

I could feel my whole body shaking as I stood in front of my Father's chambers. I could see my hand shaking as I lifted it towards the wooden door. I had not ever been so nervous to see my Father before. The idea of my Father now frightened me after what had taken place in my room earlier in the morning; the idea of my own unknown fate terrified me the most. I slowly brought myself to knock and wait in silence. Lord Haven's face greeted me as the door opened slightly.

"Princess..." he said with surprise in his voice. He should not have been surprised. He should have known I would keep my word and come to the King. I could hear my Father asking, "Is that her? Is that Aurelia?" Lord Haven gave a small nod towards the other side of the room, where I could imagine my Father leaning over his desk; his fingers tousled in his hair. The door parted more for me and Lord Haven gestured with a bow for me to enter. I tucked my hands behind my back and took a breath. I had to remember the plan Myriah and I had created.

"Could I speak to my Father, the King, alone?" I asked delicately as I kept my gaze to the floor. I could hear the silence between the two of them; the unspoken questions and commands. Perhaps Lord Haven already knew I had come here to agree to my Father's wishes, and perhaps my Father felt as if he had won. I just hoped my plan would work.

"Aurelia, the King has much to speak to you about." Lord Haven's voice was nervous, shaky even and I nodded in reply.

"Yes, I know."

"Leave us." My Father's voice caused an array of shivers to run down my spine. The hairs on my arm rose as I watched Lord Haven leave the room, and my Father took a step towards me. He looked regal and different from the night before in his cloak, his hair matted against his forehead and his crown, the large weight of his responsibility on his shoulders. I felt his finger touch my arm gently, rising and falling up and down my skin. I wanted to shrink away, but knew I could not. I had to stay firm and strong just as Myriah had told me to be.

"Aurelia..." he whispered softly. I took a step towards his desk and placed my hands on the oak wood, remembering him here, snapping his fingers at me as if I were a dog just the night before.

"Your Grace." I replied, turning to look at him. I felt as if it were the first time I was truly seeing my Father for who he was now, then whom he had been before with my Mother. I hoped the way I spoke to him made him realize the change which had occurred. He was no longer a Father, but a stranger to me.

"I've come to make an arrangement with you." I said directly.

"And what is your arrangement?" There was a hint of amusement in his voice as he spoke to me. I bit my lip and looked down at my bare hands, trying to remember everything Myriah and I had spoken of. "What is it you wish from me?" He asked again.

"You have told me this morning I am to be your bride." I caught his gaze, keeping it as long as I could until he turned, brushing a hand through his hair.

"Yes." he replied simply. "I've searched long and wide for a wife to meet the late Queen's..."

"My Mother." I interjected. He stared at me; a tense moment between the two of us.

"The late Queen's request." He finished as he rounded his desk. He began to take steps closer to me as his hand very close to mine; his face seemed to draw itself even closer.

"You are so very beautiful Aurelia. I've watched you grow in the past two years, and I never knew. Never knew how truly beautiful you were." I felt a strange disgust build in the coils of my stomach. I wanted to turn my face away from him, to turn my back and stride out the door;

I wished with all of my soul, I would never have to face him again, yet, I knew it would never resolve so easily. I could not stay a moment longer in his presence but I knew I must. As he came closer, thoughts of the night before flooded my mind; how easy it had been for him to press me against his bed, for him to take my clothes and to take me in a way only a husband should have.

"It is very lonely without a partner to live a life with. The late Queen knew how to entertain our people and myself. She knew how to hold herself with poise and grace, and she knew how to tend to her husband diligently. I see much of her in you." It seemed strange he would. I hardly thought I was anything like my Mother. Perhaps, yes, she was graceful and delicate, but she hardly knew how to take care of anyone but herself. I began to think of the ball, and the golden dress and how I had resembled her so much it seemed my Father fell in love with me.

My Father took another step towards me and I backed away instinctively. His hand grabbed mine and pulled me towards him, so that I was standing pressed against him.

"Have you forgotten your Mother's last wish? I promised her I would marry someone as beautiful as she. You're the only one who has the same golden hair, the same smile, the same beautiful eyes. You are the only one who will do, who I can love. The only one worthy of my love, my power, my body. You will be my bride." He declared as he ran a finger through my hair. My teeth clenched at his touch; the only thing keeping me in the room was the hope my arrangements would ultimately save me from this fate. I could not live this life with him.

"If I am to marry you," I began softly, letting out a deep breath. "I have four simple requests."

My Father grinned and nodded, "Go on...anything."

Perhaps he thought he was about to have everything he wanted. Perhaps in this moment, he was. I slowly uncurled my fingers from the fist I had created and licked my bottom lip.

"For my marriage, I will require new gowns. I request three gowns, one spun from the ray of sunbeams, the second, as silver as the moonbeams that dance along the night sky, and the third, woven from the star dust that falls from the heavens." My Father looked slightly surprised but continued to listen. I knew he would remember these from the night he had declared he would do anything for me to keep me happy and by his side.

"My last request," I continued, "A fur coat made of all the Kingdom's wild animals, so when the harsh winters come I can keep sickness and death at bay." I could feel my hands shake from trepidation; I couldn't believe I actually made these demands to him. What would the people think once they heard of him going to these lengths to marry me? Would they think I was a harlot? Would they think I encouraged my Father's inappropriate behavior towards me?

"And this is all you request from me?" he asked, surprised. I could see the amusement light up upon his face as I slowly nodded to him. Maybe this would actually work. Perhaps he would not see through the façade and agree to these. If he did, this would grant me more time to collect my things, arrange an escape from the palace, and move forward with my plans. I would never again be Princess Aurelia, but I would avoid the marriage between my own Father and myself.

"And if I agree to these things, you will marry me?" A smile crept upon his face as I gave a fast, curt nod as I swallowed my fear.

"Consider it done then, my love." My Father embraced me as he pressed a kiss upon the corner of my lips. I felt his finger lift my chin gently and I quickly took a step back away again.

My eyes darted to the ground and I twisted a part of my dress around my finger nervously. I needed to play the part but protect myself.

"I have much to plan." I said quickly, fumbling and turning towards the door. For those who heard me, perhaps they imagined I'd create a beautiful wedding, but for me I knew I had other things to plan.

"Dearest," My Father's voice caused me to stop in my foot-steps at the door. My hand had only been inches away from reaching the doorknob.

"I shall have these gifts to you within a week. Mark my words, the day after I present them to you, we shall marry." There was no question in his voice. This was how it would be. I only gave him a silent nod as I avoided his eyes and opened the door. I escaped quickly out into the hallway, far away from him before he could see the tears I fought so hard to keep at bay.

END OF EXCERPT

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