhaled deeply, the air was so fresh out here. "I hope your dinner went well with Enzo." Doris said as she pressed her cold hands together.

"It was... productive." William said with nothing to hint how he truly felt, his own hands were shoved deep into his pockets. "There's something I can't get off my

mind, though." Doris glanced up at him curiously, but he stared forward. "About Enzo?" "No." He said sharply. "About the night you were poisoned. You said you saw three wolves that looked out of place." "Yes, they came from the woods behind the cabins. They sought you out and I thought they were part of the rogues and I just hadn't seen them before." Doris kicked a rock in front of her and gazed up at the gloomy sky. "It's strange." He said more to himself than her "Were they not part of the rogues? I never knew what happened after...." "They fled before I could get all of them. I'm not sure if there was more." His words were clipped as if he already said more than he wanted to. Doris blew out a slow breath of air. "That is strange, I thought Enzo would have known." Doris glanced at him again but he only shook his head. Hadn't

anyone else at the camp recognized the wolves? Surely they must have seen them before if they lived here. "My guards had poisoned claws that night and was able to harm at least one of them." "Oh, so perhaps they're dead now." Doris suggested. "It's possible, the only cure besides my blood is passionflower and poppy seed but only an expert would know that." Doris walked on in silence, but her mind was loud. Was it possible the man was still alive? If he was. Doris stopped and turned to William." How far is the market we were meant to go to from here?" "Not far, just over the hills. Why?" "What if... what if the man isn't dead yet but doesn't know a cure? He might start to get desperate the sicker he gets." Doris said, William watched her closely. "What if you bought out all the ingredients he would need from the market and plant a half dose of cure for one of the venders to sell. He'll be shouting what it is to the streets and eventually it might draw out the man

that really needs it. Or at least someone he knows, then they could tell him about

it."

William's brows furrowed and suddenly she felt stupid for ever saying anything. He must think she was ridiculous. He cleared his throat and looked up at the sky as if he wanted to look anywhere else but her. "That's brilliant, Doris." He said, and her heart did a silly flip in her chest. He looked down just in time to see her smile and she could have sworn the side of his mouth lifted just barely. "How would we catch him?" He asked as if he was trying to build a small bridge between them. For once, it sounded like he wanted to hear her opinion. 2 "We... we can watch the market for a few days. Go in disguise and pretend to be visiting villagers." "He'll know it's me instantly." "We can put you in Enzo's clothes to throw off your scent and—" Doris hesitated, but she reached up and brushed his hair to the side. He blinked at her in surprise but said nothing. "We can put a hat on you." 1

"You'll be my wife, then." He said suddenly. His words knocked the breath from her lungs. 2 "What? I—I don't think that would be a good idea-No one would believe that." "We're going to be pretending, aren't we?" He took a step closer, she had to tilt her head back just to look up at him. He lifted her hand and turned it over to look at the scars across her skin. So many that she hadn't had before. "I'll even get you a ring." Doris willed herself to speak, but nothing came out. His eyes left her feeling as if she was about to drown again and he was-so close. She could feel the warmth his body gave and smell the stormy scent of his skin. He dropped her hand and started back towards the camp before she could object any further. It took her a moment to catch her breath before she followed him,

hurrying in the snow to catch up with his long strides. It should be considered a sin to be that beautiful. He turned to look at her with a sense of mischief in his eyes. "Meet me back in here an hour." 1

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Chapter 69 He'll kill for it anyway

Of all the things she had to pretend to be ... his wife was the last thing on the list that she would have guessed. Doris searched through her clothes and came out with an outfit she thought would blend in best with those that lived here. A thick cream sweater with a black coat on top and boots that were meant to brave even the worse snow. She pulled her hair up into a bun and pulled a black hat Eliza had given her over it. She wasn't sure if anyone would recognize her long brown hair, but she didn't want to take any chances. When she came back out, William was talking with Patrick close by her cabin. His eyes caught on her for a second but she was too distracted by his attire to notice. He was dressed almost exactly like Enzo with the same crisp suit that was built for snow and one of the many hats she'd seen him in around the camp. When she neared him, he even smelled

different. She'd never seen William in anything but his fancy prince attire and palace themed outfits. Even the ones meant for snow. Patrick turned to look at her and offered a small smile. "I'll be close by in the trees, try not to look for me." He winked and clapped William on the back before he headed towards the stables. Even he was dressed more like a villager. She assumed all their other clothes had been ruined on the journey over here-she didn't even want to think about what happened after she was taken. William picked up her hand and slid a gold ring on her finger. It was nothing fancy, just a simple gold band that was much different than what princes usually gave the women they were marrying. It made Doris feel a little better, at least she knew for certain this was all fake. Doris released her breath when he set down her hand. "It was all I could find." "It's perfect." Doris nodded with a smile. He looked a little surprised before he shook it off and led her to the horses. "My horses are too obvious, Enzo is letting us use one of theirs." He stopped in front of a plain brown horse that looked like the rest of them. He gripped her waist and lifted her on the back of the horse. She tried not to think about how strong he was as he lifted himself up in front of her and guided the horse out onto the trail. Doris wrapped her arms around his waist and held on tightly The ride wasn't as long as she thought, it was truly right over the hills as he had said. They took the main path and they were there in less than an hour. No one really spared them a second glance as they trotted through the market. He steered the horse towards where the rest of them were left and hopped off to tie the rope along the fence before he held out his arms for her. He gently set her in the snow and took her hand to wrap around his arm as they walked. No one would believe this, there was no way. Him? With-her? They're all going to laugh and call their bluff immediately

William put his hand over her own and squeezed. "I can hear your heart pound *faster* than it should be. Take a breath." Doris took a deep breath as she swerved out of the way for another couple. William tipped his hat to them to hide

a part of his face. "Do you know how to make the cure?" Doris whispered, she glanced around at the growing crowd but no one seemed to notice her or them at all. Nothing more than a quick glance in passing before they went on their way. "Yes." He said through his teeth. Doris glanced up at him. Why did he always have to snip at her? They stopped in front of a booth that had endless spices. Doris took in the sight of all of it. Wait-was this the booth that also had the poison that was in Melody's soup? Would he have that? It looked like he had everything. She didn't have time to ask William, he was already flagging down the owner. "Yes, my boy. What would you like today? We just got in some fresh cinnamon sticks—" "I was wondering how big your stock of poppy seeds and passionflower is?" William interrupted before the man ran the entire menu. "Oh we haven't gotten much of either lately." The man nodded his hello to Doris as he talked. Doris offered a smile. "We have less than a pound of each right now but we should get more next week

"We'll take all of what you have." William took off his gloves and she saw he had a matching gold ring on his finger. He pulled out a sack from his pocket and offered a bit more than the spices were even worth. The man didn't seem to mind, he quickly took the money and nodded his head. "Yes sir! I'll get that for you right away." William pushed his hands back in his pockets and Doris moved a bit closer to him when a gust of wind picked up and sent a new wave of chills through her. He looked down at her. "Is there any sort of shelter nearby for my wife and I to stay the night?" He asked the man as he bagged the spices. He spared a quick glance at them both before he continued. "There's an inn at the edge of the market. It's made for travelers like yourself to stay when the wind gets to be too much." "Do you get many storms out here?" Doris asked as she glanced down the road. It seemed to stretch on and on with booths and cabins like the one Enzo lived. This one seemed to be even more popular, perhaps because of the market. "Oh yes, we have a system that once the wind picks up a certain way, we collapse everything and get in doors." He laughed a little and handed the bags to William, he shoved it in his coat. "The inn is nice though. The rooms are cozy and come with a heater." "Oh, lovely." Doris said. "Thank you, sir." The man smiled and nodded his head. "You two come from far?". William shook his head and started to steer Doris away. "Good day." Doris followed him down the road and took in the sight of all the other sellers had to offer. They had clothes and hats, scarves and gloves. Some sold meat while others sold weapons for hunting. It was truly lively place and Doris had never seen anything like it. Of course, she had heard of places like this. But to see it was wild. "Oh." Doris saw a booth that had a few books laid in a pile on the front table. Her fingers curled with how much she longed to see what they had. It was so hard being somewhere secluded and nothing to read. Everything about this place screamed perfect reading weather. William stopped when he saw her longing gaze and led her a little closer. "Do you want one?" He asked. An old woman stood from the stool and smiled at them both with a toothless grin. Doris shook her head. "I couldn't." She didn't have any money with her, all of it was back at the palace. William furrowed his brows and set down a few coins. "Get two." The woman snatched the coins before Doris could say no again. Doris cleared her throat and looked through the pile until she came across two romances that looked perfectly entertaining. She smiled down at her choices and ran her fingers across the new bindings. "Oh, you'll love those." The woman winked at Doris before she glanced up at William with a sheepish grin. "Thank you." Doris said quickly and guided William away. He glanced back over his shoulder at the woman before he glanced at the books in her hands. "Thank you for that you didn't have to." William shrugged as if it was nothing but -it was something. He wanted her to have these books because she

wanted them so he bought them for her. No one had ever bought her anything before like that. They silently walked up the street and William bought them some food from another vender before they went into the Inn. She didn't expect to be staying long enough to need it, but she should have figured it might have taken longer than an evening of waiting. If only she brought more clothes. William bought them a room and ignored the glances from interested and beautiful strangers. He walked right past them with his hand on Doris's back as if he was claiming her as his own and nothing else would be considered. Once they were closed in the room, he went to work. He pulled a small vile out of his coat pocket and pulled out the spices. "Do you need help?" Doris offered. He shook his head and already seemed to be lost in his own concentration as he laid out his supplies on the table. He grabbed the heater and turned his back to her. Doris laid her coat on the bed that was much smaller than any she had shared with him before-but she tried not to think about that. She started to prepare them both a plate of food. "Are you hungry-" "It's done." He said before she could finish. He lifted a small glass of liquid to the ceiling to observe. "He won't survive off of this, but he'll kill for it anyway."

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Chapter 70 Did you think I wouldn't find you

William stood, the chair almost fell behind him when he turned to the door. "Should I come-" Doris moved for her coat. "No, stay here. I want to talk to the spice guy and work out a deal." He closed the door before she could ask what he meant. What kind of deal would he mean? Again, Melody and her poisoning had slipped from her mind. She had to ask him about it before they left but whenever she was around him-Melody was the furthest thing from her mind. As horrible as that sounded. She ate her food alone and laid on the bed to read when her thoughts tried to drown her. She wondered if the wolves lived nearby or if they were long gone and all of this was for nothing. William would probably be furious for her wasting his time and having to pretend to be married to someone like her. She

could see the rage on his face now when he realized she was wrong and wasn't smart at all. Doris was dozing off when William finally came back in their room. She sat up quickly and set her book on the end table. His eyes looked a little wild and his cheeks were red from the cold. "He mentioned someone coming by the market last week looking for some sort of cure for poison." Doris stood quickly. "Had he come by recently?" "He said he saw him again a few days ago-but he looked close to death. He comes by often to check for something to help him." Doris chewed on her lip and sat on the edge of the bed. He might already be dead. They both knew it, but at least they weren't going in circles. He had passed through the market in search of a remedy. Perhaps he was close enough to hear the man actually had one. "Patrick is watching the booth, he'll leave a note on the horse if he follows anyone." "Shouldn't we wait out there too?" Doris asked

"We will. Tonight. The man said he always comes at night, never during the day." William picked at the plate of food she laid out for him. "I'll get answers out of

him one way or another." His voice darkened a little and sent a small shiver through Doris. She never knew where his emotions would land at any given time. Perhaps it should thrill her that she never knew what he was going to say, but more often than not it left her annoyed with him. Or terrified of what he was capable of. Lately she'd been feeling less scared and more... used to it. Doris tried to turn on the heater but it refused to start. She kicked it a few times, but still nothing. She sighed and laid in the bed and brought the covers over herself. Night time was hours off, they both could use rest before the night came.³ Her entire body trembled. How was it possible that she felt more cold in here than outside? She heard the bed creak and his weight brought it down a little while he settled himself. Doris closed her eyes and almost stopped breathing when

he wrapped his big arms around her small frame, trapping her in his warmth. "...William?" "Shhh." He said against her ear. It sent a new kind of shiver down her body and she silently shamed herself. What was wrong with her? 3

William woke her a few hours later when the room was completely dark except for the few candles he must have lit near the door. "It's time." He whispered. Doris shoved her books in a small pouch and followed him out the door. There was nothing else for her to take, she wasn't even sure if they would come back. Probably not if they ended up finding him. When they stepped out into the snow, she could hear the sounds of chatter from all angles. It was even more alive at night when all of the torches and candles lit up the area like a beautiful scene. She gripped William's arm and followed him down the road. She tried her best not to focus on the muscles she could feel through his jacket and instead focused

on not slipping on the ice. They stopped at each booth, looking over things they didn't really care about and trying not to search the crowd too obviously for a man that was on his last leg. So far, everyone looked completely healthy. The closer they got to the booth, the more she heard the bell. The spice man stood on the edge of his booth ringing a small bell while shouting to the crowd. "Poison from a bush? I've got the cure! Come on down, not much available!" He shouted it over the murmuring voices and laughter while everyone ignored him. It wasn't a common thing to get poisoned, she assumed. Even berries that were poisoned would leave them with an upset stomach but nothing more if they had the wolf in them. William led Doris off to the side where a booth was selling warm cider and sweets. He bought her some before they went off to sit on a bench that just so happened to have a perfect view of the spice booth. "I may have given him a little extra for his help." William said as he wrapped his long fingers around his warm mug. Doris scooted a little closer when

another gust of wind picked up through the booths. "What if he doesn't come tonight?" Doris whispered. He bent his head closer to her own. His breath smelled like cinnamon. "He will. The man said he's gotten desperate. The word will get back to him." Doris lifted her book and tried to act like she was reading as she watched the crowd. Minutes turned to an hour and her skin was close to freezing over into ice. Her trembling was so rapid, it was hard for her to control her teeth chattering. Part of her was afraid she'd break her teeth soon. William took her arms and wrapped them around his torso so he could hold her. The warmth was a small relief, she didn't understand how all of these people could take it so easily. She felt as if she was an icicle. Some of the booths had already closed and gone home, the roads weren't as cluttered anymore. The spice

man had stopped his ringing about half an hour ago and Doris already felt herself ready to give up. At least for the night. And then

The sound of coughing littered down the sidewalk. William picked up her book and set it in front of them as if they were both interested in what it had to say. She knew his blue eyes tracked the man that finally appeared in front of them but he didn't spare one glance in their direction. He only had eyes for the man at the spice booth. He moved slowly with a limp leg. Doris was positive he was using every bit of strength to even move. She knew that feeling, it was like all of his limbs weren't his own and he had to force them to move the slightest bit. He was determined, though. He didn't stop until he got there and slammed his coins down with a nasty cough. "You lyin' bastard. Give me the cure before I rip your—" he couldn't even finish his threat before coughing. He couldn't have been more than thirty, but he sounded ancient. Did she sound as horrible as him when she was sick? It was a wonder how William could stand being around her. Once the spice man had handed off the vile, the man downed it and threw the

glass on the floor before he walked back the way he came. William stood casually, as if it had nothing to do with the man they'd been waiting for all night. He held out his hand for Doris and she took it as she stood, her books tucked back in her pouch. The spice man nodded once at William before he closed down his shop. Doris gripped tightly onto his arm as they followed as far from the man as they could. She didn't think he would notice them anyway. That sort of poison made breathing difficult, let alone noticing your surroundings. He walked off the path and stumbled a little towards the edge of the village. Once he got between the trees, he doubled over and started violently coughing. William dropped Doris from his arm and motioned for her to stay while he crept up behind the man. William grabbed the man by his shoulder and forced him around before he slammed him into a tree. "Did you think I wouldn't find you?" 2