

"Your bedclothes, My Highness."

Roses had had... a long day; he wondered if his King felt the same way. It had been one of those days where he almost wished he could have a day off, maybe even a week off, just to reset his mind. He would do absolutely nothing at all, and maybe his King would join him and it would end in a whirlwind romance of proportions only seen in grand sagas. His King would sweep him off his feet, declare it a National Holiday, and -

On second thoughts, perhaps that wasn't too far from the truth. The last point, at least. Would his King declare a holiday for no other reason than the fact that he *could*, and that some people might enjoy it? Roses couldn't say 'no' for sure... and that was why he both needed a holiday, and would never, *ever* take one even if he could. His King was... distracted. He had his own idea of how the world was and how his great and powerful Kingdom fit into it. Try as Roses might, there had been no way to explain to his King that he was but *one* of many leaders, and the whole world was not his oyster. He had given that battle up long ago. But as long as his King was lost in his own universe, Roses had to be fully entangled in it.

Not that he minded, not really. He tore his gaze away from his King with difficulty, a blush beginning at his nose and spreading to the tips of his ears as the other man began to strip past his undergarments as though there was no one else in the room. He had no modesty; not around Roses, anyway. And it was increasingly difficult to look away, when everything that he wanted was *right there*... His fingertips lingered on his Kings as he passed over the clothes, and his breath hitched as his trousers dropped to the floor.

"I - My Sire."

"Yes, Roses?"

"Perhaps..." Roses cleared his throat, finally managing to look somewhere else. Anywhere else. His gaze landed on a potted plant in the corner - something tall and overly flowery, a gift from a visiting leader that he had taken pains to keep alive in their vastly different climate - and he worked on steadying his voice. "Would you not be more comfortable dressing behind a screen?"

"Why?" His King's tone was completely innocent, and were he anyone else Roses would have thought they were flirting - or at the very least, *teasing*. "I've always dressed myself in front of you."

"Of course, My King."

And so it was in the bedroom, so it was in the throne room. Once a week, his King held a council where the people could come to him with their problems. They had been... reluctant, at first, but Roses had been whispering in his King's ear for long enough that they were beginning to feel as though their problems were being heard. It was best not to let them think that *he* was the one answering their calls; best to let them believe their King had agency. But he felt, deep down, that perhaps they knew the truth... and so he'd struggled, in past weeks, to keep his mouth shut, or to be more subtle with his advice. It was exhausting. Sometimes he wanted to scream - not at his King, but at the *inadequacy* of the situation. His own helplessness. His King's prison within his own mind.

Once he set his mind on something, it could be impossible to change it.

"Roses."

Startled out of his thoughts, Roses shook his head and turned back to face his King. He subconsciously raised his head a little higher, straightened his back a little more. The red rose

around his neck tingled as he turned, and he saw the corners of his King's mouth turn up in a small smile at the sound. He smiled back, before he even knew he had done so.

"Yes, My Majesty?"

"Are you not going to change yourself?" Roses' eyes widened, but his King seemed not to notice. "It's time for bed, is it not?"

"My Sire..." Rosas ran his hand through his hair, the mane of his fringe flopping in front of his eyes inelegantly as he did so. "It... it wouldn't be proper."

"Nonsense." His King huffed. "I am King, am I not?"

"Yes, though -"

"Then I decide what is proper." His King smiled, clearly very pleased with his conclusion. "So you need not worry."

It... wasn't exactly spot-on what had been bothering him, up Roses couldn't find a good argument for that logic. Not one he was certain he'd be able to make at this time of night, anyway. He was tired, and he didn't *really* want to argue, anyway. He wished... he wished more than anything, more than a holiday, that his King could understand the depth of his feelings for him. Could understand why Roses stayed by his side, day and night, and why Roses wanted so bad to see him succeed and to thrive. But he didn't know how to make him understand; what words to say, what more he could possibly do than what he already did. And so he turned around, hands shaking, to undo the buttons of his own shirt while his King waited semi-patiently.

"It was a good day, was it not?"

"Yes, My Highness."

"The peasants seemed happy to see me." His King preened, still half-dressed. Looking over his shoulder while they talked, Roses hurried to change out of his clothes and into something he could sleep in before he was needed to help. The quicker he got this over with, the sooner the red on his face might begin to fade, as well. If only his King could look at *him* the way he looked at *him*... "We should hold council more often!"

"I do not think that wise, My Sire."

"Oh?" There was a faint edge to his King's voice; though he usually listened to Roses' advice, it was a bad idea to tell him he was *wrong*. You had to make him think that an idea or a plan or a ruling was his own. "And, pray tell, why is that?"

"Why..." Roses hastily pulled on his trousers. "Why, then you would spoil them, my King! The... peasants," he cringed inwardly, "are more simple people. The salt of the earth. It wouldn't serve to overwhelm them." Or, thought Roses, *to overwhelm me*. One council a week was *quite* enough.

"Don't *I* decide what will and will not serve my subjects?" That faint edge became sharper, a keen edge on a blade that Roses had learned to dread the taste of. He took a step back - not out of fear, but in search of breakable things to take further away - and held out his hands in the universal gesture for peace, and calm. "I am *King* after all, am I not?"

"Well," Roses carefully moved an expensive jug of milk off the nearest shelf, "yes my Highness."

"And as King, is my word not law?" His King stamped one foot on the ground, making his

bookshelf rattle on the fine wooden floor. His shirttails flapped, exposing his still untied trousers and bare skin beneath them. Roses bit his tongue, for now, as his King made a whirlwinding gesture with his hands, searching for words. "It's not that I am - am - am *unkind*, Roses."

"Of course no--"

"It is the right thing to do," his King continued, balling his hands into fists, "when a King makes decisions. Leads his country."

"Yes, my--"

Roses narrowly avoided a pillow being thrown to the floor, not so much at him but in his direction. "My kingdom." He stepped out of the way just in time, and took a deep breath, waiting while his King threw a second pillow to the ground, followed by his comforter. "My council." Once the bed was entirely clear he took a great, heaving breath and deflated, glaring at Roses as though his inability to grasp the words he *wanted* to say was his fault. It was almost childlike, had the actions not come from a man who could have him killed, if he so wished. Except Roses knew that he, of all people, was entirely safe. So he stood his ground, waiting to come in as advisor, comforter and... friend... whenever it was needed. "We will hold a second council."

"I will take that into consideration, my King."

"Yes," his King stuck out his bottom lip. "I will."

Roses knelt down to pick up the lower bedsheet, shaking the dust out of it as he made up the bed once again. This wasn't the first night he'd had to deal with such a tantrum, and it wouldn't be the last, he knew. He just had to live with it. He saw his King kick out at the ground, bare feet scuffing the ground, and sighed to himself. Crouching down to pick up the next sheet, he was able to hide his disappointed and tired expression. This fit, at least, had lasted much less time than some of the ones in the past. He supposed he should count that as a blessing; he only had to fix the bed, after all. When the bed was more or less put back together - and, from the sound of things, his King's foul mood had burned off enough steam - Roses went in search of the missing satin pillow. But as he straightened up, focusing on fluffing out the feathers a hand on the small of his back stopped him cold.

"Come." His King smiled weakly at him, all his restless energy of the day gone after their small altercation. He was clearly *trying* to make amends, and that was all Roses could ask for. He kept his hand on Roses' back as the servant walked, very aware of his own body, back towards the bed. He put down the pillow and turned to face his King, who pouted at his hand slipped away. But when he saw Roses' face, he smiled again. "It's a cold night. You will share my bed."

Roses began to splutter, knocking the pillow unceremoniously to the floor. Stammering as he tried to work out how to respond, he put the pillow back for a *second* time and got his coughing under control, suddenly feeling as though his choker was just a little too tight. He felt the same way about his clothes. If he was lucky, the ground would swallow him up, before his mind took that chain of thought any further.

"I'm sure I wouldn't want to impose, my Lord."

"I *insist*." Well, that was the end of *that* discussion. "It is a cold night. Two people in one bed will make us warm."

"...oh!" Roses covered his mouth. He hadn't - his mind had gone - it really wasn't what he'd *thought* his King had meant. And he was hard-pressed to tell if he was disappointed or relieved by the realisation. "Ah. A smart and logical decision, my Highness."

"I agree," his King smirked. "Of course. Now," he gestured at his chest. "My buttons, Roses."

Swallowing his many, *many* thoughts Roses did as he was commanded, falling back into the role of servant to the King that he had played so well for his entire life. This was neutral, *safe* territory. In this role, he didn't need to worry about doing or saying the wrong thing. He could put aside his own desires to please his King.

And he *did* want to please his King.

"Now, Roses." His King hopped onto the edge of the bed, swinging his legs up and patting the worn, King-sized dip in the nearest side. Clearly he wanted the inner side of the enormous bed, then. That suited Roses fine; it meant he could sneak out in the night, if he wanted or needed to. "I'm tired."

"I'm sorry, My Majesty." Roses blushed, reaching for the candle. "I lost myself for a moment."

"You're right here." His King frowned, confused, and before that could go any further Roses hastily interrupted.

"As I am, My King. An astute observation." He blew out the candle, illuminating the room by nothing but the moonlight creeping in through the thin curtains. "Would you... do you wish to sleep against the wall?"

"This way you can watch me," yet again, his King had missed the implication of his words.

"I will, *beloved*..."

"What was that?" Roses froze. He *thought* he had been whispering... he hadn't realised what he said until his King sleepily rolled over, a confused expression on his face. What had he called him? Oh, god. He really *had* said beloved... hadn't he?

"I said..." he swallowed, knowing that his King was waiting for an answer. "I said 'I will, my Monarch.'"

"Hmm." Roses let out a sigh of relief. "Well, shut up. I'm trying to sleep."

King rolled over again, tucking his chin into the mountain of pillows and wriggling until his back was flush against Roses' chest. Feeling as though his heart was going to force its way out through his ribcage Roses held his breath, a giddy half-smile on his face. His King's chest rose and fell, pressed against him, until his breathing slowed to a steady in and out and he drifted off into an easy sleep. Roses lay there in silence, not daring to move or to breathe. He didn't want this moment to end; if he could just live in this, commit every second of this night to memory, it would be enough. Finally, when he was sure that his King was fast asleep he let go of the breath he'd been holding, and started to make himself more comfortable. It really *was* a good bed. Very comfortable. A little too soft... and his arm was going to sleep, pinned between himself and his King, but if he just... *there*.

Letting his arm fall gently around his King's waist, Roses' smile only grew and he closed his eyes. He would sleep well, tonight. He pressed a kiss to his King's shoulder, and nestled against his neck. Just for one night... he could have the world.