

TRAITOROUS SPIES  
DON'T DESERVE  
HAPPILY EVER AFTERS

# BETRAYING KORTH

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## CHAPTER 2





“We should just kill them now before they have the chance to align with a nation that is possibly even more powerful,” Curdy grouched from his position leaning against the damp wall in the cellar.

“Murder creates martyrs,” I mused, pacing the room around the three dozen co-conspirators. “And that’s something no rebellion can afford.”

“So you expect us to start a war without any bloodshed?” Curdy rubbed his thumbs against his temples. “That’s impossible. Isn’t the whole point of this to kill the royals?”


“Eventually, yes,” I agreed. “But it’s too precarious right now. If we tip our hand too soon, then we will lose all the progress we’ve made over the last few years.”

“Over the last several decades,” my father amended. At the sound of his voice, everyone straightened, ears perked and ready to listen to the leader of the rebellion. “The royal family has always been suspicious and won’t



let just anyone work in close proximity to them. It has taken the majority of us generations to secure higher positions within the palace. We cannot act until enough of us are in place that we cannot be stopped.”

Murmurs of agreement rolled around the dark wine cellar, lit only by a few guttering candles placed on low tables. The dim light coming from waist height created a ghostly effect on our faces, a fitting representation for the dark deeds we were plotting.




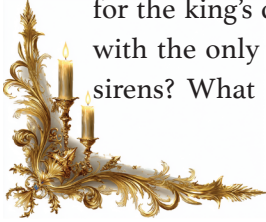
“There is another alternative to taking down the king first,” Declan rumbled. He had a gravelly voice that made the hair at the back of my neck stand on end. If I didn’t know the scarred, middle-aged man was on my side, I would’ve been terrified of him. Everyone listened raptly as he slowly turned his head to ensure he had everyone’s undivided attention.

“With the recent siren treaty in place, the seas have been reopened. Dahlia reported that Princess Odette will be journeying to marry her betrothed, Prince Korth of Haven Harbor.”

“Our people are in slavery, and you want us to think about some entitled royal’s wedding?” Curdy angrily blurted out.

“I agree,” Garrik piped up. “Who cares who she marries? Good riddance to her, I say.”

Declan studied Curdy and Garrik for several long moments, then his eyes roved over the other men present—Thad, Edric, Simon, Steele, and so many others assembled, all eager for our government’s downfall. “You wish for the king’s daughter to form a strong political alliance with the only nation whose navy was capable of taming sirens? What would happen to all the oppressed when







our government grows even stronger? You think that her marrying someone with connections to a powerful military will *help* our cause?"

Silence fell as we all digested this information. The ever-increasing political unrest would erupt soon unless the king joined with a stronger kingdom and quashed the rebellion in its infancy. How I'd longed for the simmering insurgence to boil into open revolt. Under new leadership, we would be able to free those forced into servitude and usher in a new era in which everyone could be seen as equal. We might even be able to elect our own officials. Surely, no monarch could ever be trusted. Power always corrupted. We didn't need another dictatorship; we needed checks and balances.

"Then what do you suggest?" I asked. "She leaves in less than a week's time."

"She may be back pretty soon once her fiancé realizes how annoying she is," Curdy put in, which earned a few laughs.

"That's assuming that her fiancé isn't equally odious," I returned. "We all know how all royalty are."

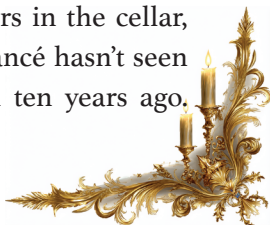
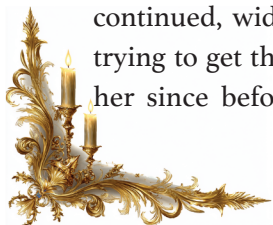
Declan leered evilly. "You're her handmaiden, though."

"So? I'm not like her."

"You're familiar with the princess's habits, mannerisms, and duties."

"I am." I had an inkling of what Declan was getting at, and the thought made my heart pound.

"You even have a slight resemblance to her," Declan continued, widening his eyes to the others in the cellar, trying to get them to understand. "Her fiancé hasn't seen her since before the siren plague began ten years ago."



And didn't you say that she has you compose her letters to him?"

"You want me to take her place," I stated baldly. "But what purpose would that serve? Why don't we just kill her on the journey and be done with it? We could claim that the sirens took her life en route."

Father cut in. "You said it yourself, Dahlia. *Murder creates martyrs*. We want to rally people to our cause, not set them against us."

"So, you want Dahlia to go marry some prince?" Curdy asked, a sudden biting edge to his voice.

Garrik shrugged. "Why not? We can take over the crew on the way to Haven Harbor, pass Dahlia off as the princess, and she can win the prince's allegiance. Then, instead of contending with an additional armada, we'll have them on our side."

Father nodded slowly. "It's a good plan."

I thought quickly. There were flaws in this plan, many of them. But if we were going to stage a coup, it would be best to make the attempt on a smaller scale in a distant land rather than trying to overtake the entire palace with far too few of us rebels against well-fed and trained soldiers. Then there was the prospect of an army that could help liberate us...all it would cost was my willingness to seduce a royal and ensure his loyalty.

Oddly, the notion of marrying a stranger whom I would undoubtedly despise didn't bother me in the slightest. My life's work was to overthrow the king in order to free my people from bondage. It had been so since the cradle. Lying, cheating, stealing...these were all a mere means to an end, and selfishly, I much preferred an undesirable marriage to dirtying my hands with some



of the more bloodthirsty plans that had been proposed in the past. For all my long list of crimes, I'd never killed anyone.

Curdy's glare was likely to burn a hole in the side of my head, and Father's jaw locked with tension. I remained silent, still assessing the viability of the plan.

"I could go instead," Trina offered, but her proposition was instantly met with a flood of disagreement.

"You're a cook. Dahlia's the princess's personal handmaiden. She's been training for something like this for her entire life," Steele objected.

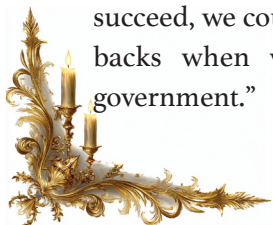
"Odette already trusts Dahlia; it would look suspicious if you tried to go," Thad added.



"Dahlia's prettier. We need the prince to like her if we want to have any chance of accessing his army, and he will know her penmanship if she's been writing to him. You can't even read."



"Silence!" Father hissed in his commanding voice. We all quieted down, anxiously looking around for any sign of a guard. Had we been overheard? For several tense minutes, we listened to the scurrying of rats in the corners of the cellar as we tried to ascertain if our treasonous group had been discovered. Mother, the dedicated lookout, poked her head into the room to give a slight shake of her head to signify that no one was coming.

In a low voice that was barely more than a whisper, I said, "I'll do it. Odette already intends for me to accompany her to Haven Harbor, and I don't think we'll get a better opportunity. It will take some planning, but if we succeed, we could have the might of Haven Harbor at our backs when we do finally move to overthrow our government."





“What about the princess after we stage the mutiny?”  
Curdy asked. “Are you going to kill her?”

“No.” A cruel smile lifted my lips. “But I’m very interested to see how she enjoys the same kind of life she has imposed on so many others.”

As we closed the meeting, we all moved in unison, first touching our earlobes, then lips, and finally our foreheads. “Hear all, speak none, remember always,” we chanted. “In shadows we thrive; with unity we rise.”











