

Song of Ebony Bonus Scene

By Deborah Grace White

Timeline: between Chapter Twenty-Nine and Epilogue

Bianca

“Perfect.” Ilse’s voice quivered a little as she spoke, and Bianca’s eyes flew to her sister’s in the looking glass.

“Thank you, Ilse,” she said quietly. Things had been so manic in the week since she’d returned to Sel, she hadn’t had much opportunity for private speech with her sister.

“I just did your hair,” said Ilse, shrugging. “It’s no big thing.”

Bianca shook her head, her eyes remaining on her sister’s face rather than straying to the beautiful crown of braids Ilse had made from her white hair. Ilse was admiring her own stunning reflection in the looking glass, adjusting her dark locks with deft fingers.

“I’m not talking about my hair,” Bianca said. “I’m talking about you standing by me though all of this. I know it must be...painful.”

Ilse bit her lip, her hand dropping from her tresses. “Of course I’ll always stand by you, Bee,” she said. “You’re my sister as well as my queen. I just wish...” She swallowed. “I wish I hadn’t been so blind before. I wish...” She gave a wry smile. “Well, I wish I’d listened to you when you tried to warn me about Mama.”

“It’s not your fault,” said Bianca. “You didn’t have the reasons I did to doubt her trustworthiness.”

“Yes I did,” Ilse contradicted quickly. “I had exactly the same reasons as you. The way she behaved toward you was right in front of me, even if I wasn’t its target.” She shook her head. “Don’t make excuses for me, Bee, it’ll just make me feel worse. The truth is I didn’t want to see it. I should have realized she never intended to hand over your crown—she didn’t even pretend to consider the question of whether you were already fit to rule when Father died. I should have protested then.”

“Well, if it comes to that, I’m much more culpable than you are,” Bianca told her frankly. “You can’t blame yourself for that.”

There was a sharp rap at the door. “Your Highnesses?”

“Yes, we’re coming!” Ilse called. She smiled at Bianca in the mirror. “It’s strange to think we’ll never hear that phrase again. You’re going to be Your Majesty in a few hours.”

“That is strange,” Bianca agreed, a little shudder running over her. She’d fought hard for her crown, and she was glad to have won it. But it was still all a little overwhelming.

“I’m just so happy you’re alive!” Ilse said, throwing her arms impulsively around Bianca from behind. “When they brought word that you’d fallen to your death...” She trailed off with a shudder of her own. “I’ve never felt so alone in my life.”

“I’m not going anywhere,” Bianca assured her, squeezing Ilse’s arms where they were tight around her shoulders.

Ilse drew back, her expression in the mirror unimpressed. “Really? Because I’m sure I heard you promising your prince that you’d travel back to his kingdom with him only yesterday.”

Bianca laughed. “You know what I mean. That’s just going to be a short trip. Farrin is going to live here, with us.”

“He is quite dreamy,” Ilse commented. “You certainly could have done worse for yourself. Especially if he really is a prince.”

“Of course he’s a prince!” Bianca gave her sister’s sleeve a playful pinch as she rose. “Do you really think he would lie?”

Ilse shrugged. “I don’t know. Only if he thought he could get away with it.”

Bianca sighed. It wasn’t the first time she’d seen Marisol’s suspicious nature coming out in Ilse’s attitude. She just hoped that she and others close to Ilse—which would now include Farrin, she realized with a thrill—would be able to change her perspective over years of keeping their promises and acting with integrity.

The two sisters made their way to the platform together, a veritable horde of guards and servants falling in behind them. When they reached the doorway, Ilse slipped in, escorted to her seat by one of Bianca’s higher ranking advisors.

A fanfare sounded, and Bianca stepped through the doorway herself. In spite of the solemnity of the moment, she couldn’t help a gasp of delight. The platform had been transformed, flowers adorning every surface and lush vines draped along the railing. The afternoon sunshine streamed down through the hole Bianca had unintentionally made in the canopy above, giving the whole scene an orange tint that reminded her of fire.

Selvana’s new beginning had certainly been birthed in fire, metaphorically speaking, and Bianca knew that she for one was all the stronger for it.

The platform was packed with people, the half closest to the dais seated in stately rows, and the back half jostling for position as they stood behind gilded ropes. Bianca moved down the aisle that had been left through the masses, her head held high.

Her thoughts flew suddenly to her father, and she wished he could be there to share this triumph, and to support her rule. A moment later she realized the folly of that thought—impossible for her father to be present at her coronation. She was only taking the crown because he’d left it behind and gone on where he couldn’t be called back, for either advice or celebration.

For a moment emotion threatened to overwhelm her as she remembered the night he’d been taken so suddenly from them. Things would have been so different if he’d survived that illness.

But she refused to let grief weigh her down at this triumphant moment. She was too young to be a monarch, and she knew it. But she was going to do her very best—and she would have more experienced advisors to help her.

She caught sight of Lurgl, seated with a small retinue of elves in a place of honor near the dais. That was one count in her favor, she reflected. Not only had she helped to expose the existence

of the reclusive elves, but she'd actually befriended their leader. That was a feat no other monarch in Selvana's history could claim to have achieved.

Her eyes flew to the tall figure seated on the far side of the aisle from the elves.

Farrin.

Her heart swelled as she remembered that she would never be alone in her rule. She would have Farrin by her side. He would help her, advise her, support her, listen to her frustrations, and keep her anchored. He would make her feel loved when she lost favor with others, and when the responsibilities of her crown threatened to crush her, he would remind her that someone was looking after her while she looked after the kingdom.

He might not be familiar with Selvanan ways, but he was no stranger to the pressures of royal life. He would have many helpful insights to offer.

She felt a fleeting stab of regret that she hadn't yielded to his entreaties to fall in with the steward's suggestion that the coronation be combined with a wedding. But she knew she'd made the right decision in staying strong. She would love nothing better than to be marrying Farrin that day, but she was determined not to steal him away from his family and his kingdom like that.

Just as soon as the ship she'd commissioned was finished, they would go to Medulle, and they would acquire his parents' blessing. Nerves flashed through her. What if they said no? Farrin seemed to think an alliance with a reigning monarch was unbeatable, but Bianca wasn't so sure. Selvana must seem such a weak and restricted kingdom compared to those on Providore's mainland. Would they think her kingdom wasn't powerful enough to claim their son?

Farrin didn't seem concerned. He'd reminded her just the evening before that, as far as he was aware, Selvana was the only kingdom which could claim a singer in the royal house. Plus they had plenty of magic to share. If Medulle agreed to send singers to help work through the magic choking the ground, she was more than willing to let Farrin's parents choose how some of that magic was to be shaped, and to benefit from its release.

Farrin had also reminded her, she thought ruefully, that even if his parents said no, it didn't have to stop their plans. "I've run away once, I can do it again if need be," he'd said cheekily. Then he'd given her that reassuring smile that always made her sure that everything would work out. "But I don't think it will come to that."

She could see that confidence reflected in his eyes as he watched her now, his face lit with pride. She returned his smile, eager for the day when it would be his turn to be crowned as one of Selvana's monarchs.

All of this passed through her mind in the minute it took her to approach the dais. And all of it passed out of her mind just as quickly when she ascended to the throne which had been placed there.

Her father's throne.

Her throne.

The words of the ceremony were brief and to the point, and important as the moment was, Bianca barely heard them. She knew every line of the speech—she'd read it many times in the preceding days. Her mind was on the enormity of the task ahead, and the people who would now look to her. They deserved the best, and she intended to lead them into a brighter future than the past that had brought them to a place of such fear and danger.

As she turned to face her people, her heart swelled with hope for the future. The best was surely yet to come.