

No. 14

A Princes View

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(Junior Category)

They say, once upon a time before I was kidnapped by the witches, that I was due to marry a princess. And by 'they' I mean the fairies at the bottom of the witches' garden. Despite them keeping me prisoner, I was still a prince so they let me out now and again for fresh air and to keep me fit just in case they needed me to fight.

They say – the fairies that is – that she had long blonde hair that hung around her pretty face like golden curtains and eyes that shone like the morning dew on rich green grass. But, 99.9% of the time the fairies talk nonsense. They make up their own tales to entertain themselves, sometimes at my expense, sometimes at the witches'. I tend to encourage the latter.

“Oh, do cheer up, my lord,” Scooter told me one day while I sat on the bench near the water fountain. He hopped up onto the arm of the bench and tried to make me smile by pretending it was some sort of tight rope. Scooter was my most trusted fairy friend and even by that it meant I couldn't trust him a lot. “Your princess does exist. Why, I saw her merely seconds ago.”

“Where?” I asked him, not in the mood. “In that empty head of yours?”

“Why, my lord!” Scooter cried, clutching a hand to his chest. “Your words wound me. I'd only meant to point out that your parents have arrived for their full moon visit and they have brought with them the princess we have been telling you so much about.”

“You've merely stated how pretty she is,” I reminded him. “For all I know she could be as ugly inside as those witches are outside.”

Scooter shushed me. “You talk any more talk like that, my lord, and the witches will send your King and Queen back to where they came from. And what does it matter should she be ugly inside?” He smiled drunkenly at me; clearly he’d been at the dew this morning. I sighed. Fairies were so shallow.

“Alas, I hear the witches calling so I must depart. Do give the girl a kiss from me, my lord.” He winked before hopping off the bench and back through the bushes where his friends waited.

The witches were calling me in fact, their horrible croaky voices would be hard to miss anywhere, and my mother and father were not alone for their monthly visit. They had, as Scooter had said, brought a girl with them. And the fairies had been right; she was very beautiful, more so when she smiled timidly at me. She looked every bit the princess in her royal blue dress.

“Why, Mother, Father,” I said, “Is it true that this woman should have become my wife had the witches not taken me away from you?”

Mother, with her hair as brown as mine tied up in a tight bun, looked as though she was going to have a heart attack. Father, whose nose I unfortunately shared, merely raised his eyebrows.

“Wife?” Mother choked. But I wasn’t listening. Instead I directed my attention to the young woman before me.

“Pray, what name do you go by?”

The young woman looked from me to my parents and back again before answering rather timidly, “Rosanna...my lord.”

My mother made a noise as though she was going to faint but I ignored her, leaving it to my father to catch her.

“And what brings you to the dreadful witches’ home?” I asked.

“I...requested to see you, my lord,” she answered.

“And I am very much glad you did so,” I told her sincerely, kissing her hand before turning back to my parents.

“Have you gathered enough gold to pay for my release?” I asked them.

Mother burst into tears, effectively ending our visit.

“So she was a pretty one then?” Scooter asked me when I went into the garden the next day. The smug smile on his green-tinted face told me he already knew the answer.

“You should look beyond prettiness,” I told him. “’Tis not everything.”

“But it’s enough,” Scooter prompted.

I had to agree with him there. We spent the afternoon lying on our backs and watching the white fluffy clouds float peacefully around the sky. Scooter lay next to my hand, shouting every few minutes to remind me of his presence so I would not roll over and squash him. He wouldn’t be able to hop away in time.

“I don’t see why you don’t fly,” I told him. “Why would God give such devices to creatures who care not to use them?”

“Aye, we can fly,” Scooter admitted, sounding almost embarrassed. “But they’re not designed right so they only carry us a few feet before we have to drop back down.”

“Maybe you should not gorge yourself then,” I told him, grinning as I remembered him helping himself to a third petal this morning. Apparently he couldn’t resist lilies. They only came around once a year and you had to ‘grab ‘em while you can’.

“Maybe you should keep that mouth shut, my lord,” he warned me playfully.

We didn’t see the witch until she loomed over us, her wrinkled wart-ridden face blocking the sun and casting a cool shadow over us.

“Well that’s my cue to leave,” Scooter declared, jumping to his feet. He hopped off then, hitting his head on the underside of the bench in his haste.

I got to my feet, glaring at the witch who held the vial of potion I was expected to drink.

“Oh, blossom,” she said, trying to sound motherly and failing. “That Rosie girl must have really messed with your head.”

“Hardly,” I told her. “And her name is Rosanna.”

The witch shook her head again. “She had no right to talk to you like that,” she muttered, handing me the potion. I took it from her, my distaste showing on my face. She rolled her eyes as she said, “Drink it or I’ll bring...the trolls out to hold you down again.”

“Why, last time you only brought the goblins,” I said, a little frightful.

“That’s what I meant,” the witch said, waving her claw-like hand. I downed the liquid in one gulp, trying to ignore the bitter taste.

“Should I need to drink any more?” I asked, knowing she didn’t think I meant just today.

“You’ll keep drinking until I’m back to my gorgeous young self,” the witch told me, taking the drained vial away.

I returned to my chamber where the witches kept me if I wasn’t outside, and pondered on what she could have possibly meant by that.

The princess visited me again over the coming months, along with my father.

“Your mum’s having a hard time dealing with all this,” he admitted to me one visit.

“You mean Mother’s gathering help to reach the amount of gold the witches’ have asked for?” I asked.

“Erm, yeah, that,” Father said, looking slightly uncomfortable.

I beamed and looked at Rosanna who was still blushing from the kiss I had planted on her cheek when she had arrived. “I shall be out soon then,” I said, happily and surely, “And then Rosanna and I shall wed!”

A year after the princess’ first visit, I found Scooter hopping from flower to flower on the rose beds; a flower the fairies saved for special occasions.

“Should I ask what the celebration is?” I said to him, laughing at his goofy smile.

“Love!” he declared proudly. “Oh, isn’t it a wonderful thing, my lord?”

I laughed. "I should think so though I've never stumbled across as fairy quite so involved with the emotion before. Do tell."

"She has glorious red hair and freckles up her arms like me!" Scooter declared, picking a petal from a rose and waving it above his head joyously. "Her eyes remind me of the pond when it sparkles in the summer."

"Should she be as pretty on the inside?" I asked, wondering if I would get an answer.

"I certainly think so," he sighed. "I suppose I must bid farewell then, my lord." He didn't even sound upset.

"Why so?" I asked.

"Because your potion drinking days are up," Scooter answered before hopping away from me, flower to flower chanting, "Love! Love! Such a glorious-!" I didn't hear the last part as he slipped and fell into a tulip, pollen rising everywhere.

Curious as to what Scooter was saying, I turned to find a witch standing behind me.

Only she wasn't a witch. She was a young woman. A gorgeous young woman in a blue shirt with matching pants. "You ready to go home now, blossom?" This time she did sound motherly.

Confused, I let her lead me back into the witches' house which had transformed into some kind of large building. Inside – where I had expected to find witches – were more young women in the same outfits.

But I wasn't looking at them. Instead I focused on my princess who waited for me by the door. Only she wasn't a princess, she was just a young girl of seventeen – my age, I realized. Her loose fitting jeans suited her more than the royal blue dress had done but her golden hair still hung around her face. I barely noticed my mother and father – my mum and dad waiting behind her as she made her way over to me.

Wrapping her arms around me, it suddenly all made sense; the witches being nurses; the potion being my medication; Scooter no doubt, being a silly representative of my shallow side. But by pretending to be part of my world, Rosie had helped me on the road to recovery. She had saved me.

“I'm so glad your better, Duncan,” she whispered, her breath hot in my ear. “Now let's go home.”

From behind her I heard my mum shout, slicing through mine and Rosie's bliss, “And no more of this marriage talk!”

The End