

Julie

YA NOVEL: QUEEN OF SPADES BY VALLEY SHALIA

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Summary: Queen Malise Litonia of Auraun was abducted—and her daughter, the princess Leena, is determined to find her. She holds the only clue to the queen’s whereabouts and, with help from a dark elf at The Underbelly, Leena learns of a way to follow her mother. Leaving her life of leisure behind and putting herself at risk of her half-brother’s evil powers, she stows away aboard a ship. They travel across the Feanix Sea to Vagari Isle, where she discovers the vessel the elf suggested, The Maverick Maiden.

When mother and daughter reunite, Leena learns of Malise's past and true nature, and questions whether or not she should have come. Unable to return home, she joins in Malise's dangerous quest, hones her weapons skills, and meets the deadly yet handsome Draeden Hunt, who is charged with keeping her alive—if he can.

1st sentence. Mention her name.

would they?

Leena's

The soft pads of her shoes resounded against the stones of the dungeon level. On one side lay the prison, sealed by a thick, steel door, the criminals a subdued clamor behind it. To the other ^{were} ~~was~~ the quarters reserved for the warden. Years ago, however, the warden had been given a cottage on the palace grounds. Instead, in the isolated stone room, now lived her half-brother, Averyn.

verb choice
relocated to moved to upgraded to

For what better warden was there than a living column of flame?

best words but doesn't work here

Leena shivered. The air was cold and stale. She sensed the sins and violence ~~and ilk~~ of the convicts swirling behind the steel door, aching to be released. That door. It had not been erected to keep the prisoners in.

verb choice
swirling?
verb choice
constructed?
installed?

It had been forged to keep the fire out.

legend has it that / as the story goes...

It was said that when Averyn was an infant, simply holding him had blistered Malise’s arms. All babies’ tempers turn in an instant, and when his did, she burned. How can a mother

choose between comforting her child or remaining painless? Allegedly, when Prince Jarron

III—now, king—discovered the marks on Malise’s arms, he not only ordered the infirmary nurses to divine ways to care for the babe and the scholars to ascertain a cure, but he ^{also} gifted Malise two copper cuffs for her wrists. The queen could finally, comfortably hold her son.

parallel construction not only... but also...

Ask.

JULIE

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STEWIE

Leena rapped lightly on Averyn's door, icicles of fear sinking into her stomach. A long moment passed. He didn't answer.

verb che.
jobbing?

She rapped harder.

Wait!
He's NOT
imprisoned?

The door swung inward, booming as it smacked into the stone wall. Averyn, slick black hair ruffled from sleep, shirt haphazardly tucked into his breeches, glowered at her. His skin was golden-brown like their mothers, and it glowed in the torchlight.

"What?"

"Have—have you heard?" Leena blurted.

"Heard what?" he seethed.

verb che.

The icicles sank deeper, tickling her rib cage. Oh, by the Gods, she was right. Of course, no one had told him. No one ever thought of him down here, caged like a drake. She felt something different stab into her gut now, guilt...and pity.

2nd sink

And a twinge of fear at being the one to tell him.

"Averyn, Mother's been taken. She's gone."

Choose one.

For once, the fury roaring behind his eyes extinguished. "What?"

An urge to take his hand overcame her, but common sense reigned; his skin could boil hers at his whim.

"She's missing. Someone took her. Last night. Out of her study."

"When?"

"Las-last night."

His eyes danced menacingly, the wrath reigniting. "And no one came to tell me?"

Find synonym for "take"
robbed?
stole?
kidnapped?

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The queen's favorite. Her prized son, the only one of her children to reflect her Vagari heritage because of his brown-skinned father. The only other person permitted behind that study door. And he had been ignored.

He wouldn't be any longer.

Suddenly, it was happening. A sweaty sheen dewed the stone walls. Leena's brow dampened, as did her nightgown. Red clouded at the corners of her vision as she remembered a time from long ago. A time of stuffed bears and pleading screams.

"Averyn—please," she begged, air thick in her throat.

He cackled. "They shut me down here in this dank hellhole, where only my mother cares to visit, and they can't even deign to tell me she's been kidnapped?"

Waves of heat pulsated off him. His clothes smoked.

"Averyn—" Heat coated her throat, ~~coated her throat~~. She could barely breathe. The red creeped in further, further. She could hardly see him.

"I should have been the first one notified! They owe me that at least!"

She might suffocate. "Brother—"

"I'm the only one she loves!" he thundered. "And they couldn't deign to tell me?!"

He shrieked like a gutted boar, wrenching away from Leena. Both hands flew up in front of him. Tongues of orange and blue flames erupted from his fingertips and splashed across the stones, scorching, blackening.

Burning.

Leena dove past the doorway into the corner, coughing, searching for a fresh pocket of air. The stench of charring cloth seared her nose. She curled into her self, shaking violently. Her vision swirled in shades of red.

or other noun?
Have her make gestures wave away smoke clutch throat

"deign to tell me" x 2

Ambiguous

distance
Vents
choir
Would he
or shrill?
or yell?
or s+u?

And he howled. And he howled.

Slowly, the temperature cooled. The air hissed in her ears and thinned, becoming stale and safe once more. She raised her head from her arms, running fingers through her hair to check for any singed strands. Her vision spotted, cleared.

No more heat. No more cries. Only muffled sobbing.

Leena crawled to the threshold, peering in.

Averyn ^{lay} ~~laid~~ crumpled on the floor, arms wrapped around his head. His shirt was blackened to the elbows and ash fell in gentle flakes around him, kissing his skin. Soft cries bounced off the stone walls, impossible to cloak.

Wordless, Leena scooted up next to him, daring to place a hand on his shoulder.

"I'm sorry," she whispered. "I know you love her. I understand how you're feeling. I feel the same."

He glared sharply at her through the crack between his elbow and knee. "Don't compare our feelings. You don't know Mother like I do."

She hated his unapologetic truths and ignored this one. "They'll find her, Averyn."

He swiped his forearm across his eyes and sat up. "They know nothing of blood and danger, those untested palace guards. They know she is gone and nothing more." He stood. "Anyone able to capture her must be truly skilled. I'm going after her myself."

Leena hopped up. "You can't! It's dangerous. You don't know who took her—or where."

He glared at her and stalked to his steel armoire, throwing it open. "I think I can handle myself."

better verb
wrapped?
verb when
further fell
What happened
to her skin?

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Leena, accustomed to his obstinance, switched tactics. "If you go, other people will find out about you—people outside of Litonia. You'll be crucified."

"I don't care."

"You're not supposed to have Söl. People will think you're an abomination."

"And you don't?"

Leena flinched, as if he had slapped her. Those plain truths, attacking her from all sides. "You can't control your Söl, Averyn."

She imagined ^{his} face softened a fraction.

Quietly, she continued, "Don't be so rash. Have faith in the Royal Guard. At least for now."

"I have faith in no one who has no faith in me." Jaw set, he said, "Tell the king I will be seeking his council this evening."

Leena knew their conversation—interaction, really—was over. For now, she had adverted another royal crisis. Averyn would be staying and his Söl contained.

She raised her eyes to his, catching the scorched wall in the corner of her vision. His shirt continued to disintegrate around his wrists and his crystal pink eyes—eyes that all Söl Bearers shared—were swollen. She nodded. "As you wish."

The second she stepped out of the room, the door slammed.

She turned to head back to her chambers, but something glinted seductively on the wall across from her. Had that been there before?

Up close, she recognized the object for what it was: a knife, wedged halfway into the mortar between stones. It pierced a playing card, pinning it to the wall.

What is she doing?
for this whole scene?
standing in where?
covering in forest?

?
EXPLAIN

Why?

Lead with this.

Does she need to brace herself for long journey?
Just going upstairs within building?

Where is it in relation to prison/dungeon entrance?

JULIE

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She grasped the hilt and yanked. It didn't budge, as though someone had sunk it into the mortar when it was still soft. She tried again, throwing her shoulder and back into the effort, to no avail.

Frustrated, Leena flexed her hands, easing the cramps. A lone blade in the wall, its hilt bloodied, was suspicious. Would be considered a threat to Averyn's life.

She doubted a soul would care.

Shhhhrk! Leena tore the card from the dagger, pulling it downward in a rough slit.

The card was black with white X's covering it. She flipped it to the face side. A queen of spades. She turned her wrist, viewing both sides again as if something would change. That's it? This was the possible threat? Just a queen of spades?

She almost flicked it to the floor, but a splatter of red on the card caught her eye. She peered closer. The queen was holding a bloodied sword and the copper crown about her brow was blood-stained as well. Curious, for a card in the diplomatic kingdom of Auraun. And there, at the bottom, in minuscule handwriting, was a message:

Come find me.

This note was obviously meant for Averyn. Stabbed into the wall across from his room. Because this was their mother's handwriting.

Maybe the queen hadn't been abducted after all.

Hmm. I'm intrigued.

SET THE SCENE: DESCRIBE THE DUNGEON AND ACCESS TO IT.

HOW FAR DOES LEENA HAVE TO WALK/RIDE OVER GRASS, THE WOODS, CITY STREETS?

WEATHER - WEARING CLOAK? NEEDS THROWING OFF? STRAIGHTENS HAIR FROM WIND?

WHY DOES LEENA TAKE IT UPON HERSELF TO TELL AVERYN ABOUT MOTHER'S "ABDUCTION"?

HOW OFTEN DOES SHE VISIT HIM?

WAS SWORD THERE BEFORE?

GUARDS?

Ed

Summary: Queen Malise Litoria of Auraun was abducted—and her daughter, the princess Leena, is determined to find her. She holds the only clue to the queen's whereabouts and, with help from a dark elf at The Underbelly, Leena learns of a way to follow her mother. Leaving her life of leisure behind and putting herself at risk of her half-brother's evil powers, she stows away aboard a ship. They travel across the Feanix Sea to Vagari Isle, where she discovers the vessel the elf suggested, The Maverick Maiden.

When mother and daughter reunite, Leena learns of Malise's past and true nature, and questions whether or not she should have come. Unable to return home, she joins in Malise's dangerous quest, hones her weapons skills, and meets the deadly yet handsome Draeden Hunt, who is charged with keeping her alive—if he can.

- this is from Leena's point of view: indicate her thoughts, bring us into her head.
- I like this opening to novel!

The soft pads of her shoes resounded against the stones of the dungeon level. On one side lay the prison, sealed by a thick, steel door, the criminals a subdued clamor behind it. To the other was the quarters reserved for the warden. Years ago, however, the warden had been given a cottage on the palace grounds. Instead, in the isolated stone room, now lived her half-brother, Averyn.

For what better warden was there than a living column of flame?

Leena shivered. The air was cold and stale. She sensed the sins and violence and the convicts swirling behind the steel door, aching to be released. That door. It had not been erected to keep the prisoners in.

It had been forged to keep the fire out.

Leena had heard...

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copper is not a good choice because it conducts heat well

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She rapped harder.

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"What?"

"Have—have you heard?" Leena blurted.

"Heard what?" he seethed.

The icicles sank deeper, tickling her rib cage. Oh, by the Gods, she was right. Of course, no one had told him. No one ever thought of him down here, caged like a drake. She felt something different stab into her gut now; guilt...and pity.

And a twinge of fear at being the one to tell him.

"Averyn, Mother's been taken. She's gone."

For once, the fury roaring behind his eyes extinguished. "What?"

An urge to take his hand overcame her, but common sense reigned; his skin could boil hers at his whim.

"She's missing. Someone took her. Last night. Out of her study."

"When?"

"Last last night."

space, em-dash, space

His eyes danced menacingly, the wrath reigniting. "And no one came to tell me?"

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He was, after all,

The queen's favorite. Her prized son, the only one of her children to reflect her Vagari heritage ^{despite?} because of his brown-skinned father. The only other person permitted behind that study door. And he had been ignored. *the Queen's*

He wouldn't be any longer.

Suddenly, it was happening. ^{begin} A sweaty sheen dewed the stone walls. Leena's brow dampened, as did her nightgown. Red clouded at the corners of her vision as she remembered a time from long ago. ^{Her} A time of stuffed bears and pleading screams.

"Averyn—please," she begged, air thick in her throat.

He cackled. "They shut me down here in this dank hellhole, where only my mother cares to visit, and they can't even deign to tell me she's been kidnapped?" *don't*

Waves of heat pulsed off him. His clothes smoked.

"Averyn—" Heat coated her throat, coated her throat. She could barely breathe. The red crept in further, further. She could hardly see him. *is she inside or outside the room?*

"I should have been the first one notified! They owe me that at least!"

I
She might suffocate. "Brother—"

"I'm the only one she loves!" he thundered. "And they couldn't deign to tell me?!" *didn't*

He shrieked like a gutted boar, wrenching [?] [away from] Leena. Both hands flew up in front of him. Tongues of orange and blue flames erupted from his fingertips and splashed across the stones, scorching, blackening.

Burning.

Leena dove past the doorway into the corner, coughing, searching for a fresh pocket of air. The stench of charring cloth seared her nose. She curled into her self, shaking violently. Her vision swirled in shades of red.

And he howled. And he howled.

Slowly, the temperature cooled. The air hissed in her ears and thinned, becoming stale and safe once more. She raised her head from her arms, running fingers through her hair to check for any singed strands. Her vision spotted, cleared. *as she had*

No more heat. No more cries. Only muffled sobbing.

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Averyn laid crumpled on the floor, arms wrapped around his head. His shirt was blackened to the elbows and ash fell in gentle flakes around him, kissing his skin. Soft cries bounced off the stone walls, impossible to cloak.

Wordless, Leena *crawled?* scooted up next to him, daring to place a hand on his shoulder.

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Leena hopped up. "You can't! It's dangerous. You don't know who took her—or where."

He glared at her and stalked to his steel armoire, throwing it open. "I think I can handle myself."

obstinacy?

why is she trying to stop him?

Leena, accustomed to his obstinance, switched tactics. "If you go, other people will find out about you—people outside of Litonia. You'll be crucified."

"I don't care."

?

"You're not supposed to have Söl. People will think you're an abomination."

"And you don't?"

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"You can't control your Söl, Averyn."

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did it, or didn't it? or as a question

Quietly, she continued, "Don't be so rash. Have faith in the Royal Guard. At least for now."

"I have faith in no one who has no faith in me." Jaw set, he said, "Tell the king I will be seeking his ^{council?} council this evening."

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would remain

She raised her eyes to his, catching the scorched wall in the corner of her vision. His shirt continued to disintegrate around his wrists and his [crystal pink] eyes—eyes that all Söl Bearers shared—were swollen. She nodded. "As you wish."

mention earlier?

The second she stepped out of the room, the door slammed.

so, she was inside?

She turned to head back to her chambers, but something glinted seductively on the wall across from her. Had that been there before?

Up close, she recognized the object for what it was: a knife, wedged halfway into the mortar between stones. It pierced a playing card, pinning it to the wall.

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She grasped the hilt and yanked. It didn't budge, as though someone had sunk it into the mortar when it was still soft. She tried again, throwing her shoulder and back into the effort, to no avail.

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Maybe the ^{*Q*}queen hadn't been abducted after all.

nice ending!

Jenn's Feedback

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Commented [RJL1]: echoed

Commented [RJL2]: The way this is written, the steel door is aching to be released.

Commented [RJL3]: Copper conducts heat so I'm not sure copper would protect her from the baby's temperature. Maybe titanium instead? Or make up a fictional metal.

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"What?"

"Have—have you heard?" Leena ~~asked~~ blurted.

"Heard what?" he ~~asked through clenched teeth~~ seethed.

The icicles sank deeper, tickling her rib cage. Oh, by the Gods, she was right. ~~Of course~~ No one had told him. No one ever thought of him down here, caged like a drake. ~~She felt~~ Something different stab into her gut now, guilt...and pity.

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"I should have been the first one notified! [They] owe me that at least!"

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Commented [RJL4]: Why would his father cause the child to reflect the mother's heritage?

Commented [RJL5]: So Averyn is allowed to leave the dungeon level?

Commented [RJL6]: Who is thinking this? The narrator? You start in Leena's head. Stay there.

Commented [RJL7]: Why doesn't she run?

Commented [RJL8]: Who is They?

Commented [RJL9]: Stick with asked and said. If you want hm to thinder then that should be show in his dialogue or his body language.

Commented [RJL10]: Into his room, or out of his room?

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Commented [RJL11]: Why?

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She almost flicked it to the floor, but a splatter of red on the card caught her eye. She peered closer. The queen was holding a bloodied sword and the copper crown about her brow was blood-stained as well. Curious, for a card in the diplomatic kingdom of Auraun. And there, at the bottom, in minuscule handwriting, was a message:

Come find me.

This note was obviously meant for Averyn. Stabbed into the wall across from his room. Because this was their mother's handwriting.

Maybe ~~her mother~~ ~~the queen~~ hadn't been abducted after all.

Nice!

YA NOVEL: QUEEN OF SPADES BY VALLEY SHAIJA

Summary: Queen Malise Litoria of Auralon was abducted—and her daughter, the princess Leena, is determined to find her. She holds the only clue to the queen's whereabouts and, with help from a dark elf at The Underbelly, Leena learns of a way to follow her mother. Leaving her life of leisure behind and putting herself at risk of her half-brother's evil powers, she stows away aboard a ship. They travel across the Fenix Sea to Vagari Isle, where she discovers the vessel the elf suggested, The Maverick Maiden.

When mother and daughter reunite, Leena learns of Malise's past and true nature, and questions whether or not she should have come. Unable to return home, she joins in Malise's dangerous quest, hones her weapons skills, and meets the deadly yet handsome Draeden Hunt, who is charged with keeping her alive—if he can.

Leena's

The soft pads of her shoes resounded against the stones of the dungeon level. On one side lay the prison, sealed by a thick, steel door, the criminals a subdued clamor behind it. To the other was were the quarters originally reserved for the warden. Years ago, however, the warden had been given a cottage on the palace grounds. Instead, in the isolated stone room, now lived her half-brother, Averyn.

Commented [SD1]: Good!

Commented [SD2]: 1 space between sentences

For what better warden was there than a living column of flame?

Commented [SD3]: Kind of threw me off—the warden is living outside...

Leena shivered. The air was cold and stale. She sensed the sins and violence and ilk of the convicts swirling behind the steel door, aching to be released. That door. It had not been erected to keep the prisoners in.

It had been forged to keep the fire out.

It was said that when Averyn was an infant, simply holding him had blistered Malise's arms. All babies' tempers turn in an instant, and when his did, she burned. How can a mother choose between comforting her child or remaining painless? Allegedly, when Prince Jarron III—now, king—discovered the marks on Malise's arms, he not only ordered the infirmary nurses to divine ways to care for the babe and the scholars to ascertain a cure, but he gifted Malise two copper cuffs for her wrists. The queen could finally, comfortably hold her son.

YA NOVEL: QUEEN OF SPADES BY VALLEY SHALIA

Leena rapped lightly on Averyn's door, icicles of fear sinking into her stomach. A long moment passed. He didn't answer.

She rapped harder.

The door swung inward, booming as it smacked into the stone wall. Averyn, slick black hair ruffled from sleep, shirt haphazardly tucked into his breeches, glowered at her. His skin was golden-brown like their mother's, and it glowed in the torchlight.

"What?"

"Have—have you heard?" Leena blurted.

"Heard what?" he seethed.

The icicles sank deeper, tickling her rib cage. Oh, by the Gods, she was right. Of *course* no one had told him. No one ever thought of him down here, caged like a drake. She felt something different stab into her gut now, guilt... and pity.

And a twinge of fear at being the one to tell him.

"Averyn, Mother's been taken. She's gone."

For once, the fury roaring behind his eyes extinguished. "What?"

An urge to take his hand overcame her, but common sense reigned; his skin could boil hers at his whim.

"She's missing. Someone took her. Last night. Out of her study."

"When?"

"Las-last night."

His eyes danced menacingly, the wrath reigniting. "And no one came to tell me?"

> Not clear how he's being kept (if he can open the door, why can't he leave?)

YA NOVEL: QUEEN OF SPADES BY VALLEY SHAIIA

The queen's favorite. Her prized son, the only one of her children to reflect her Vagari heritage because of his brown-skinned father. The only other person permitted behind that study door. And he had been ignored.

clarify

Commented [SD4]: ?

He wouldn't be any longer.

Suddenly, it was happening. A sweaty sheen dewed the stone walls. Leena's brow dampened, as did her nightgown. Red clouded at the corners of her vision as she remembered a time from long ago. A time of stuffed bears and pleading screams.

"Averyn—please," she begged, air thick in her throat.

He cackled. "They shut me down here in this dank hellhole, where only my mother cares to visit, and they can't even deign to tell me she's been kidnapped?"

Waves of heat pulsated off him. His clothes smoked.

"Averyn—" Heat coated her throat, coated her throat. She could barely breathe. The red crept in further, ~~further~~. She could hardly see him.

"I should have been the first one notified! They owe me that at least!"

She might suffocate. "Brother—"

"I'm the only one she loves!" he thundered. "And they couldn't deign to tell me?!"

He shrieked like a gutted boar, wrenching away from Leena. Both hands flew up in front of him. Tongues of orange and blue flames erupted from his fingertips and splashed across the stones, scorching, blackening.

Burning.

Leena dove past the doorway into the corner, coughing, searching for a fresh pocket of air. The stench of charring cloth seared her nose. She curled into her-self, shaking violently. Her vision swirled in shades of red.

YA NOVEL: QUEEN OF SPADES BY VALLEY SHAIA

And he howled. ~~And he howled!~~

Commented [SD5]: Too much repeating.

Slowly, the temperature cooled. The air hissed in her ears and thinned, becoming stale and safe once more. She raised her head from her arms, running fingers through her hair to check for any singed strands. Her vision spotted, cleared.

No more heat. No more cries. (Only muffled sobbing.) → new line

Leena crawled to the threshold, peering in.

Averyn ~~laid~~ lay crumpled on the floor, arms wrapped around his head. His shirt was blackened to the elbows and ash fell in gentle flakes around him, kissing his skin. Soft cries bounced off the stone walls, impossible to cloak.

Wordless, Leena scooted up next to him, daring to place a hand on his shoulder.

"I'm sorry," she whispered. "I know you love her. I understand how you're feeling. I feel the same."

He glared sharply at her through the crack between his elbow and knee. "Don't compare our feelings. You don't know Mother like I do."

She hated his unapologetic truths and ignored this one. "They'll find her, Averyn."

He swiped his forearm across his eyes and sat up. "They know nothing of blood and danger, those untested palace guards. They know she is gone and nothing more." He stood. "Anyone able to capture her must be truly skilled. I'm going after her myself." →

Leena hopped up. "You can't! It's dangerous. You don't know who took her—or where."

He glared at her and stalked to his steel armoire, throwing it open. "I think I can handle myself."

YA NOVEL: QUEEN OF SPADES BY VALLEY SHALIA

Leena, accustomed to his obstinance, switched tactics. "If you go, other people will find out about you—people outside of Litonia. You'll be crucified."

"I don't care."

"You're not supposed to have Söl. People will think you're an abomination."

"And you don't?"

Leena flinched, as if he had slapped her. Those plain truths, attacking her from all sides. "You can't control your Söl, Averyn."

She imagined his face softened a fraction.

Quietly, she continued, "Don't be so rash. Have faith in the Royal Guard. At least for now."

"I have faith in no one who has no faith in me." Jaw set, he said, "Tell the King I will be seeking his council this evening."

Leena knew their conversation—interaction, really—was over. For now, she had averted another royal crisis. Averyn would be staying and his Söl contained.

Commented: [SD6]: To this point I don't understand how they keep him contained.

She raised her eyes to his, catching the scorched wall in the corner of her vision. His shirt continued to disintegrate around his wrists and his crystal pink eyes—eyes that all Söl Bearers shared—were swollen. She nodded. "As you wish."

move earlier

The second she stepped out of the room, the door slammed.

She turned to head back to her chambers, but something glinted seductively on the wall across from her. Had that been there before?

Up close, she recognized the object for what it was: a knife, wedged halfway into the mortar between stones. It pierced a playing card, pinning it to the wall.

YA NOVEL: QUEEN OF SPADES BY VALLEY SHAIJA

She grasped the hilt and yanked. It didn't budge, as though someone had sunk it into the mortar when it was still soft. She tried again, throwing her shoulder and back into the effort, to no avail.

Frustrated, Leena flexed her hands, easing the cramps. A lone blade in the wall, its hilt bloodied, was suspicious. Would be considered a threat to Averyn's life.

should state that
right away

She doubted a soul would care.

Shhhhrk! Leena tore the card from the dagger, pulling it downward in a rough slit.

The card was black with white X's covering it. She flipped it to the face side. A queen of spades. She turned her wrist, viewing both sides again as if something would change. That's it? This was the possible threat? Just a queen of spades?

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This note was obviously meant for Averyn. Stabbed into the wall across from his room. Because this was their mother's handwriting.

Maybe the queen hadn't been abducted after all.

I like this: I think it's a good start. I think it's been dramatic in a few places, but that's easy to fix. I'm definitely intrigued.

I can't understand how he's kept there. Is it of his own free will? He could open the door himself. Maybe a better description of the setup is needed.

YA NOVEL: QUEEN OF SPADES BY VALLEY SHAIA

It also might be helpful to understand a bit more why Leena is so scared of her brother.

Has he hurt her before?

Overall, though, I enjoyed it!

YA NOVEL: QUEEN OF SPADES BY VALLEY SHAIJA

Valley, you're trying to create a fantasy novel with several levels of meaning. First, there's the setting. Try to give an establishing shot of where the action is taking place. After reading the section, I'm still confused by the "where" we are. A dungeon? A study? I don't know. There's a mention of a thick door. There's a mention of a column of fire. I'm having a difficult time imagining the scene. Where is the isolated stone room? The dungeon? The cottage? Two: Why is Avern in this room? Why has he not been informed? Did he do something to have the authorities angry with him? You have to support his current situation to make it sound plausible. Three: that goal mentioned in the last few lines of the piece. That's a good hook. But, can Avern simply leave this room? Has he been arrested or something? Does he need to escape?

You can see that there are many loose ends here. These problems can be fixed, but you must see this story from the reader's point of view and help the reader to see the story as clearly as you do.

Good luck.

Dave

Summary: Queen Malise Litonia of Auraun was abducted--and her daughter, the princess Leena, is determined to find her. She holds the only clue to the queen's whereabouts and, with help from a dark elf at The Underbelly, Leena learns of a way to follow her mother. Leaving her life of leisure behind and putting herself at risk of her half-brother's evil powers, she stows away aboard a ship. They travel across the Feanix Sea to Vagari Isle, where she discovers the vessel the elf suggested, The Maverick Maiden.

When mother and daughter reunite, Leena learns of Malise's past and true nature, and questions whether or not she should have come. Unable to return home, she joins in Malise's dangerous quest, hones her weapons skills, and meets the deadly yet handsome Draeden Hunt, who is charged with keeping her alive--if he can.

The soft pads of her shoes **resounded** (*odd verb here. Soft pad of shoes certainly won't resound of anything. More like muffled or inaudible*) against the stones of the dungeon level. **On one side lay the prison, sealed by a thick, steel door, the criminals a subdued clamor behind it. To the other was the quarters reserved for the warden.** (*impossible to understand this sentence. On one side of what? Hear a subdued clamor behind a thick steel door?*) Years ago, however, the warden had been given a cottage on the palace grounds. (*Where did the warden live before the move?*) Instead, in the isolated stone room, now lived her half-brother, Averyn. (*These two sentences don't follow logically.*)

YA NOVEL: QUEEN OF SPADES BY VALLEY SHAIYA

For what better warden was there than a living column of flame? (*Where did the flame come from?*)

Leena shivered. (*Where was she? Why?*) The air was cold and stale. She sensed the sins and violence and ilk(?) of the convicts swirling behind the steel door, aching to be released. That door. It had not been erected to keep the prisoners in.

It had been forged to keep the fire out. (*Please fill the reader in on the fire.*)

It was said that when Averyn was an infant, simply holding him had blistered Malise's arms. All babies' tempers turn in an instant, and when his did, she burned. How can a mother choose between comforting her child or (*and?*) remaining painless? Allegedly, when Prince Jarron III—now, king—discovered the marks on Malise's arms, he not only ordered the infirmary nurses to divine ways to care for the babe and the scholars to ascertain a cure, but he gifted Malise two copper cuffs for her wrists. The queen could finally, comfortably hold her son. (*Copper is used for the bottom of pots and pans because of their heat conducting properties.*)

Leena rapped lightly on Averyn's door, icicles of fear sinking into her stomach. A long moment passed. He didn't answer.

She rapped harder.

The door swung (*to the what? Where are we?*) inward, booming as it smacked (*slammed?*) into the stone wall. Averyn, slick black hair ruffled from sleep, (*slick compared to ruffled don't make sense*) shirt haphazardly tucked into his breeches, glowered at her. His skin was golden-brown like their *mother('s)*, and it glowed in the torchlight.

“What?”

“Have—have you heard?” Leena blurted.

“Heard what?” he seethed.

YA NOVEL: QUEEN OF SPADES BY VALLEY SHAIYA

The icicles sank deeper, tickling her rib cage. Oh, by the Gods, she was right. Of *course* no one had told him. No one ever thought of him down here, caged like a drake (*a male duck? Sounds comical and not dramatic.*). She felt something different stab into her gut now, guilt...and pity.

And a twinge of fear at being the one to tell him.

“Averyn, Mother’s been taken. She’s gone.”

For once, the fury roaring behind his eyes extinguished (*extinguished? Sounds like it should be just the opposite.*). “What?”

An urge to take his hand overcame her, but common sense reigned; his skin could boil(*scald?*) hers at his whim.

“She’s missing. Someone took her. Last night. Out of her study.”

“When?” *“Re-read the last quote. Is he deaf?”*

“Las-last night.”

His eyes danced menacingly, the wrath reigniting. “And no one came to tell me?”

The queen’s favorite. Her prized son, the only one of her children to reflect her Vagari heritage because of his brown-skinned father. The only other person permitted behind that study door. And he had been ignored.

He wouldn’t be (*ignored*) any longer.

~~Suddenly, it was happening. A sweaty sheen dewed the stone walls.~~ Leena’s brow dampened, as did her nightgown. Red clouded at the corners of her vision as she remembered a time from long ago. **A time of stuffed bears and pleading screams.** (*This sentence has no reference anywhere. The reader will be confused.*)

“Averyn—please,” she begged, air thick in her throat.

YA NOVEL: QUEEN OF SPADES BY VALLEY SHALIA

He cackled. “They shut me down here in this **dank** hellhole, where only my mother cares to visit, and they can’t even **deign** to tell me she’s been kidnapped?” (*Lofty language out of no where.*)

Waves of heat pulsated off him. His clothes smoked.

“Averyn—” Heat coated her throat, coated her throat. She could barely breathe. The red (*in her vision*) creeped in further, further. She could hardly see him.

“I should have been the first one notified! They owe me that at least!”

~~She might suffocate.~~ “Brother—”

“I’m the only one she loves!” he thundered. “**And they couldn’t deign to tell me?!?**” (*Repete.*)

He shrieked like a gutted boar, wrenching away from Leena. Both hands flew up in front of him. Tongues of orange and blue flames erupted from his fingertips and splashed across the stones, scorching, blackening.

~~Burning.~~

Leena dove past the doorway into the corner, coughing, searching for a ~~fresh~~ pocket of (*fresh*) air. The stench of charring cloth seared her nose. She curled into her self, (*herself*) shaking violently. Her vision swirled ~~in shades of red~~.

And he howled. ~~And he howled.~~

Slowly, the temperature (*in this stony dungeon*) cooled. ~~The~~ air hissed in her ears and thinned, becoming stale and safe once more. She raised her head from her arms, running fingers through her hair to check for any singed strands. Her vision spotted, (*then*) cleared.

No more heat. No more cries. Only muffled sobbing. (*Who is sobbing?*)

YA NOVEL: QUEEN OF SPADES BY VALLEY SHAIYA

Leena crawled to the threshold, peering in. *(Threshold in where a door closes. When did she leave the room?)*

Averyn laid crumpled on the floor, arms wrapped around his head. His shirt was blackened to the elbows and ash fell in gentle flakes around him, kissing his skin. Soft cries bounced off the stone walls, impossible to cloak.

Wordless, Leena scooted up next to him, daring to place a hand on his shoulder.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered. “I know you love her. I understand how you’re feeling. I feel the same.”

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Leena hopped up. “You can’t! It’s dangerous. You don’t know who took her—or where.”

He glared at her and stalked to his steel armoire, throwing it open. “I think I can handle myself.”

Leena, accustomed to his obstinance, switched tactics. “If you go, other people will find out about you—people outside of Litonia. You’ll be crucified.” *(Crucified? Really? What did he do to deserve it?)*

“I don’t care.”

“You’re not supposed to have Söl. People will think you’re an abomination.”

“And you don’t?” (*Don’t think he’s an abomination? Why?*)

Leena flinched, as if he had slapped her. Those plain truths, attacking her from all sides. “You can’t control your Söl, Averyn.”

She imagined his face softened a fraction.

Quietly, she continued, “Don’t be so rash. Have faith in the Royal Guard. At least for now.”

“I have faith in no one who has no faith in me.” Jaw set, he said, “Tell the king I will be seeking his ~~council~~ (*counsel*) this evening.”

Leena knew their conversation—interaction, really—was over. For now, she had averted another royal crisis. Averyn would be staying and his Söl (*would be*) contained.

She raised her eyes to his, catching the scorched wall in the corner of her vision. His shirt continued to disintegrate around his wrists and his crystal pink eyes—eyes that all Söl Bearers shared—were swollen. She nodded. “As you wish.”

The second she stepped out of the room, the door slammed.

She turned to head back to her chambers, but something glinted seductively on the wall across from her. Had that been there before?

Up close, she recognized the object for what it was: a knife, wedged halfway into the mortar between stones. It pierced a playing card, pinning it to the wall.

She grasped the hilt and yanked. It didn’t budge, as though someone had sunk it into the mortar when it was still soft. She tried again, throwing her shoulder and back into the effort, to no avail.

Frustrated, Leena flexed her hands, easing the cramps. A lone blade in the wall, its hilt bloodied, was suspicious. Would be considered a threat to Averyn’s life.

YA NOVEL: QUEEN OF SPADES BY VALLEY SHAIYA

She doubted a soul would care.

Shhhhrk! Leena tore the card from the dagger, pulling it downward in a rough slit.

The card was black with white X's covering it. She flipped it to the face side. A queen of spades. She turned her wrist, viewing both sides again as if something would change. That's it? This was the possible threat? Just a queen of spades?

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Come find me.

This note was obviously meant for Averyn. Stabbed into the wall across from his room. Because this was their mother's handwriting.

Maybe the queen hadn't been abducted after all.

(Given all the other problems here, this is a good hook. Try to deal with the setting and establish a place where the reader understands who, what, and where we are in the story.)