The King's Daughter

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Her mother had protected her ever since her birth, because she was gifted and nobody else could know. All royalty had powers, except for her father, and according to her mother, her too. Arabella the princess of her fatherâ s kingdom has rarely traveled outside of the castle and city walls on her own. But once she is kidnapped by a man madly in love with her and hunted down by assassins, she finds the key to why her mother always protected her, a key that could force her to rethink her life and uncover a father who has a hidden secret that nobody would have ever guessed. And once the only living person that knew her secret slips from her hands, can he be trusted not to give her away?

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Sorry to have changed the material a little. Editing is still being done. This is just the first couple chapters for you to read to see if you would like to read the rest!

Prologue

At the age of four I discovered my abilities. I was merely a toddler, just beginning to understand the powers I possessed. My Mother had them. I knew that much. And I knew my Father didnâ t. The king of the Leonald didnâ t have powers.

â Mommy? Why arenâ t I allowed to use my powers?â My Mother combed through my wavy hair gently with her delicate golden comb. I could feel her body tense up momentarily behind me but then she sighed and replied.

â Because, my darling. Yours are more powerful than anything that has lived or is yet to come. And your Father is a lovely man, but deep down he mustnâ t know of your powerâ s existence. Nor shall the rest of this kingdom or the â others.â All right? I know itâ s a lot for you Ara. But the guardians and I shall help you the whole way.â She leaned forward to give me a gentle kiss on my forehead. I turned back and stared into the last dying embers of the fire.

â But Mommy, donâ t all royalty have powers?â

â Arabella, that is not true.â She snapped. But soon her voice calmed. â Only the greatest of us possess the powers. Your Father hasnâ t any powers but he still rules and is a very powerful man. But there are others that may overtake him one day. And challenge his kingship. There are very few else that behold such powers Ara. They are as rare as a dragon spotted outside of the dragons land. And you and I are just two of them. I know that anyone who has these powers are and will become royalty if they reveal them to the court. And I know as a fact The Athalos prince, your age is one of them. But be careful, Ara. Be careful for you do not fully comprehend what you behold at your fingertips. It will take time and practice, but I shall help you to master your abilities. Do you understand dear?â I smiled as she wrapped me up into her robe.

â Yes Mommy.â

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The courtyard was silent as her small footsteps hit against the cold cobblestone. She ran fast towards the stables, her skirts in hand, making sure she did not run into any guards. The moon was out bright, giving a little light to the dark shadows that lurked. She made her way in through the main stable doors and down the corridor.

â Nevar?â She stood in the small light of the torch in front of her. She repeated. â Nevar?â She skimmed all the stalls checking where he was. â Nevar!â She whispered harshly.

â Princess.â He slid out from behind a hay bale, clasping a hand over her mouth. Startled, she grasped his hand with hers, twisting it around to his side.

â Nevar! You scared the life out of me!â She squeaked.

â Will- you- please- let- goâ¦â He whimpered. Instantly, she dropped his wrist dropping her hands back down to her side. â I am sorry your Highness.â Nevar frowned sarcastically. He stood up taller and looked over the girl.

She replied looking up at him, â I forgive you. And I am sorry for gripping your wrist so hard. Itâ s instinct.â He was an inch taller than her, and a year older but he was the one willing to help her with what she needed. She studied his light brown hair and bright blue eyes. As he stared at her figure in the dim lantern light, he noticed she had her brown locks of hair flowing down over her shoulders and not up on top of her head as he had always seen her before.

Ara clenched her jaw firmly, snapping back to the point. â Where is she Nevar?â His face relaxed a little and he looked away for a brief moment.

â She is waiting for you, come on.â He held out his hand for her to take. She didnâ t know how to respond so she simply took it running off right behind him out of the stables. â Watch out for any of the guards okay?â He whispered as they ducked into a shadow. He pulled her around a corner and towards the back wall near the orchard.

She made careful to not step on any fruit but it was hard to see in the dark. Soundlessly, they sneaked down along the wall, and then reappeared on the path near the west entrance. Nevar let go of Araâ s hand and crept right up in front of the wall. Nervous, she moved forward slowly and watched as he pushed a block of the wall in precisely and a small trap door appeared in the ground.

â What is that?â She asked him quietly.

â I thought your elders would have told you by now. It is a passage under the moat to the other side in the royal forest. An escape route: you have to be careful when youâ re over there though. Guards patrol there as well. I couldnâ t have gone any further because it is too much of a walk.â He turned the latch with a click and opened the door into the ground.

â There is a ladder here.â He said. â I will go down and light the candles,â Ara watched as he slowly disappeared into the blackness. With one foot then the other she made her way down the ladder and into the passage.

Arabella screeched as her foot missed a peg and she slipped down the rope burning her hands. She braced herself for the fall but was cushioned instead by a pair of hands. Nevar let out a â humphâ and set her on the ground safely.

â Nevar!â She squeaked again. â Shh!â He yelled. He climbed up the ladder quickly and pressed a button that made the door close and the stone in the wall was pressed back into place where it belonged; right when they began to hear yelling and boots heading their way.

â Come on.â He handed her a candle but she had to readjust it in her fingers, her hands burning with fiery pain.

â How are your hands?â He asked as they began to walk.

â Theyâ re fine.â She whispered shyly.

â How far did I fall?â She asked curious.

â About my arms length. Not very far.â

â Oh.â She breathed, replaying the scene in her head. As they walked she asked him to hold her candle as she held her hands down to her side.

Closing her eyes, she focused her energy flow into her hands and felt let the tickling sensation cover them. Once she opened her eyes and looked down at her palms, they were healed. She smiled satisfied then took her candle from Nevar who didnâ t bother to look at her.

â What did you need me to hold your candle for?â He asked. She hid her face in the shadows and whispered quietly to herself. â You ask a lot of questions donâ t you Nevar?â There was a moment of silence before I added, â I needed to fix my dress.â

Nevar pressed a button that opened the door above them and as Ara climbed out first she was greeted by blackness all around her, the only light from that of the candle in her hand. She climbed up on the rocks and waited as Nevar followed close behind.

â Just over here,â Nevar gestured her to climb down into the grass. Then through the trees she saw a black broad shadow.

â Is that her?â She asked pointing to the shadow. Nevar nodded. â Oh!â She laughed with glee as she ran to the white mare. Her fingers flowed through her silky mane as she retrieved an apple from her pouch and fed it to her.

â I still do not understand this, Princess. Why you sneak out in the middle of the night with me, to go riding a horse.â Nevar leaned up against a tree and stared down at his hands. â Because. Because-â She stammered. â because Father believes that I will get hurt riding. Or run away.â She whispered quietly.

â Why would he think that?â Nevar asked. â Because he doesnâ t know what I am about to tell you.â She walked over to him and looked up into his eyes for the first time. â You will be the only one who knows.â

Chapter 1

â Thank you Nevar.â I smiled dismounting the horse. With a quick adjustment to the belt at my waist, I ran to give him a hug. Looking up into his deep eyes, I gave him a gentle kiss on the cheek.

â You are welcome.â He smiled down at me, and then removed himself quickly. I was royalty. I was not supposed to be touched. And Nevar respected the rules.

â I do not understand why you still have us sneak out to go riding. You have permission to ride as you please now.â He whispered through the dark.

â Because I prefer it this way.â I smiled and looked back over at Thea my new dark brown mare.

â Go on, go ride her. I am not holding you back.â He gestured. Slowly, I walked over to her and hoisted myself into the saddle, taking her reins in my hands.

â I will see you back here in a bit!â Nevar called after me, watching as I rode off into the shadows.

Once I was done riding Nevar walked me back to the courtyard.

I stopped for a second and looked at him. â Will you go shooting with me later?â I asked.

â Yes. Princess. Milady.â He replied grinning.

â Nevar. I could never be *your* lady. I do not understand where you come from with this statement. I am betrothed to the Prince of Athalos, but I am not even sure if what is said it still true since motherâ s passing.â

â I realize this yes.â His eyes lit up for a brief second setting off a small spark in my chest.

â Nevar, you should go home, I will go shooting later. Meet me at the Kingâ s road at noon.â

â Very well.â He sighed, frowning. I stood and waited, watching his figure disappear into the night. As I walked along the side of my tower I let out a long sigh. I felt footsteps press into the ground, the vibrations coursing through my feet. I dove into the shadows of the lower terrace and watched as a guard walks by, his hand on his sword.

Quickly, swiftly and silently, I pulled myself up onto the terrace and slipped through my unlocked door and into the darkness of my staircase.

My dress felt heavy as I continued to climb the never-ending spiral of stairs, but I only stopped once. Feeling my energy revive, I carried on to the top, my dress feeling as light as a feather.

â Arabella. Your Highness.â The soft voice wavered around in front of my bed. I opened my eyes slightly, letting them adjust to the light. Emeline, my first maid stood at the foot of my bed.

â Good morning Emeline. What can I do for you?â I asked simply, sitting up; tiredness sweeping over me like a plague.

â Your Father has called for your attendance at breakfast my dear.â She forced a smile on her small face.

â Oh Emeline, I wish not to go, but if I must. Tell Father I will be down as soon as I can.â I let out a loud sigh as I fell back into the comfort of my bed. I watched as Emeline drew back the tall thick curtains around my window, letting the light pour in.

â Emeline!â I groaned, shielding my eyes to see. I quickly slipped out of the bed, covering myself in the robe that Emeline handed to me. I opened the door to my bedroom terrace, not the one I snuck in last night. That was in fact, at the very base of my tower, at the entrance.

I walked out into the crisp morning air and let out another sigh as I wrapped my arms closer around me, my nightgown rippling into a river down to my feet. I walked to the edge of the balcony and looked out over the land before me. Standing there for a minute, Emeline reminded me that I had to get down to breakfast.

Slowly I made my way back into my room and Emeline handed me a simple green and cream-colored gown that flowed past my feet. I changed behind the privacy screen and as I stepped out, Emeline laced up the front, the cream color running down the front of my dress and the green wrapped around everywhere else.

â May I help with anything Milady?â Emeline asked staring at me as I messed with my hair in frustration.

â Please. I am a mess.â I put my hands down as she set to work on my hair. I watched as she braided two strands of hair on either side of my head, and connected them in the back, leaving the rest of my hair to curl down. â Thank you Emeline.â I smiled at her as she handed me my crown to place on my head.

I let a yawn escape my mouth and quickly apologized seeing it as a rude gesture.

â You were out late again werenâ t you?â Emeline whispered in my ear as I stood up to go.

â Oh Emeline, please do not tell a soul.â Her mouth formed an evil grin.

â Arabella, I have kept it a secret for you for seven years now. I believe I can handle it my dear.â She gave me a sad smile and a hug. She was the closest thing Iâ ve had since my Mother passed. I raced down the steps of my staircase, careful not to slip. I passed the library level right before I opened the door into the hall that led down into the main part of the castle.

Two of my guards stood waiting for me on the other side of the door, and I smiled in greeting to them.

â Good morning your Highness.â They both spoke in unison.

â Good morning Inigrid.â I turned to my right to greet her. She was one of the few females my father had assigned to the army: for her strength and her excellence in sword fighting. I turned to my other side.
â Good morning Bryce.â I greeted the second commanderâ s son. â If you will excuse me, I am in a rush.â I smiled to both of them and walked quickly down the hall. I took the steps down to the next floor and made my way to the dining hall.

â Good morning Father.â I tried to avoid contact, curtsied politely, and then took my seat.

â Good morning my fair Arabella.â His deep baritone voice shook my insides. I hated it. I hate him. I looked over at Merek for help.

â It is ok, he is in a good mood today.â His blue eyes beginning to look into mine.

â Thank you Merek.â Merek is my fatherâ s sisterâ s son. But she died four years before the plague. Merek was two years older than I, and one of my fatherâ s spies.

The first course of hot bread, butter, and jam was set out on the table. I took my helping politely, and glanced around the room to see whom else had joined us. As I saw no one else worth talking to I simply excused myself from the table and left for archery range. I put my cloak on and walked through the courtyard up to the stables.

â Good morning your Highness.â I watched as Peter the stable boy bowed then stood back up.

â Good morning Peter.â I replied. â I need Thea saddled and ready for me please.â He nodded then disappeared down the next corridor.

â Hello your Highness. Is everything alright?â The stable master spotted me as we walked along the corridor.

I threw up my hand and waved to him as he joined me. â Oh yes. Peter is just fetching my horse for me is all. May I ask a question?â

â Of course! You should be ordering the questions your Highness! You are the Princess here. I am just the stables master.â He chuckled as he stroked his stubbly beard.

â Oh, of course Sir. I would like to know how many stable hands do you have working here lately. I have seen quite a few new people in and out of here.â The stable master rubbed the back of his head then replied.

â Well, about fifteen I believe.â

â Fifteen! These stables have never seen more than ten! Did Father choose them or you?â

â Both your Highness.â

â But we have no more that thirty horses in here, perhaps more when the army is here, but that is not the case.â I sighed once I saw Peter return with Thea. We hadnâ t the money to go towards that many stables boys either. It would be enough wage to feed the village of Southsdale for months.

â Never mind this, I will discuss it with my father at a later time. Good day to you.â I nod to him and watched him wobble off down the corridor.

Peter handed me the reins for the horse as I studied the saddle and ropes, making sure it was all done properly. â Thank you Peter. Who braided her hair?â I asked, my voice growing agitated.

â Er. One of the other stable hands did so this morning your Highness.â Considering it, and then admiring it, I spoke out, â I think its quite alright. But do *not* let them touch my horse again unless said to. I want to make sure that well-trained and mannered people touch her. People like you.â Peter hid his pleasure by bowing again.

â Thank you your Highness. Do you need the assistance of a stool to mount?â He asked. I laughed a little and smile.

â No, I am well capable of mounting on my own.â In one swift motion, I lifted myself up into the saddle.

I nodded holding onto my small crown. â Good day Peter.â He must have believed me to be one of the craziest women, not riding sidesaddle. I laughed at the thought and rode out to the west entrance.

The fog slowly disappeared as the sun rose in the sky, bringing along a new day. I stopped for a brief moment on the side of the road to watch as the light broke over the city walls, illuminating it in light, casting aside all of the shadows.

I rode up along the Kingâ s road entering the forest. Almost instantly I spotted Nevar off on the side of the road waiting on his horse, my bow at his side.

â Good morning, Princess.â Nevar greeted as I brought Thea to a stop.

â Good morning Nevar.â I replied staring at my bow, and quiver across his back. â How did you get my stuff?â I asked him. His grin displayed his perfect teeth.

â I had Emeline retrieve them for me.â

â Thank you.â I smiled as I slid down off of Thea and walked over to where his horse stood. He dismounted and handed me my weapon. I slid on my wrist guard, rolling and flexing my wrist so it could fit snug against my skin. I followed Nevar a little deeper into the trees.

â I marked the trees that are targets.â He added as I looked around at the trees with paint on them.

â I see them.â

â Good.â He smiled taking his place to my left. I retrieved an arrow out of my quiver and loaded my bow. Without any effort, I released and watched my arrow split through the air and dead center into the tree marked as a target.

â You are not allowed to use your abilities Ara!â Nevar exclaimed as I laughed at his fail of a shot.

â I can not just turn them off for you Nevar.â I drew another arrow and shot.

â Yes. I realize that Arabella.â He snapped, loading his bow. Steadily, he aimed at his target, and in a swift motion, released the string sending the arrow through the air.

â Arabella.â He said turning to face me.

â Yes?â I asked confused.

â I have something to tell you.â

â Alright, out with it already Nevar. You know I donâ t like guessing games.â

â I think I have tooâ ¦ Well I am supposed to see the recruiter this afternoon.â

â Pardon?â

â I received a letter Ara, that may or may not mean what I believe it does. But I am supposed to meet with the recruiter of your Fatherâ s Army. The King will be there as well.â

Chapter 2

I stood watching silently until he disappeared into my Fatherâ s office.

â Hello, your Highness,â A young maid shuffled past me carrying a pile of linens as I paced back and forth in the hall. I couldnâ t hold still; my fingers fidgeted with the fabric of my dress as I paced around the hall just waiting for him to step out.

I wrapped my cloak around me tighter, listening to my boots on the marble flooring.

The doors to my Fatherâ s office opened then closed. A pair of boots made way over to where I stood. I turned around to meet Nevarâ s sorrowful face.

â What Nevar? It isnâ t anything bad is it?â I asked. Nevarâ s face shifted into a serious expression and I began to panic.

â Arabella,â He began, â The King has enrolled me in his Royal Army.â A wave of confusion washed over me. I looked back and forth between his eyes confused.

I forced myself to speak, â Why would he do that? That isnâ t how it works.

â In these times, it is. He chooses the men who he feels will best suit the job. Iâ ll be paid well. This might be the chance that I need Ara.â There was a faint sound of happiness in voice as he spoke.

â But when?â

â He wants me to leave with the first branch up towards Brookerinde for a few weeks to sort out the mess with the black market merchants. Then we will return back down here. We leave in six days Ara.â He paused. â He has been looking for well-trained men, and his first choice was the smiths. Since we at least know how to make and use the weapons.â I began to feel weighted down and my knees gave out beneath me. Nevar caught me and set me gently on the ground.

â Nevar, youâ ve never gone away before. And not for the Army! You canâ t Nevar! Not for my Father!â I cried.

â But Ara I have no choice to I would like to serve my kingdom and display my honor to the King.â Furious, I stood up and ran down the hall crying while I raced up the tower steps to my rooms.

â Arabella!â Nevarâ s voice echoed up the stairwell. My guards probably stopped him. I dove into my bed and closed the curtains around it leaving me in the darkness to cry.

The sun beat down overhead casting a hazy shadow over the trees. The smell of the fresh apples filled my senses as I relaxed against one of the trees.

â Arabella.â Nevarâ s voice approached me. â Can we please talk?â I watched as he leaned against the tree above me in the orchard.

â No.â I proceeded to peel the apple with my knife.

â Please just give me one minute.â He pleaded.

â 59 seconds.â

â I will take it. I am not doing this to help your Father; I am doing this for me. To learn to be a better fighter, to be a better disciplined person, and it will give me the chance at a higher status. I always feel small and worthless compared to you. You and your *abilities*. I am just an average man.â

â You compare yourself to me? I would never compare myself to anyone, why would you? It is not your fault that I have what I have.â

â Yes, I know Arabella. But please just let me do this one thing. And even then it isnâ t your choice. I am an individual person and I can stand on my own.â I sighed taking it all in. It was so much, although he didnâ t have to do it alone... I thought up a plan quickly then burst out. â As you wish Nevar. But please let me do something. Let me join with you.â â

â What! No! You are staying here, and you can keep me updated. There is no need for you to get yourself into more of a mess with your Father.â I rolled my eyes and straightened out my dress. â Your fifty nine

seconds are up.â I mumbled. He took his turn rolling his beautiful blue eyes.

â Come on.â

Chapter 3

After a short breakfast, I took Nevar out into the gardens to escape the place where my Father lived and breathed.

â You need to practice? I didnâ t know you had to practice. Your abilities come naturally, Ara. No need to maintain them.â I shook my head.

â I practice because then I can do what I love, Nevar especially since you wonâ t hear of me goin into the army.â I glared at him. â Plus, I need to learn to control them.â I lied.

â I believe you are doing a pretty good job of that since you have not killed your Father yet.â He let out a chuckle but I ignored him and he soon caught on.

We stopped in front of his tall wooden house with its walls adjacent to the house on its right And his Fatherâ s workshop lay on the left side.

â Hello Pa.â I stood behind Nevar as he stepped into the doorway. A sweet smell of bread filled the air and as I looked over to the kitchen I could see his mother was baking.

â Hello your Highness.â His father greeted me by standing up and bowing.

â No, no please do not bow.â I held out my hands to stop him. He returned to his chair. â It is my pleasure.â

â Hello Anselm, Beatrice.â I smiled kindly. â How are you two?â

â Fine as always Arabella. Thank you for asking.â Anselmâ s rough face smiled at me. Nevarâ s parents were much older than my Father. But Nevar had an older brother and sister who had both moved away.

Beatrice grasped Nevarâ s arm, pulling him into the other room, leaving me to stand alone.

â Nevar, does Arabella know?â His Mother whispered. *Know* what?

â Yes Mother.â

The two reappeared, but Beatriceâ s smile had vanished.

â Arabella how did you take the news of Nevarâ s enrollment?â I shrugged my shoulders, trying to hold back the mixed feelings inside.

Through tears, she smiled saying, â He will be back soon enough.â

Through clenched teeth, I added. â Yes. Yes he will.â

â Come here, Son.â Anselm gestured to the chair next to him. â Do you want to know something? I was in the army once.â Nevar looked shocked. I stood there trying to stay out of the way of the family matter. â It was for King Jorgeâ s army: your Grandfather Ara. Come have a seat next to me.â He ushered me over. I smiled taking a seat at the only unoccupied spot at the table. â I was his best archer man Nevar, just as you may be now some day. But thatâ s also when I met someone that would change all of that.â He smiled at his wife standing by the counter listening attentively to the story. â I met Beatrice, and then I told the King that I would retire to have a family. He wasnâ t pleased at all with me but let me leave the army. As a consequence I got no retiring benefits, and he never wanted to hear from me againâ He sighed and stretched his arms a little.

â It sounds kind of like my Father.â I glanced over at Nevar. â Thank you for letting me listen Ans. I am afraid I must be going though. I will see you tomorrow Nevar.â I smiled at him and started out the door.

â Ara, let me walk you out.â Nevar insisted, standing from his chair to walk me out. I opened the door and stepped out into the dim lit street watching as he closed the door behind me.

â I will see you tomorrow Nevar,â I turned to walk off but a hand gripped my arm.

â I will see you tomorrow Ara. I know you might not like this, but I am going and I *will* come back. Sleep well.â He turned and walked back inside leaving me standing hopeless.

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Rubbing the sleep from my eyes, I sat up in bed to talk to Emeline. â I think I will be going down to the bath house.â

â Of course your Highness.â She replied with a curtsy. â I will return in a few minutes.â

I watched her leave, then stood up and walked down into clothing room, pulling out a long purple dress that draped off my shoulders, exposing my bare collarbone. With every tug of the strings to tie the front of my dress; I felt my chest expose a little more. It wasnâ t one of my favorite dresses, but the hot air forced me to wear something that I wouldnâ t sweat in.

With one last glimpse in the mirror, I pinned my hair up and rushed out of the room.

Two extra pairs of footsteps echoed down the stairwell after mine as my guard followed me.

â No need. I am only going down to the bathhouse.â Said I. Inigrid nodded her head and the two of them marched back up the stairs to wait at the entrance of my room.

A wave of moist air swept over me as I walked into the bathhouse. Emeline hurried over to my side and started brushing out my hair slowly, and then I stepped out of my dress and walked over to the waters edge.

I unwrapped the cloth from around me, and slipped into the warm water. Steam slowly rose up from the water surrounding me in a foggy haze. I sat down on a step watching the rose float around the surface of the water.

â It feels very nice, Emeline.â I smiled, pleased.

â Iâ ll just be in the other room if you need me, Arabella.â Once gone, I relaxed slowly sinking into the water.

I cleared my mind as I thought about mental exercises and began to focus on the rose petals in the water. Slowly at first, the water swirled in little spirals around the petals, lifting them gently upward and out of the water. I released it with my mental hold and watched the water splash back in the bath.

I couldnâ t hold back the laughter that bubbled in my stomach.

â Is everything alright?â Emeline asked, bursting into the room. â Yes, Iâ m fine Emeline, it was nothing.â I held back my joy as she left the room again.

â Thank you Emeline.â I smiled as she curtsied to me, clasping my thin linen cloak over my dress before I stepped outside into the sun. Pulling my hood over my head, I opened the door stepping out into the midday sun. Something was off. As I walked further out, I noticed the crowd of men and women gathering in the court yard.

â Emeline? Whatâ s going on?â I asked cautiously. She shrugged her shoulders giving me a blank look.

â I have no idea Milady. Tis for you to know, not I.â I quickened my pace, approaching the crowd, to turn and look up, watching my Father on the balcony above.

What was he doing? As I lowered my gaze, I caught sight of the noose hanging from the wooden stand, awaiting its victim. A woman beside me gasped. I looked around frantically, searching for an answer.

â Whatâ s going on?â I asked the woman. She didnâ t even look at me as she murmured,
â Heâ s to hang till death. Poor boy.â She said clasping her hand over her mouth, and her other wrapped around her child.

â Can you tell me what for?â I asked wanting answers.

â He knocked out a guard in town for takinâ all his money to â help pay for his protectionâ . Itâ s happeninâ more and more now though. The guards are raisinâ our taxes to help pay for better protection, as they say. And to help with the war thatâ s starting with Brookerinde. How do you not know mis-?â As she looked over at me, she immediately silence, dipping into a curtsy at my feet.

â Your Highness. Please forgive me. I have no excuse to be so rude.â I waved it off, smiling down at her little child.

â It isnâ t your fault. Merely my Fatherâ s ignorance, and greediness. I had no idea to be honest, and I will see to stopping it. The people here donâ t need higher taxes, it will only make things worse.â

â Thank you for understanding your Highness.â She smiled, curtsying again.

â People!â The Kingâ s voice roared out over the crowed. â People of Leonald. I here, have a young man, who thought it wise to hurt those who were merely protecting him. Let this be a lesson to you all! The next time one of my men are hurt because of you people, you *and* your whole family will be hanged.â Whispers broke out among the people as we watched the young man step up onto the platform in manacles.

â People of Leonald! This man, Gaven Gousner is announced guilty of assaulting one of the Kingâ s men, and is to be hanged until dead, tomorrow morning here in the courtyard.â A few shrieks and cries rang out from the crowd as I watched my Father gesture to have the man taken away to the dungeon.

â No, no, no, no, no.â I whispered frantically. â This isnâ t right.â He went from killing highly wanted outlaws and murderers to killing a young man about my age, for hitting a guard who probably took the only money he owned.

As the crowd dispersed, I marched away, angered, heading to the one place where I could possibly reason with him.

Two guards pushed the doors open as I rushed down the corridor and to his office. With a flick of my hands, the guards stepped away, allowing me passage into the room.

â Father!â I shouted, bursting into the room.

â Aw! My dear Arabella. You greet me with such distaste. Letâ s do that again. This time, a little nicer: perhaps a curtsy shall suffice.â I narrowed my eyes at him, daring to take another step forward.

â No Father.â I hissed. â What is this I hear, about hanging a poor man, for hitting one of your guards. Did you know if your guards were trained well enough, he wouldnâ t have been able to hit him in the first place! That does not matter though. The fact that you are raising the taxes on these people does matter!â My Father let out a low chuckle as he slumped down into his chair, watching me with a precarious stare.

â We need the money Ara. You would know if you did as you are supposed to, and attended all of the meetings and lessons for you. This kingdom is loosing money. I decided we have let Brookerinde mess with our borders for too long. King Serthenelles has taken the few cities that bring me the most pay. And our best crop farms in the doing. He has to pay. And that means war.â

â No Father. That does not. If you hadnâ t let it happen in the first place this wouldnâ t be the topic of our conversation! You must find other ways to get that money. Perhaps by selling some of your precious jewels, or rings, would buy you a little wage. You have too much, yet you only give little. Think of the people for once Father, as Mother did. She earned their trust, unlike you.â I could see the anger burn in his eyes as he grew more agitated.

â I say let the man go.â He let out another hideous laugh.

â And I say, let the man die! Which shall it be?â He asked sarcastically.

â Well, we will let fate decide. *Father.*â

I marched down the halls quickly, turning the corners sharply, and down the stairwell that led into the dungeons.

â Let me through.â I commanded as I approached the guards at the doors to the dungeon.

â No can do your Highness. Kingâ s orders.â

â You can abort my Fatherâ s orders. I command you to let me through. Or else.â Laughter rang out from the two men.

â Or else what? You will break our necks with a snap of your fingers?â

â Iâ m sorry but I wonâ t kill without a good excuse.â I raised my hands quickly, bringing them to the outsides of their helmets, and smashed their heads together, letting them crumple to the floor.

â But I can knock you out.â

Taking the keys off the right guard, I unlocked the door and pushed it open, walking down the short flight of steps into the prison hall.

He was in the first cell on the left as I held the torch close to the bars to look into the cell. A pair of gleaming emerald eyes shined back at me as I fidgeted with the lock until I found the right key.

â Why are you doing this for me your Highness.â I reached my hand out to him, to help him off the ground.

â Because I know what you did was only to protect your family. And to mess with my Father a little.â

â But if he finds me, wonâ t he kill me?â His voice trembled. I shook my head handing him a small pouch of coins.

â Take this and ride south to Lumbridje, and build a home there. This should be plenty of money, and give the sheriff a little. Make sure to tell him itâ s from her Highness will you?â Gaven nodded his head. Raising my hand to kiss.

â Thank you, your Highness. I am forever in your debt.â

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Walking quickly down the halls, I stopped for a moment to examine myself in a mirror. My simple, deep crimson red dress flowed to the floor, my gold trimmed, black bodice secured tightly around my waist. I tucked in a loose piece of hair back into the bun on the top of my head and, feeling complete I rushed off again.

I ran into the Merek in the hall as I hurried on my way to the stables. â Good morning Arabella, cousin.â Merek greeted me. â Where are you off to?â

Hiding my excitement, I lied, â I have a, a new gown I need fitted.â

â Well then, I shall see you later.â I walked quickly until I was around the corner. I burst into a run with my skirts in hand and headed for the doors. I slowed down at the entrance.

â Good morning your highness.â I walked through the front doors and out into the fresh air. Walking down to the stables I was stopped by Peter as I tried to enter.

â Good morning your highness.â He smiled kindly at me. â I need to know what you are doing down here.â

â Just going to see Thea is all, why?â I asked.

â That is all you can do I am afraid. You have ten minutes. They are orders from your Father. He says you have been out too much. He is worried for your safety.â I smiled, holding back my laugh and nodded to him as I pushed past.

â Will do.â I replied.

â Hello Thea.â I smiled as I stroked her mane. â Be quiet.â I whispered in her ear as I strapped on her saddle and placed her bit in her mouth. I snuck her down the back corridor then stopped. I dropped her reins, pulled my cloak hood over my head and opened the door. I placed my boot in the stirrup and pulled myself up. Riding down the path, I went right through the entrance over the drawbridge.

â If Father doesnâ t want me out he ought to do a better job of making it happen.â I spoke to myself.

â Arabella!â Nevar shouted at me as I rode up to the front of the house.

â Shh! Nevar!â I yelled as I slid out of the saddle.

â Why did you come out here?â

â Because it is your last day in the kingdom.â I reached for the clip of my cloak and took it off dropping it into my hands.

Nevar stood still. â Er?â I scratched the back of my head. â Nevar? Is everything okay?â He closed his mouth and began to stutter. I began to feel my cheeks turn red with embarrassment. .

â Nevar? Is everything alright?â

â Um, yeah, yes. Yes Arabella. Yes Your Highnessâ

â Good, I thought that we could do something. We could go hunting?â I lifted my hand to scratch the back of my head again. â Or go to the ocean? Or something.â

â Hunting. Hunting is good.â Nevar assured.

â We can go hunting in the royal forest as long as you are with me.â I suggested to him. I observed him as he thought a minute then left me, not saying where he was going. I stood there and waited for him to return. He appeared out of the house and then disappeared into the workshop. Once he emerged, he had on his archery gloves and arm guard, his quiver of arrows on his back, and his long bow at his side.

â I just need to fetch Frey.â

He followed me up to the forest, taking the royal road.

â I feel like I am trespassing.â He spoke loudly over the horses. I suppressed a laugh and replied.
â You are with me Nevar, you will be fine.â I fixed the crown on top of my head and we rode on towards the forest. We made the bend up the hill around the castle moat, and back down, then headed into the woods.

â We will go off here!â I yelled to him as I slowed down and turned off the road and into the trees. He followed silently as I raced through trees searching for the right markers to know when to turn.

Finally he spoke out, â Where are we going?â I didnâ t reply.

The small cabin overgrown with vines and moss waited, hidden away at the base of a hill. He now knew perfectly well where we were going. We hadnâ t been here in years, but I wanted to remind him what he was going to miss if he left. We both dismounted and made our way towards the cabin. I had cleaned it so it wouldnâ t look in such bad shape when we went in.

â Why take me here?â He asked, standing beside me. I unlatched the door and stood back as it swung open.

â Because this is where we have memories. I wanted to show you what you will you miss.â I lit the fire, letting the light fill the room for him to see everything. Our glass jars of little treasures we found lined the shelves, and our old bows and arrows hung on the wall. I could see the memories flooding his mind as he moved from one thing to another. The two cots in the corner were perfectly made and the old tapestry hung above the hearth.

â Did you really do all of this for me?â He asked turning to me. I nodded my head a little embarrassed.

â Maybe it was a bad idea. I am sorry. I will take you back now.â I whispered lowering my head, heading for the door.

â No, donâ t.â A hand reached out and caught mine, turning me to face him.

â It was a bad idea Nevar. I am sorry. How foolish I was to think this would stop you. Just let me leave now please.â

â I wonâ t let you leave.â He replied pulling me towards him. A tear stained the corner of my eye. â Please donâ t cry.â He whispered softly running his thumb over the tear, tracing down along my cheekbone. A shiver slithered its way down my back as I went still.

His warm breath pressed against my ear as he added, â Thank you.â I watched him as he began to close his eyes, leaning his head in towards mine.

â You really think something so simple would win you a kiss?â I whispered with ease. A smile appeared on his face as he gave a faint laugh, stepping away.

â I had surely hoped it would, for that is really the only thing that could convince me to stay.â I stepped towards him again, with more urgency.

â Well then,â I whispered pressing my lips against his. Right before his kiss began to deepen, I stepped away, searching his eyes for an answer.

â Does that mean you will stay?â I asked urgently. His smile remained as he whispered in my ear,

â No.â

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The sun could hardly be seen through the cloud-covered sky as we rode on in the forest. We hadnâ t found anything yet, and we had to be going back soon.

â Shh!â I pointed out in front of us almost instantly to a fox following behind a mouse, very sly. I loaded my bow and aimed for the fox. â Ara,â Nevar whispered. I looked back at him. â What?â

â Thereâ s another one. They probably donâ t even know of each otherâ s presence.â He said pointing to another behind him in his direction.

â Double.â I smiled at him. I looked back and traced the foxâ s steps through the leaves to find it trying to blend into the trees. I focused my shot and aimed, perfectly.

â Who's there?â A voice yelled. I released my arrow and it whizzed through the air. I didnâ t have time to look if it made the target because I spun around to face three guards on horses.

â It is Princess Arabella, and a mere acquaintance of mine.â I announced to the men.

â How shall I know it is you Princess?â The tall slender man on the right spoke.

â Are my looks not enough to give it away? Your men are supposed to learn to recognize royalty when you see them!â I reached down into my saddlebag and pulled out my crown.

â Is this enough proof?â I demanded. The men backed up on their horses and nodded. â I will have you men dealt with by my Father!â

â Oh Princess! We are terribly sorry. It was an honest mistake. You cannot trust anyone these days.â The man in the middle pleaded. I looked up and down his features and found him attractive in my eyes. I bit my lower lip then added. â Let us fetch our kill, then we will be off to the castle with you three.â Nevar helped me down off of Thea and he went to get his kill while I went to find mine. I pulled the arrow out of the fox and brought it back to the horses.

â Your highness. I did not know that you hunt.â The middle one spoke. A wry grin spread across my face.

â I hunt just as much, or more than any of you do.â I tied the fox onto the saddle and pulled myself up. Nevar came trudging back with his, slightly larger fox in hand.

I watched him as he mounted Fey, his stallion and we turned to ride back onto the road.

â Follow me gentlemen.â I proclaimed, setting off down the road.

â Princess!â Bryce yelled at me as we ride up. â Where have you been?â

â Out hunting Bryce why?â

â You had better come now!â His face filled with anger, I got off the horse.

â Nevar will you take the horses to the stables please? Gentlemen it seems you have been let off. On the contrary, I will remember you all. Go on now.â The men all bowed to me in their saddles and rode off. Nevar took the horses and I followed Bryce into the castle. The cool air circulating through the entrance calmed me a bit but I was still worried and had to rush after Bryce.

He stopped in the middle of the hall and pulled up his sleeves. â This, this is because of you.â He spat holding back tears.

Chapter 4

I gasped clamping my hands over my mouth. â Who? Why? Bryce what happened!â

â Your Father. Is what happened. All because you have not obeyed his orders.â I couldnâ t help but to stare at the bleeding gashes on his arms. Furious, I apologized to him at once, and ran down the hall screaming my fatherâ s name.

â Father! How could you?â

â Hello my Dear. Have you been gone long? Or my prisoner? I had an execution scheduled for this morning. Quite a disappointment to the people, it was.â

â You punished an innocent man for what I have done? That is not right on any level! And I am sure he is not the first is he.â It felt as though he was looking right through me not even fazed by what I was telling him.

â And that man did not deserve to die.â

He simply set down the fire poker and took a seat at his desk. â You are very strong Queen material, I can tell Arabella. It is none of your concern. This is all ridiculous.â

â Yes it is Father! And you have sent an innocent person into your army to get himself killed on your behalf!â

â I see youâ ve made this about yourself now have you? I need more soldiers. I am recruiting them from every city, and village I can. Theyâ re just lucky I am not taking them in the middle of the night to go fight without saying goodbye.â

â No Father, you are ridiculous.â I turned and marched right back out of the room to go find Bryce.

â Let me at least get you a doctor.â I pleaded.

â There is no need for your sympathy Princess.â He hissed, pulling away from me.

â Please!â I begged. â Bryce please, let me get you help.â He shook his head turning away. With one last cold glare at me, he spoke,

â No. You are no longer in need of my service. I will be leaving now.â I turned away in pain. Standing tall, I strode over to Nevar.

â Nevar you can go home.â My voice was emotionless as I commanded him to leave at once.

â Arabella, are you okay?â

â I am fine Nevar, just like you. I will see you tomorrow to bid you farewell.â I gave him a small-restricted hug and turned to look away from him. â Good day.â

â Inigrid, has my Father ever?â Inigrid stood there staring blankly at me for a minute then shook her head vigorously.

â Oh no Princess. But he has beaten others I know of. I can tell you who if you would like.â I waved it off.

â No need to. Thank you, Inigrid.â I smiled sadly and then walked into my room. I stood at the edge of my balcony looking out to the ocean in the distance. I knew I was not really going to get punished by Father, except in a day my best friend was to be sent off to join my Fatherâ s army, preparing himself for the worst. He was only going in to do little things; he was not even heading into war. Not yet. I sat down and leaned against the cold stone pillars of the balcony and cried myself to sleep.

â No! No! Nevar!â I screamed as he walked towards the battlefield. He had his bow in one hand and sword in another. His sheath of arrows was strung across his back.

â I have to Ara. I have to.â He repeated over and over as he walked into the dying bloodbath of men. I shouted over and over again except he didnâ t listen to me. Then a shadow appeared drooping over him as he walked onward. Then the shadow turned into a man with a knife. And a sword. And he swung at him over and over again.

â No!â I kept screaming as his blood burst everywhere and he collapsed on the ground. The shadow disappeared and I ran after him sliding in the pool of blood around him. I struggled to his side and cried as I screamed his name. I looked into his clouded blue eyes and cried. â Nevar!â

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