

# Checkmate

By Trisha Mariel Quejada

Delicate waves of a duster brushed past a long row of books and made for the illusion of labor, all the while I read the spines, wondering what I would spirit back to my room next.

"Cecily, it's all a mess," bemoaned a voice from behind, interrupting my thoughts. "If this keeps up, exports will dry up for certain." "It can't possibly be that bad milady," I assured, going back to my "work." I was but a simple serving girl. That which set me apart however, was my proximity to her Ladyship Rozalind. The gullible woman had loose lips and often would gripe to literally anyone within earshot, her complaining being the one thing in all the realm that crossed class distinction. A bit of strategic placement made sure that that person was always me.

I became akin to a royal advisor, to whom even the true aides of the duchy would sometimes bend their will. To everyone save the Ladyship herself, it became something of a private shame: no one wanted to admit that a simple serving girl was whispering in the Duchess's ear. The oblivious woman continued to lament, it becoming clear it was time for me to step in and fix whatever mess she'd kicked up now. "If you would let me see the ledger, milady." I said, going to her side. "Ceci darling, I don't know where I went wrong!" She handed me her records with a ring-laden hand, a torrent of red on the pages.

Apparently, a territory of hers had halted crop production, and at a crucial selling period to boot. A quick look at the atlas, and the matter became clear. "Your Ladyship, where you aware that governor Arundell reformed the region's economic function? Couriers have been relaying as such for months now." Lady Rozalind looked to me, her pristine face the very picture of puzzlement, "What is that to mean for farming? The matters of coin and soil are very different." She said this as only logical.

"The farmers that work the soil deal in matters of coin, milady. Lord Arundell's emphasis on export produces many boons to be certain, but it leaves little for the peasantry to eat." "Ah!" She exclaims, having been led to a conclusion. "Then it shall be but a simple matter of ordering for the overturn of Arundell's decree. Oh, I am the very picture of the ideal governess!" "But of course, your Ladyship."

As I exited the room, a hidden book tucked under my arm, a waiting royal advisor met my eyes for just a second before pretending to mind his own business. Silently congratulating myself, it was clear that my renown was growing; come next summer, governors would be throwing themselves at my feet.

As her Ladyship continued to foolishly confide in me, my reach would continue to grow. All that was left for me to do was bide my time. Out of public eye and behind the operations of the realm, I'd enjoy all advantages of laymen and noble life.

All I had to do was wait.