**LOVE FOUND IN CINDERS**

A Backwards Fairy Tale

By. Marinela Ortiz

From the Back:

Sidney has a special power inherited by his dead father. He is able to use rainbow colored flames that can come out at will or in emotional distress.Despite having this power and hoping to become a Court Wizard, his stepmother and twin stepbrothers always keep him cleaning their home, cook food, and run their café attached to their home.

Alexa is seen as the princess that is supposed to serve everyone and marry a prince. Just when she is brought home a new fiancé by her father, she wants someone better. After seeing Sidney at a garden party and then at the café later on, she can’t seem to stop thinking about him. Will she ever get the man she loves or marry someone she doesn’t? Can she do it before the ball strikes twelve?

This story is the first in a new series with magical hijinks in a new version of the classic Cinderella story.r

Note from the Author:

As a little girl, I always loved fairy tales and always loved watching the Disney princesses the most! One of the first Disney movies I’ve ever watched was *Cinderella* since it dealt with from being someone who has worked most of her life and become a princess. I even enjoyed watching *Ever After* even more since it took that same story of Cinderella to make it more unique and had one of my fave actresses, Drew Barrymore, play the lead role and she did it well. Now, I will be continuing that story but make it more interesting by putting a spin by turning Cinderella into a male character that is also magical. I bring you backwards Fairy Tale: Love Found in Cinders!

This book is dedicated to my dear friend, Dameon Alexander. He always believed in getting things done and being fabulous. He was loud and he also honest with things and not afraid of saying them. I miss him dearly.

Chapter 1

Sidney

*“Sid! Sid!”* I heard in the distance.

*“Who’s there!?”* I called out and then looked up to see darkness surrounding a maze. It looked like hedges at first but they looked wrong to me.

I heard the voice again and tried to find the source of the voice. I went down so many corridors and tried to call out, “Where are you?”

*“Sid! Help!”* I heard and then a scream rang out.

*“Wait!”* I yelled and then I heard a meow and then a paw hit me in the face.

“Ow! What the hell!?” I yelled and got up to find my cat, Jacques, lying on the floor. “Oh no! I am so sorry Jacques!”

He meowed and looked up at me and then I saw his bowl empty.

“What time is it?” I asked and checked my alarm clock in my little alcove next to the hearth. I saw it was about to ring in two minutes and then turned off the bells. “Another day of cleaning, cooking, and opening the café.”

I knew if I don’t get breakfast going then some complaints would be heard and not just from customers.

“Hey cinders! Are you making breakfast yet?” I heard one of my stepbrothers yell down from the upstairs floor.

“Yeah! I am feeding Jacques first and then I will start on it!” I yelled back.

“Better hurry up! I’m feeling anemic this morning!” I heard the other one.

“Yeah, yeah! Just hold on a minute you brat!” I called back up.

I heard some grunts since I knew my twin stepbrothers, Jason, and Nathan, always hated that even when we were kids. They keep calling me “Cinders” because when I was kicked out of my bedroom after my stepbrothers and stepmother moved in before my father died, we didn’t have much room and had to make do. I was even jealous that my father got to stay with my stepmother upstairs.

One morning, I was sleeping a bit too close to the hearth and turned and screamed in pain and had a burn scar ever since.

“And don’t forget my tea!” I heard my stepmother, Serafino, call out.

I sighed and then went to the main kitchen area and grabbed the tea pot and got water into it.

“Here it is, plum flower.” I said and put a tea bag into the teacup and heard the whistle after a few minutes as I prepared the crepes and grabbed it from the wood burning stove.

“Here you go!” I exclaimed as I appeared with the food a moment later and brought it to the nook where they sat.

“Yes!” both brats exclaimed and started digging in.

“Thank you, Sidney! Your cooking is delicious as ever.” Seraphina said as I placed her plate in front of her.

I always wondered how my father fell for this woman after my mother died. He was always talented even with the rainbow flames he was known for. He was a court wizard before which if you had magic in town you have to be registered with the court so they can keep count. I do have the magic myself except I failed and Serafina always berated me and told me to stop using my magic except it can rear its head if I get too angry but I can keep it under control. Despite how it reminds her of my father.

“Hurry boys, opening time is fast approaching and we want the café look its best!” Seraphina exclaimed.

*Or have me make it look good.* I thought to myself as I ate my breakfast.

We all finished up and I washed the dishes and joined everyone in the café that was attached to the house. I sighed and said, “Let’s do this.”

The doors opened for the new day of business.

Alexa

I woke up to a new day in my room at the castle. I felt as though the sun kissed me with its rays but at the same time, I felt suffocated.

“Good morning!” I heard and looked up to see my adopted sister, Gina, with my maid, “Tessa, at my bedside.

“Good morning.” I said and yawned as I got out of bed.

“So, do you want to wear a dress or your usual top and pants?” Tessa asked.

“Pants please.” I answered and headed for the bathroom.

“Alexa, you should really wear a dress to welcome Father back!” Gina complained.

“Wait, Father’s coming back?” I asked and turned at them.

“Yes, Bartholomew handed me the letter this morning.” Tessa answered as she handed me the letter.

I opened the envelope and saw that it was his handwriting and that he is returning that evening.

“Oh man! I never thought it was so soon!” I exclaimed.

I felt a bit of dread since I know he would be talking about marriage again. I know most girls would love the idea of being princess except it can be suffocating at times.

Yes, the dresses, the maids, and being able to live in the castle sounds amazing but to me it’s not so much. I prefer wearing a pair of slacks and a light blouse for comfort. A pair of boots over heels, which I want to toss out the window and go bare foot. Except it always falls on deaf ears when it comes to dear old dad.

“Morning princess!” I heard my court wizard and best childhood friend, Jasper, exclaim.

He appeared with his usual indigo gown, glasses that he always wears, and his light brown, curly hair.

“You can call me Alexa.” I reminded him.

“Except a court wizard should use formalities.” He said.

“I know but you have been my childhood friend before you became the wizard here.” I told him and went behind my changing screen.

“I know but like everyone else I have to address you as “princess” instead of your name.” he said.

I sighed as I changed into the pants suit that was chosen out for me. I stepped out and looked out over the town below from my window and said, “I wonder how the town looks when my father returns.”

“Probably going mad, especially when we have sent an order for the tarts from the Morning Dew Drop Café that everyone seems to love around here.” Gina said.

“I bet it’s a wonderful place.” I said.

“You know you have your responsibilities here even with the king gone.” Jasper said.

I remember all the consulting the bookkeepers, making sure the servants do their chores, and the guards are in tip top shape in protecting the castle every morning, afternoon, and night. Except that I sometimes sneak out to do a bit of swordplay against the guards without anyone knowing.

“Shall we make sure the preparations for Father’s return are good to go?” Gina asked me.

“Yes,” I said and the three of us left the room to see about everything being ready for the king’s return.

Chapter 2

Sidney

“Sir! I would love a muffin!” I heard a woman exclaim.

“A refill on my tea!” another woman exclaimed.

“I want to know your latest special!” a man called out.

“Just a minute!” I responded and ran to fill the orders.

“Keep it up Cinders!” Nathan called out.

I twitched at that nickname I really resented.

“I really hate it when they call me that, especially in front of our customers.” I muttered to myself as I made someone’s latte and delivered it to them.

“I wonder why we’re getting so much business.” Seraphina asked.

“Didn’t you hear?” a woman asked.

“Huh?” both twins asked.

“The king is coming back to town and rumor has it he is bringing a prince for the princess to marry.”!” she answered.

“You don’t say!” both twins exclaimed.

That was when the door opened a man in fancy attire came walking in.

“Message for the café.” He said and handed official stationery.

“What is it?” I asked.

She saw the address and went wide-eyed and said, “It’s from the palace!”

Everyone was surprised.

“What does the residents at the palace want?” Nathan asked.

She opened up the envelope and took a read and then read it aloud, “Dear Morning Dew Drop Café! You are receiving this order for three dozen of your famous tarts! We have heard many reports from the citizens about these delectable pastries and want them served tomorrow during the afternoon tea party that is being held for the king’s return!”

“Amazing!” the twins exclaimed.

“What’s amazing? “I asked as I finally took my break from serving everybody in the café.

“The palace has requested an order of our tarts to be delivered tomorrow and you must make them!” Seraphina answered.

“What? How many?” I asked.

“A dozen of all three we serve.” Jason answered.

“Wait a second mother, what about the new vanilla and fig ones that are being tested? Should we try to have those made as part of the order to see how people like them? “Nathan asked since he remembered we were trying a new recipe to go with the ones that we already make.

“That is a good idea! We should include survey cards to see if we get to make more for the café!” she exclaimed.

I looked at the tarts we had in the case and sighed as I said, “Man this will take all night and all day to make.”

“Exactly!” both twins exclaimed as they appeared behind me.

I screamed in surprise and asked, “How do you do that!?”

They giggled a bit and walked off.

“Sidney, you better start on the order once we close down for the night, got it?” Seraphina asked.

“Yes ma’am.” I spoke.

*If only we had a staff to help, this entire order would be easier to make and delivered.* I thought as I headed back into the kitchen to get cookies out of the oven. I even looked at where the palace stood and sighed with a thought about the royalty up there being so laid back and having their own servants on hand and foot.

“Excuse me! I would like a table for four!” I heard.

“Coming!” I said and gathered some menus to help the new guests that arrived.

Chapter 3

Alexa

I stood in the foyer waiting for Father’s arrival. I was so nervous from seeing again which I never had been before. I heard the trumpets blare in the air and I saw the footmen appear and the carpet roll toward us.

I rolled my eyes at this since this kind of procession seems to be a joke since he is just a normal guy to me. Sure, he took up the throne when his best friend died from a disease and didn’t have any heirs to rely on. I didn’t like the idea of this since it felt unfair for someone to take the throne when they were just an advisor rather than a prince.

“Here he comes!” Gina exclaimed.

I saw him in his royal purple robes with our family crest on the cape. I felt some tears come to my eyes since he was so gorgeous and young looking with his flowing, wavy dark blonde hair and his deep aqua eyes glinted in the lamps that hung from the ceiling. It made him more like a faerie king than a human one.

“Alexa! Gina! Come to daddy!” he exclaimed and held out his arms and we ran and hugged him. “I miss you both so much!”

“We miss you too!” Gina exclaimed.

I nodded.

He let go of us and looked at Jasper and said, “You kept them protected as usual?”

“Yes sir! Don’t worry, they were in good hands!” he exclaimed and then caused a small spark from his hands and his wizard’s cap went into flame.

“Jasper!” I exclaimed and he smelled the smoke and used a water spell on it.

“Sorry!” he said nervously.

We both giggled.”

You need to know how to harness your magic a lot better Jasper.” Our father said.

“Working on it! Even potions are being worked on.” He said with a slight blush to his face.

“No matter, you may have some help in that training all thanks to the wizard that came with our guest.” Father said.

“Guest?” I asked.

“Yes, which I want you to meet when he arrives.” Father said.

“What do you mean by guest? You didn’t mention it in the letter you sent.” Gina said.

“Well, this is for your sister actually.” He said as he led us towards the dining room area where we saw Bartholomew, the butler, was pouring wine for him.

“Thank you, Bartholomew!”

“You’re welcome sir!” he exclaimed and bowed and then noticed us. “Ah, Princess Alexa, you look beautiful as always!”

“You think so? I thought a dress would’ve looked better on her instead of her usual pants suit.” Gina said.

“Gina!” I exclaimed.

“I would agree but Alexa is old enough to choose her clothes Gina.” Bartholomew told her.

I sighed in relief and had a silent thank you towards Bartholomew since he understands what I go through as a princess.

“Please don’t snap at my daughters.” Father told him.

Which turned into sadness since my father can’t see how suffocating it can get.

“Sorry sire!” Bartholomew said and left.

“Alexa, you’re seventeen and usually you would be looking for a suitor as your prince but it seems like you haven’t been doing that while I was away.” Father started.

“No sir, I have been so busy with doing my duties in order to keep the palace in order.” I said with a slight cringe.

“Which I appreciate dearly but it is time for you to have a husband and that is why I brought home a suitable bachelor for you.” He spoke.

“Huh?” I asked.

“Nikolai? Are you here?” he called out.

I turned and saw a guy around my age with soft, blue eyes and short, blonde hair that reminded me of cornfields. He wore a shirt that had ruffles around the collar and sleeves with a black jacket on top that shown his family crest.

“Hello there! I am Nikolai Archer!” he said.

I slightly blushed in embarrassment and said, “Hello there! I’m Alexa.”

“I’m glad to meet you Princess!” he exclaimed and kissed my hand.

*Oh boy! This is going to be a long visit, isn’t it?* I thought.

Chapter 4

Alexa

After having dinner with father, Gina, and Nikolai that evening, I was called to Father’s study for a private talk. I can tell that he is liking this guy and just ignored my discomfort.

The door opened and he came in and hugged me as he said, “So sorry to keep you waiting!”

“It’s okay Father, I understand you were keeping the prince company.” I told him.

“Of course, especially when he’s going to be your husband!” he exclaimed.

“Right.” I said with a nervous tone.

He went to his desk and filled a glass with wine and said, “I thought with this engagement that we should also have a ball.”

“A ball?” I asked and turned around to face him. “You don’t have to! Engagements should be more private instead of being flamboyant!”

“Alexa, you are my true daughter and I want to see you happy while I’m still alive.” He spoke.

“Still, shouldn’t we have it private? What if I don’t like him and the ball wouldn’t go so well?” I tried to ask.

“Why wouldn’t you not like him? He has a lot of personality!”

I groaned a little and said, “I don’t like the idea of having a guy brought to me hoping to get married in order to make me happy.”

“But it is tradition according to the last king that the heir must marry at seventeen.” He told me.

I felt my heart sank since his best friend, King Javier, was the last king and did have many rules to go by even with the whole wizards are to be advisors and protectors to the prince and princess, which Jasper practiced hard to be my wizard.

“So, that is why the ball will be in two weeks’ time to give you enough time to get to know Nikolai.” He spoke.

“Yes Father, if you want me to get to know him and be able to see how I feel about him then I will try.” I spoke.

“Thank you.” He spoke.

I left the room and walked down the hall towards the stairs leading up to my room. I felt as though that this was making me suffocate even more. I decided to head outside onto my balcony and looked over at the town below.

“It feels so good to be out here.” I spoke.

“I bet it does!” I heard and saw Jasper.

“Jasper!” I exclaimed in surprise.

“Don’t mind me! I used my levitation spell!” he said and stood on the balcony right next to me. “What’s wrong? It seems like your father slapped you or something.”

“Not quite, I felt like he did when he not only brought me Nikolai to marry me but wants to have a ball to announce the engagement.” I spoke.

“No way!” he exclaimed.

“Yes, it feels more awkward that I have to smile in front of the kingdom with this guy calling himself “prince” right next to me and to dance with me in the ballroom.”

“I guess you’re really uncomfortable about this?”

“Yes, of course I am!” I said and looked at the sky.

“Even if your father wants you to be happy?” Jasper asked me.

“The only way I can be happy is if I find love in my own way with someone who can understand me a lot better than anyone and lets me out and about like in that town I always see from here.” I said and pointed at it and even noticed a bright light in the distance. “Especially with that light in the distance.”

“You will get there someday.” I heard him say.

*I will go there, I know it.* I thought.

Chapter 5

Sidney

After the doors closed for the evening, I started to look at the tarts we have and went to the café’s kitchen to examine them and their recipes.

“Cinders! Some dinner please?” Nathan called out.

“Make it yourself!” I yelled back.

“But it’s too hard!” he called back.

“Besides, you do a better job at cooking around here.” Jason said.

“Damn it.” I muttered and went into the house’s kitchen and started to cook dinner for them.

*All they want to do is just order me around like their servant.* I thought as I cooked and then my fire magic sputtered a purple flame.

“Shit!” I exclaimed and put out the fire quick.

“What was that down there? Do I smell something burning?” Seraphina asked.

“No! Just had a bit of a mishap with the stove!” I called back as I tossed the food I made before and started again and made chicken and vegetables for them and me since I was starving after a long day of waiting tables.

“MMM! Delicious as ever!” the twins exclaimed.

I sighed in relief.

“Now Sidney, you must fill in that tarts order.” Seraphina said.

“Yes ma’am, I even started looking at the recipes.” I told her.

“You also will be delivering them along with the survey cards.” She spoke.

“What?” I asked and sputtered my drink.

“You heard her Cinders!” Jason exclaimed.

“Can’t the twins deliver them?” I asked.

“We’re needed here to run the café!” Nathan exclaimed.

I groaned and said, “Fine, I will take the truck.”

“Good boy!” she exclaimed.

I trudged back to the kitchen in the café and started to work on the order. I went through the entire place to find the fig preservatives so I could make the new tarts perfect and even made an extra for myself for tasting. I was amazed with what my exhaustion could pull together after making the raspberry and white chocolate ones.

“Okay, next is the apple and cream cheese ones.” I said and went to look for the cream cheese containers and saw that we were out. “Why now?”

I went into the refrigerator in the storage area and found one but it was expired.

“Oh man! If I don’t get these made perfectly then the business will die.” I said and then noticed something above and saw a huge container of honey. “I think I have an idea.”

I know it’s not perfect but when the royals expect apple tarts then I make sure they are made!

By dawn, the order was finished and I packaged them all in our signature delivery boxes.

“Okay, one dozen of each of our three tarts and the newest one.” I spoke.

I had to keep the apple ones having honey instead of cream cheese a secret.

“Good! Also, make sure you bring these back all filled out.” Seraphina said and handed me a huge pile of survey cards.

“Of course!” I said and took them along with pens that advertised the café too.

“Here!” I heard and saw Nathan starting to carry one of the boxes to the truck in the back.

“Nathan?” I asked.

“You worked all night on these so you should at least have some help.” He said as I followed with one of the other boxes.

We got the other two boxes into the truck and I got into the driver’s seat and said, “Thanks for the help!”

“This should also help! I snagged it from the pot that was being made by mom.” He said and handed me a thermos and I knew what it was.

“Thanks.” I spoke.

“And to help with hunger.” He said and handed me napkin wrapped around some biscuits.

“I thought you were a brat like your brother but I guessed wrong.”

“Don’t get used to it! I am supposed to treat you like a servant like Jason and mom.” He spoke.

“Nathan!” Jason called.

“Get going! The royals are expecting those for the afternoon!” he told me.

I nodded and closed the door and drove off and headed north towards the castle.

Chapter6

Alexa

“Ow! That hurts!” I exclaimed as I felt the pins go into the gown that was brought to me that morning.

I was pretty ticked off when I saw it since I was going to wear a pants suit for this afternoon’s garden tea party but saw a note saying, “I thought you would look so beautiful in this for the tea party!” from Father.

It was very simple in an olive-green color with a few butterflies stitched in. I tried it on and felt it too loose and called on the maid servants for help.

“If you keep on moving then you will be a pin cushion instead of a princess!” one of the servants exclaimed.

I nodded in understanding.

The servants finished up with the dress and I headed downstairs for breakfast. I saw Nikolai talking with Gina while Jasper was talking to a man right next to him.

“Who is Jasper talking to?” I asked Bartholomew.

“Good morning princess!”

I cleared my throat.

“I mean Alexa! That is Irvine, he is Nikolai’s wizard and apparently Jasper is having a really animated conversation with him.” Bartholomew told her.

I neared the table and heard Gina and Nikolai laugh together.

“Morning sis!” Gina said as I sat down next to Nikolai.

“I guess my fiancé had a very peaceful sleep?” Nikolai asked.

“Yes.” I lied.

Throughout the night I was tossing and turning from thoughts of marrying this guy and how I may not like him, even nervous about the ball and how things will go with that!

“Ah, the sweet dreams are as sweet as mine.” He said and tried to kiss my hand but avoided it.

This brought a reaction to him and he asked, “Why?”

“Sorry, I usually don’t let anyone kiss my hand.” I answered hurriedly.

“We’re betrothed, you should at least give me a chance.” He spoke.

“Uh, in public I guess.” I said nervously and started to pour myself some coffee.

“Your father has told me about how you’re really different, as in you wearing pants suits, sparring against the knights with swords, and so on.”

I felt a major blush climbing up my neck since I always enjoyed having fun with our knights and the freedom of not having a skirt on.

“For now, on, you will act accordingly around me.” Nikolai said.

That got me mad and said, “Look, we’re not married yet and you shouldn’t order me around like that! I don’t know what exactly what my dad said to you but I’m old enough to be someone I want to be.” I spoke.

“Which you shouldn’t.” he said.

“Oh please, I will see you afternoon.” I said and left the table and headed back upstairs.

“Alexa!” I heard.

I got to my room and sulked for a bit. I heard a knock and called out, “Come in!”

The door opened and Jasper came in with my coffee and a plate with some mini quiches.

“Bartholomew gave me these to give to you.”

I smiled as I took them.

“I know you don’t like this but you should just play along.” Jasper said.

I sighed and said, “I know but I don’t feel that I should marry yet, or at least look for someone who fits me more than Nikolai.”

“I agree, I’m not even liking Irvine, I felt he ignored me.”

“That’s a bit odd.”

He nodded and said, “No matter, just fake this whole ordeal if need be.”

“Which I have to so father can be happy.”

“Right, I should head back to my quarters, see you this afternoon.”

I sipped my coffee and wondered if I do have a prince out there.

Sidney

“Where do I go next?” I asked as I drove around the castle grounds.

I have never been on castle grounds before so finding the area felt like a huge maze. I did notice a guard stopping since he saw me driving around by the looks of it.

“Excuse me, do you need help?” he asked after I rolled the window down.

“Yes, I am delivering the tarts from the Morning Dew Drop Café.”

“You can find the party with the big tent over there.” The guard answered and pointed to his right where I saw a huge tent being built.

“Thanks!” I exclaimed and rolled the window back up.

“Man, this feels magical.” I said as I watched the maids and kitchen staff preparing the tables for the gathering.

“Are those the tarts?” I heard and turned to see what looked like a butler.

“Oh yes! I have your order of tarts including a new flavor.” I spoke.

*Hoping that people won’t notice the difference in the apple ones.* I thought to myself as I brought out the boxes.

“A new flavor?” he asked.

“Yes, I’m also supposed to be here on request of the owner to get survey cards filled out.” I said and held them.

He gave a slight sniffle and said, “Very well! We normally don’t have the workers stay around for the palace gatherings but if you insist for business related things then very well.”

I sighed in relief and said, “Thank you.”

I put the tarts on the huge table and unpacked them which maids took them to set them on plates.

“Whoa, I needed to unpack them on the…” I started.

“We have our own plates to give to guests, sir.” She spoke.

*What a snob.* I thought.

She looked at my face and noticed my scar and asked, “Did you hit yourself or something? You have a major red spot.”

“Um, it’s a scar that I got from a burn.” I answered.

“Better cover that up before guests arrive! We don’t want anyone to be in disgust!” she exclaimed.

“But…”

“You heard me young man!” she snapped.

“Very well.” I said with a sigh and left.

I walked down the halls to look for a bathroom but bumped into another guard, “Excuse me, where’s the bathroom?”

“This way.” He said and led me to it.

I did see some powder in a dish and said, “Thinking that this would be a men’s bathroom that they would put something like this.”

I managed to cover the scar as best as I could despite it being too light for my skin.

“That will do.” I said and left the room to head back outside.

Chapter 7

Alexa

The party started on time as noon struck on the clock. I felt so bored at the table I was sitting at with Ms. Petterbowl was talking up a storm. I gave her my smiles as I listened to her story about her husband going out to play croquet as she stayed home doing cross stitch.

“So, I ran out of blue thread and had to get a new spool in a hurry before my granddaughter had to pick it up in the morning!” she continued.

“That’s great!” I exclaimed and then looked at my cup that was still full. “I think has gotten cold!”

“Oh dear! You better drink it up!” she exclaimed.

I started to drink it as she kept chatting.

“Having fun princess?” I heard Bartholomew ask as Ms. Petterbowl left my table to go and chat up another storm with one of father’s friends.

“Somewhat.” I said and then felt my stomach rumble. “I’m so hungry!”

“Here.” he said and handed me a sandwich.

“Much better!” I said as I started to eat.

“I wonder where Nikolai could be?” he asked.

“I think he’s somewhere chatting about his town or something with someone.” I answered since I remembered he got pulled aside by some of the guards’ sons as we entered the party together.

“These tarts are delightful!” I heard from a table next to me.

“Thanks! Please…” a guy around my age started.

“Even the apple ones are amazing! What else is in it?” a woman asked.

“Well, they have honey and apple.” He spoke.

I got up and walked over and asked, “Excuse me can I try?”

He turned to me and said with a smile, “Sure!”

I looked into his eyes and felt my heart thumping and didn’t see the plate being handed to me as he said, “Here you go.”

“Um Alexa….” Another voice came in.

“Huh?” I asked and saw Gina.

“He is handing you the plate.” She spoke.

“Oh thanks!” I exclaimed and took it.

“Enjoy and fill out this survey card! My boss would appreciate it!” he said and left with the tray of tarts.

“Who was that?” I asked.

“Not sure but he has too much powder on.” Gina said.

“Gina, don’t make fun of him with that.” I said and then took a bite and tasted the sweet flavors of apple and honey. “Oh man! These are delicious! I wonder if there are more like these!”

I ran off to the table with the spread of food and found the guy reloading the tray with more tarts and said, “Hey! Can I have more of those tarts?”

“I guess you really enjoyed yours?”

“Yeah, are you from that café that made them?”

“Yes! That survey card has the name on it in case you want to visit.” He said as he put another.

I did notice what Gina was talking about and asked, “Did you mean to cover up something with that powder?”

“Huh? What do you mean?” he asked.

“It’s like that powder doesn’t match.” I spoke.

“Um, it’s a scar that I had to cover up due to the castle staff, here is a fig and vanilla tart. It is our newest flavor.” He told me and handed me the tart.

“Really?” I asked and took a bite and smiled.

“You have a pretty smile.” I heard him say.

“Really?” I asked.

I felt my heart soar a bit more since I rarely hear anyone say anything about my looks besides being asked about my wardrobe.

“Alexa!” I heard and knew it was Nikolai.

He saw him too and stood silent as he came closer.

“I have been looking all over for you!” he exclaimed with a cheerful voice.

“Sorry, I came to get more tarts from this young fellow.” I answered.

“Tarts?” he asked and noticed the tray and took one to take a bite. “Ugh! Who puts figs and vanilla together?”

This made the waiter mad and said, “How dare you? These are the finest tarts in town!”

“I say that there should’ve been another café or bakery for the palace to order than these if you think these are the finest here!” Nikolai exclaimed.

“No other bakery would match up to my stepmother’s masterpiece!” the waiter yelled and pointed.

Out of nowhere, I saw blue flames come out of his finger and it hit Nikolai on his shoulder and he screamed.

Guards came over to help to put out the flames and then heard, “I am so sorry!”

“It’s okay!” I yelled.

“Enjoy the rest of the tarts and have everyone fill out the cards so I will come back to retrieve them!” he yelled and ran off.

I looked at the card that was in my pocket and saw the name, “Morning Dew Drop Café.”

“Is he a wizard?” I asked myself.

“Alexa!” I heard Jasper exclaim and saw him run over.

“Jasper?”

“Did something happen? I just saw the guards help Prince Niko out.” He spoke.

“I’m fine, just enjoyed some tarts.” I answered.

“I wonder if someone decided to sabotage the party.” We heard and saw Nikolai’s wizard, Irvine, a tall man with dark silver hair and forest green eyes.

“No, he is just a waiter that might have knocked over a candle?” I asked.

“Silly princess, there are no candles out here.” Irvine said.

“Well, not sure what happened but I am sure that the prince was helped out.” I said and walked away.

I knew I saw a blue fireball hit Niko, if it was then I must see this guy again!

Chapter 8

Sidney

I got back to the truck and I was gasping from running so much and dodging the guards in case they got a glimpse of my face.

“That was close.” I said and then looked at myself in the mirror and saw the powder starting to come off due to the sweat that drenched my face. “I guess that didn’t last too long.”

I was surprised that my temper was lost so easily and that my magic would come out with it. I feel as though that I should be practicing it more to control it like dad had done when I was a baby so he wouldn’t hurt me.

“I hope I can get back in to get those cards back once the party has ended.” I spoke.

Another hour went on and then saw some of the guests leaving the garden. I knew that it had ended and saw the tents collapsing to put away. I got out of the truck and headed back to retrieve the decorative trays I brought with me.

“Excuse me!” I heard.

I looked up and saw a guy with red hair and wearing a wizard’s robe and asked, “How may I help you?”

“I was wondering if you were the one who left these?” he asked and handed over the survey cards with handwriting on them.

“Yes! I did! Sorry if I ran off suddenly, I felt a stomach cramp coming on.” I lied.

“I understand! The princess wanted me to give these back since she and the rest of the guests enjoyed the tarts we ordered.” He told me.

Princes!? That was the princess!?

“Thanks for giving them to me! I should be heading back!” I said nervously and got back to the truck to put the trays in the back and placed the stack of cards into the glove compartment.

*No way! She was the princess and I didn’t know it?* I thought as I started the truck and drove off.

I got back home as the sun set on the horizon. I got the trays into the dishwasher and went to Seraphina’s office on the second floor where she was looking over the receipts from the past two days.

“Welcome back Sidney.” She said as I walked in.

“Here you go!” I said and handed her the stack.

“Thank you.” She said as she took them.

“Anything else?” I asked.

“No, except I did notice that there was a container of cream cheese that was supposed to be used for the apple tarts.” She spoke.

“It expired stepmother.” I spoke.

She looked up at me with raised eyebrows and asked, “Expired? How could that be?”

“I did use something else.” I spoke.

“What do you mean by something else? Apple and cream cheese tarts are one of our most popular tarts!” she yelled.

“Except the cream cheese expired and I had to make a quick fix by using honey and people loved them even more.” I told her.

“Get out!” she yelled.

“Huh?” I asked.

“Get out of here!” she yelled and I ran out of the office before she threw a flowerpot.

I got outside as she kept on screaming at the top of her lungs about how I ruined the tarts but I did remember how the guests at the tea party enjoyed them.

I heard a meow and saw Jacques come out of the shadows and over to me.

“Hey there Jacques.” I said and petted him. “I’m glad you’re not human and get emotional over having the best thing in town.”

He purred.

I looked around and then went into the field that was behind our house and then started to practice my magic. Even though it comes out when I get nervous or angry but practicing controlling it seems to relax me a bit, especially on a day like this.

As I made a plume of flame, I heard a person applauding and then heard, “I guess that is what they meant by “like father like son!”

I stopped and fell to the grass. I looked over to see Nathan looking over at me.

“Why are you here?”

“I heard mom yelling and knew it had to do with you.” He said and came over to help me up.

“I guess she’s still screaming?” I asked as I got up.

“She did for another minute and then relaxed.”

“I bet she doesn’t want me to fill any orders.”

“Not sure about that since she doesn’t send me nor Jason out to deliver things.”

“Why not? It would help me out even more.”

“It’s because we’re her precious babies and she preferred you doing anything.”

“Ever tried cooking for yourself for once?” I asked.

He smirked and said, “I did make one of the cookies and they came out amazing from one ingredient to the next.”

“Huh?”

He guided me to the storage room and he took out a box from the refrigerator and opened it to reveal the ginger snicker doodles and handed me one.

I took a bite and said, “Oh man that is amazing! Have you put them in the case?”

“No, this is the only batch I secretly made while she went off for a meeting downtown.”

“No wonder I smelled ginger root on you.”

“Yeah, I didn’t want to reveal that I have the cooking talent like you do.”

“You should sell these.”

“No, I’m afraid that I would be yelled at like you were for ruining the tart order.”

“I didn’t, I had to improvise and if she read the survey cards then your mother would know that everyone enjoyed them as much even the princess.”

“Huh? You’re saying the king’s daughter loved what you brought?”

“Yes, I didn’t even know it was her when her court wizard came to give me the cards after I embarrassed myself by using my magic.”

“What?”

I told him what had happened at the tea party with how I was talking with her and then the guy came over to make fun of our tarts, which caused me to throw a blue flame at his shoulder.

“Damn! That suck!” he exclaimed.

“You’re telling me!” I spoke.

“Oh Nathan!” we heard Jason call out.

“I better get going.” Nathan told me.

“Thanks for the cookie.” I told him.

“You know you should go for that court wizard exam again.” He told me.

“Yeah, I’m afraid of failing it again.”

“You’re smart Sid, don’t think you can just let one test tell you that alongside your talent.” He said and headed inside.

I let his words sink in and said, “Maybe you’re right except who knows when I will show up for that test with everything always falling onto my shoulders around here.”

Chapter 9

Alexa

I was surprised that Nikolai was okay even if it was a slight burn. I did meet up with Jasper and told him about the guy with the blue flame.

“So, with this person you described to me he used fire magic?” Jasper asked.

“Yes.” I said as I watched him putting fresh potion ingredients into jars.

“This is a disaster, who knows what kind of gossip may spread.” He spoke.

“Except I made sure the party was under control since the guards contained everything.” I spoke.

“And yet that guy ran off.” Jasper said.

“Princess, your father would like to see you.” I heard Tessa.

“Oh man.” I said and left the room and headed for father’s quarters.

I found him behind his desk and asked, “You would like to see me?”

“You made a complete fool out of yourself today.” He spoke.

“I’m sorry father! I won’t do anything so embarrassing again.” I spoke.

“Nikolai is mad that you talked with someone behind his back, a wizard no less.” He spoke.

I thought to the magic and said, ““Not exactly sure, he’s just a café worker.”

I kept on thinking about him and how much my heart raced since he seemed different from Nikolai.

“I hope he doesn’t show up at your engagement ball!” he exclaimed.

I stood silent and then went to my room where I went to my window to look over the town again.

“I guess the princess got scolded?” I heard Jasper ask.

“Like you wouldn’t believe!” I spoke.

“He is just looking out for you like I do.” He spoke.

“I know.”

“Which I did hand those survey cards to that guy if you’re wondering.”

“Thanks! I don’t want his café go out of business all thanks to one bad visit to a tea party.”

“You know that café is on the edge of town, right?”

“Really? Are you suggesting something?”

“Maybe, you always wanted to leave the castle so maybe you should give them a visit.”

“Jasper Alchemy! You bad, bad, bad boy!”

He laughed and said, “I want you to be happy and I did see your face light up when I asked if you worried about him.”

I blushed and said, “Not sure Jasper, he seems so genuine and doesn’t have to over dramatize everything like Nikolai did today.”

“Yeah, why marry that guy when he acts like that?” he asked.

“You two shouldn’t be talking about Nikolai like that!” we heard Gina from behind.

“What? Little sis liking him?” I asked in a teasing tone.

She blushed and said, “No! Not at all!”

“Sure, you don’t!” I exclaimed.

“He is a really nice guy, Alexa; you should at least give him a chance.” Gina said.

“I don’t want to get married to a guy that is always dramatic.” I said and looked at the town again.

“I guess love is making you wise eh Alexa?” Jasper asked.

“

Maybe, I just want to see that guy again.” I spoke.

“Why not go tomorrow?” he asked.

“Not a bad idea! Gina, you’re coming with!” I exclaimed.

“What!?” she asked.

“You still know that doppelganger spell, do you?” I asked Jasper.

“Yep!” he exclaimed.

“Then it’s settled!” I exclaimed.

I slept that night with a huge smile on my face and woke up bright and early. I was relieved to find out that Nikolai went out for a day to cool his head off from what had happened the day before. I guess he didn’t like being upstaged by a guy who handed out very delicious pastries.

“Are you ready?” I asked Jasper once I finished putting my hair into a braid.

“Ready than I will ever be.” He answered.

“I’m not! What if Bartholomew comes up to check up on you?” Gina asked.

“Oh, come on now! Jasper thought about saying we were having a spa day.” I spoke.

She sighed and rolled her eyes.

Jasper casted the spell and two figures formed and they both looked like me and Gina.

“Okay, let’s go!” I exclaimed and took Gina by the wrist and we went through the hidden stairwell and got outside where the sun shone bright on us.

*Here I come Morning Dew Drop Café!* I thought as we started walking.

Chapter 10

Sidney

I woke up the next morning in my alcove in the kitchen and didn’t hear anything going on in the house. I had a feeling that Seraphina was still mad at me for changing one ingredient in the tarts.

*I don’t care if she is still mad, the crowd still love them.* I thought and got out of bed.

I got to the bathroom and showered and got dressed for the day. I made breakfast for myself and fed Jacques and felt at peace.

“This doesn’t feel right Jacques.” I said when I noticed that the twins didn’t even come down.

I placed the dishes into the dishwasher and got my apron on and ran to the café part and found it was open.

“Huh?” I asked.

I was shocked that the café was open and people were coming in and out. I had a feeling I wasn’t woken up in time for the opening and decided to run to where I had my alarm clock and found it nowhere.

“Where is it?” I asked myself and felt Jacques head-butt my arm. “Huh?”

He meowed and I saw my alarm clock with the wrong time on it and noticed the alarm was off.

“Those jerks!” I exclaimed.

“Aw, did someone sleep in?” I heard and looked up to see Nathan and Jason look at me with their million-dollar smiles.

“You two turned off my alarm did you because you were told to?” I asked.

“Us?” they both asked innocently.

“Why would we do something like that?” Jason asked.

I glared and got up and headed for the café to start working.

“Aw, we made him mad.” They said behind my back as they followed.

“Will you two shut up!?” I yelled and a purple flame flew out and they screamed as it flew towards them.

I heard, “Excuse me! We need help!”

I looked up and noticed the princess standing there with another girl. I felt the blood from my face drain and didn’t know my heart was pounding from not only shock but something else. I decided to grab some menus and went over to them and said, “Welcome to the Morning Dew Drop! Please follow me!”

I led them to a table near a window and knew that she was at the place where the tarts came from.

Alexa

“Excuse me! We need some help!” I called from our spot in the café.

We arrived at the café and noticed how busy it was. I was really surprised that someplace on the edge of town would be so famous all thanks to a little pastry!

“I understand the tarts were good but the waiting staff not so much.” Gina muttered.

“Welcome to the Morning Dew Drop! Please follow me!” I heard and that was when I saw the guy from yesterday come toward us.

I was shocked to see him there but he looked a little different from the day before because he had a scar on one cheek. I still felt my heart thump as we headed for our table and didn’t hear what he had to say since I was hearing my heart pounding.

“Alexa?” I heard Gina say and I snapped out of it. “Man, you seem to be in a trance.”

“Uh, sorry!” I exclaimed and looked at the menu and was surprised at the amount of food being offered.

“I am not sure what I want!” Gina exclaimed as she looked at the menu.

“I agree.” I said and then noticed the guy out of the corner of my eye talking to a customer.

*He is so good looking.* I thought to myself.

He noticed me looking and came back over and asked, “Do you know what you want?”

“

Um!” I exclaimed and looked at the menu and saw the tarts. “I would like the fig and vanilla tart with…um…a blueberry and rose tea!”

Gina looked at me weird and said, “You don’t like figs normally.”

I kicked her in the leg and cringed in pain.

“Very well.” He spoke.

Gina ordered a peony tea with a bear claw and we watched him go.

“Alexa, what is going on? It is like you’re losing your grip.” Gina said.

“It’s nothing! I’m just enjoying this place.” I spoke.

“Mmhmm! Right!” she said sarcastically.

Our food and drinks came and we ate in silence.

Chapter 11

Sidney

I couldn’t keep my eye off her because she was so radiant in the light the window gave off even in her hair. I never thought I would have the princess show up in my business. I felt like it was a fairy tale come true.

“What got you distracted?” the brats said in unison.

I tripped after they surprised me and the mud pies for one of the tables with a family fell on me.

“Whoops! You became a major klutz!” Jason said in a sing song voice.

“Are you okay?” Nathan asked as he helped me up.

“Why are you helping him?” Jason asked.

“Can it Jason! Take these to those kids!” Nathan exclaimed as he handed a new plate of mud pies.

“I don’t wait on customers like Cinders!” Jason exclaimed.

“Do it!” Nathan ordered.

Jason pouted and went into the café to take the plate.

“Thanks man.” I spoke.

“No problem, I still forgive you for that fireball earlier.” He said as he handed me a wet towel.

“Sorry, I was annoyed that my alarm clock was turned off.” I spoke.

“You know our mom told us to do that, right?” he asked.

“I should have known she would.” I said as I started to clean myself up.

“Yeah, she asked us to do it as revenge for the tarts but some people have asked about the apple and honey ones earlier.” He answered.

My eyes brightened at that and knew what I done was something that people enjoyed.

“I will convince her later on, just get cleaned up.” Nathan said.

I nodded with a smile and went to the bathroom.

Alexa

I tried to see if the guy would come around again to take another order but to bring some treats back for Jasper since he is watching our backs back home.

“Come on! We better get home!” Gina exclaimed.

I saw another guy approach with a tray and said, “Excuse me! I am waiting on our waiter with the red mark on his face!”

He grimaced a little and asked, “You mean Cinders?”

“Cinders?” I asked.

“Yeah, he got that name due to the burn on his face! He is a little tied up now, I don’t have time…” he started to say but another guy came and elbowed him.

“May I help you?” the look-alike asked.

“Yes, we need another order and the bill.” I spoke.

“Okay, tell me what you like.” He spoke.

“Those apple and honey tarts…” I started.

“Sorry! We sold out! We have others!” he said.

I looked down and said, “Okay, some of those fig and vanilla ones with a few of the bear claws.” I said in a slightly disappointed voice.

“Coming up.” The other boy said and we watched and walked away.

“Waiter!” we heard.

“Coming!” the one that stayed behind said and walked off.

“Man, I was hoping to get those tarts for Jasper.” I spoke.

“Are you sure you tried something like that? On the menu it says they are apple and cream cheese.” Gina said.

“Huh? I tasted honey yesterday.” I spoke.

“Maybe it was a mistake or a new thing they haven’t added to the menu from what I see.” Gina said.

The boy who went to take our order came back and said, “Here is the sweets and here is your bill.” He said in a snappy voice. “Hurry up! We’re a busy place after all.”

I took out my coin purse and paid for it and watched him go. Then I took out some more money and then took a pen from the table that was left behind and wrote on a napkin, “For the waiter with the scar on his face! Thank you!”

“Come on.” I said and got up with the container for Jasper.

Gina nodded and she followed and we both headed back for the castle.

Chapter 12

Sidney

I wiped off my hair and said, “Finally I got that cleaned off.”

I got out of the bathroom and saw the twins glare at me.

“Hey you two, what’s up?” I asked.

“You jerk! Those two girls asked for those tarts you messed up on!” Jason exclaimed.

“What did you say?” I asked since I realized that the princess was the one who asked for them.

“I said we sold out.” He said and walked off.

“I will talk to our mom about including them.” Nathan said after a moment.

“Huh?” I asked.

“Look man, you have done something that I haven’t expected to be popular overnight.” He spoke.

I smiled and said, “You’re welcome.” I spoke.

“Sidney! Tables need to be cleaned!” I heard Seraphina call out.

I sighed and headed back into the café area and started to clean some of the tables including the one table where the mud pies went to. Once I got to the table where she ate at, I noticed a note with a small pile of money underneath it and took it and read the note. I smiled since I knew it was for me and hid it in my pants pocket as I started to clean the table.

After the café closed for the day, I went to my alcove and hid the note away. I thought about how radiant she looked as she looked at the menu and smiled as I took her order and felt my heartbeat even more.

*I think I might be falling in love with her.* I thought to myself and felt some of the flames come out of my fingers.

“Oh crap!” I exclaimed as I put out the fire.

“Sidney, was that smoke?” I heard.

“Oh man!” I said under my breath. “Um, I am trying to make dinner now!”

I started to light up the stove and made it look like the smoke was going into the air and coughed.

“Better make it delicious!” I heard Jason call down from the second floor.

I groaned and started to cook.

Alexa

Gina and I decided to check out the other shops near the café and managed to pick up some tea and herbs for Jasper since he is working hard to keep our rouse together. We finally made it back by early evening and noticed that some guards were about to take up their evening shift. We ran towards the door that we took to leave the castle when we heard rustling g.

“Oh no.” Gina whispered.

“Hurry!” I exclaimed and we got into the stairwell before one of the guards caught us. We ran upstairs and found Jasper talking to Nikolai in my room.

“Crap.” I whispered.

“What is it?” Gina asked and saw through the small window. “Oh no.”

“I rest assure you Niko that Alexa will be down for dinner in the next few minutes!” Jasper exclaimed.

“She is! I have worried sick that she might have fallen ill from embarrassment when that café boy almost burned me to death.” Nikolai said.

*It was an accident.* I thought.

I remembered how that boy named Cinders I remembered how that boy, Cinders was it, helped us at the café and remembered his eyes lit up when I enjoyed what he brought yesterday to the party. It was like his eyes were little amber fireballs as they did.

“Well, she better hurry! I really want to see her!” Nikolai whined.

*Oh brother, why did Father pick him? He is such a whiny, pretty boy.* I thought to myself.

He left my room and we got into the room.

“Thank goodness! I had trouble trying to distract your future husband.” Jasper said when he saw us.

“He is not my future husband.” I groaned.

“Sorry.” He spoke.

“Here you go, we couldn’t get you the apple honey tarts because they said they didn’t carry them.” I said as I handed him the things we picked up.

“What? Those were delicious!” Jasper exclaimed.

“That what was we were told about them.” Gina said.

“At least you got me tea and herbs since it has been chilly in my room lately.” He spoke.

“Did anyone else tried to show up while we were gone?” Gina asked.

“Bartholomew did and I did tell him about the spa day thing and he left because he knew you wanted to be alone with Gina.” He answered.

“Good, at least he didn’t try to talk to me about Nikolai.” I spoke.

“I guess he wants you to follow your princess duties.” Jasper said.

I sighed and said, “Except I don’t like the idea of having an arranged marriage after seeing what you had to go through just now.”

“I guess you saw through the window.” Jasper said.

I nodded.

“Well, he has been pining after you, I would say paint your nails quick and get down to dinner.” Jasper said.

I nodded and grabbed my favorite polish and gave my nails a quick coat and had Jasper use a quick dry spell. Gina did the same thing and Jasper dried her nails and we all went downstairs to meet up with everyone else for dinner.

Chapter 13

Alexa

I had to keep my smile on my face as Nikolai and my father talked about the ball that was supposed to be taking place in a few days. I really wanted to say that I didn’t want this ball nor marry Nikolai, especially with what I witnessed through the stairwell’s window.

“What do you think dear?” my father asked me.

“What?” I asked.

“Having flower boats with candles floating in the fountains?” he asked.

I smiled and said, “That would be lovely.”

“Good, I will have designs drawn for our pottery makers.” He spoke.

We kept on eating and I nodded in response to keep my annoyance away even through dessert.

I finally reached my room and went face first into the pillow on my bed. I groaned from all the annoyances of the day.

I felt my mind drift back to Cinders with his smile, his kindness, and how much he was working that afternoon.

I didn’t feel sleep coming and felt like I needed some exercise. I went into my closet and changed into the tunic and pants the guards wear when they were practicing their sword play and appeared at their quarters.

“Princess!” one of them exclaimed.

“Hey there Thicket! I guess everyone is on high alert?” I asked when I noticed there was a smaller group than the last time I came down.

“Somewhat, we have to make sure the castle doesn’t come under anyone who wants to oppose your father.” Thicket said.

“Right.” I said and then looked at one of the swords and took into my hand. “This looks new.”

“The Blacksmith has been hard at work to keep our weapons in good condition.” He spoke.

“I want to practice with this.” I said.”

“Whoa their missy, shouldn’t you see one of the fencing swords?” one of the other guards asked.

“Do

You want to see how well I fight?” I asked.

“Very well! I won’t go easy.” He spoke.

We took our places and heard the signal. The both of us started to fight sword on sword. As we fought, I felt like a new person and kept my defenses up as my opponent came at me. I was so in tuned that I didn’t notice until I heard someone clear their throat.

I turned to see Nikolai.

“Nikolai? What are you doing here?” I asked.

“I decided to walk the palace grounds, I guess you chose to brawl as a man?” he asked.

I went to him and said, “I couldn’t sleep.”

“Oh really? You shouldn’t be down here playing swords with your guards even when you’re married.” He spoke.

“What if someone decides to attack?” I asked.

I have been making sure I defended myself when a siege happened but due to luck on all our sides, we hadn’t any issues.

I sighed and put the sword down and started to walk off.

“Hey man, she was okay.” Thicket said.

“She could’ve gotten hurt!” Nikolai yelled and then followed me out.

As I walked, I heard him call out my name and I turned around glaring at him.

“Will you shut up!?” I yelled.

“But Alexa, I was looking out for you!” he exclaimed.

“You don’t understand! I may be a princess but there are times I want to get away and enjoy myself.” I argued.

“Come on now, you should be happy and doing your duty.”

“Is that it? You think I should be marrying you instead of enjoying my life when you’re just sitting there? I’d rather find someone I want and be able to enjoy what I do instead of someone that is forced on me!” I yelled and ran off.

“Princesses shouldn’t be sword fighting with such brutes! They should be primmer and more proper.” He said with his eyes brightening at the thought.

“Well, think again Prince Niko! I am not that kind of princess!” I yelled and stomped off.

“Huh?” he asked in a confusing tone.

I got to my room and plopped back onto my pillows and cried.

“Princess?” Bartholomew said a few minutes later with a knock on my door.

“Go away!” I called back.

The door opened and he came in and said, “I overheard the screaming match with Nikolai.”

“I bet the rest of the castle did too.” I spoke.

“I guess he doesn’t like a princess sword fight?” he asked.

“You got it! I feel like I can’t get my stress out after hearing his whiny voice around me even when he and my father are so buddy-buddy with each other.” I said as I sat up and wrapped my arms around my knees.

“I can see why your father is pushing this marriage on you to keep you busy with your marriage and the preparations for the ball.”

“Yeah, and yet I find it stupid.”

I thought about Cinders and sighed.

“Did something take place that I should know about?” he asked.

“Can you keep a secret?” I asked.

“Sure thing.” He spoke.

I told him what took place earlier today and how I went to the café that brought the tarts the day before. I told him about how nice he was and even was told about how he got his scar by these twins that worked there and even felt my heart flutter.

“Hmmm, it sounds like you are actually in love with someone.” Bartholomew said after I was finished with my story.

“Really?” I asked.

“I believe that you would find your own princes someday after seeing you climb your first tree or two and fight the guards that would accept you for who you are rather than for a silly title.” He spoke.

“I guess me going out to see him was a major hint.” I spoke.

He laughed and said, “I never thought you would be that sneaky and have your own wizard make decoys to fool me.”

“Also try and fool the prince.” I spoke.

He laughed even more and tweaked my cheek and said, “You will see him again if you find another way of fooling everyone.”

I smiled and said, “I hope so too.”

He left my room and as I went to dress for bed an idea popped into my head and I think I know how to do it.

Chapter 14

Sidney

I finished up the home chores since running a café requires me to do the business during the day and any chores that are at home at night after dinner. I was exhausted and got to my bed where Jacques went to me as I was about to close my eyes.

“Man, what I day.” I said with a slight groan.

He purred against me and I started to pet his head. As I petted his head, I thought about the princess and how her eyes lit up when she ordered food earlier that day. I felt so elated when she saw me coming over to take the orders. It is like she felt at home than at a palace. I can see why she came instead of doing her duties that today. I wished I could escape like she did since I can’t handle what has been going on here.

The next morning, I heard Seraphina yell for me and I got out of bed and ran upstairs to find her with the twins in her office.

“Yes Stepmother?” I asked.

“Jason and Nathan had told me that you have used magic at them.” She spoke.

I swallowed and remembered how I got mad at the twins and thrown a purple fireball at them.

“What do you mean?” I asked in a nervous tone.

“You know Cinders! You threw a purple flame at us when you got mad!” Jason exclaimed.

I looked at Nathan who was silent even if he did respect me for my magic use and I knew he didn’t rat me out for my magic practice. Jason, on the other hand, I knew he was the one he spilled what had happened yesterday.

“Is this true Sidney?” Seraphina asked.

I knew I couldn’t keep it in anymore and looked down and said, “Yes, I was so frustrated and somehow a fireball came out of my fingers.”

“Ha! I knew it! I knew I wasn’t crazy!” Jason exclaimed.

“I guess you haven’t given up on your magic use.” She spoke.

I closed my eyes as she said it.

Nathan sighed.

“Well, no more of it, keep it in control.” She spoke.

“I will.” I spoke.

“Also, better not think about going for that exam again.” She spoke.

“I’m not, I know I’m a slave to you three all the time.” I said and left the room.

“You should give him a chance in that test, plus he’s been working way too hard here.” Nathan spoke up as I left.

“Nathaniel?” she asked him.

“Why are you defending his actions?” Jason whined.

“He may be someone else’s kid but he should have some slack cut off of him after working so hard.”

“Are you saying you’re willing to work?” Serafina asked.

“Maybe.” He spoke.

“Very well then. You will stay in the alcove with him.” She spoke.

“Also, those tarts that he changed, a woman asked for them yesterday.” He said as he left the room.

He found me in the kitchen and asked, “Need help with breakfast?”

“What?” I asked.

“I’m helping you now.” He spoke.

I smiled and said, “Of course, I always need help around here.”

“Tell me what to do and I do.” He spoke.

I started to order him on how things were made. We even worked on some of the items that needed to be re-stocked in the case while Jason and Serafina had their breakfast upstairs. They didn’t even spoke to us while we served them.

“By the way.” Nathan said.

“Yes?” I asked.

“You should keep training with your magic, if you become upset every time Jason jabs at you, you can’t let any colored flames come out.” Nathan warned.

“That is what I’m trying to do, except it ends up like my dad has done in entertaining people.” I spoke.

“Come out to the fields after the café closes up.” He spoke.

I nodded in agreement.

We kept on working until the café opened for the day.

Chapter 15

Alexa

I walked down to Jasper’s room and found him cleaning a bowl he had used.

“Hey there.” I spoke.

He jumped and caught the bowl as it flew up into the air.

“Princess! What brings you here?” he asked.

“I came to see about a spell.” I answered.

“Spell?” he asked.

“Yeah, a spell that can change me into a guy.” I answered.

“A guy? Why would you want to be changed into a guy?” he asked.

I told him about what took place yesterday and how Nikolai caught me practicing with the guards with one of their newest swords and caused father to ban me from the practice field.

“Then I told Bartholomew about my going out to the café to see the guy again and he knows that I love him and thought about this plan since last night.” I answered.

“Wow, so you want a spell to change you into a guy so you can find the one you love. I thought you wanted to be another girl.” He spoke.

“I would love that but I thought the guy thing would make more sense since no one can detect me nor my personality so easily.”

“Not unless you don’t act like yourself.”

“Right, right.”

“Well, I do have a potion I wanted to try out but it is risky and it deals with turning a girl into a guy….”

“Then make it!” I exclaimed.

“But there is something else…”

“I don’t care! I need to get back to that café!” I exclaimed.\

He sighed and took a book off the shelf and found the potion and started mixing. I even found it weird that there were two flasks instead of one but didn’t pay any mind to it.

“Okay, done!” he exclaimed and handed me one of the flasks. “I hope this works.”

I nodded and then we counted to three and drank the potion and a huge, turquoise cloud appeared and then I saw myself in the nearby mirror that I was a tall and slightly built guy and my hair was still the same color but shoulder length.

“Whoa!” I said in my new voice.

“Good, it worked!” I heard my own voice and turned to see where Jasper stood and he was me but my old self.

“Jasper?” I asked.

“That is what I was trying to say! To use this potion, the wizard or the companion must drink a flask and change into them whichever gender they are.” He spoke.

“Not bad! That would mean you can throw Nikolai off!” I exclaimed.

“Yeah, I must warn you though, this potion will wear out once the ball takes place.” He spoke.

“Huh?” I asked and remembered that the ball was in a week. “That’s in two weeks from now!”

“Exactly and this potion lasts that long.” he said.

“I better get going then.” I spoke.

“Before that happens, can you hand me an outfit?” he asked.

“Well, you should head for my room then.” I spoke.

Jasper nodded and then went through the stairwell that led to my room and then I headed out of the door and hid myself behind the drapes to get to one of the tunnels.

*Here I come!* I thought.

I managed to get outside where I saw guards pacing the grounds and waited for them to pass. I walked outside and heard Nikolai whining about why I haven’t fallen for him. I felt a bit sick since that’s all I notice about him that he is whiny.

“Maybe you should have the princess notice you.” I heard Irvine say.

“Maybe I should! I want to know what she likes besides playing swords with the boys.” Nikolai said.

I glared at that after what he did last night. I did feel sorry for Jasper since he must put up with him now.

They passed by as I walked from behind the tree and then heard, “Hold it right there!”

“Oh no.” I spoke.

“Do I know you from somewhere?” I heard Nikolai ask.

“Uh, I was just dropping something off as a token for the princess during the ball.” I lied.

Irvine looked into my eyes and said, “Your eyes are the same color as hers, are you sure you came to see her?”

I gulped and said, “Yeah, green eyes are common all around here.”

“Really? Even that green? What’s your name dear fellow?” Nikolai asked.

“The name’s Bastion!” I exclaimed.

“Bastion? What shop did you come from? Or home?” Irvine asked.

“Um, the Morning Dew Drop Café but my mom wanted me to drop off a hair comb for the princess from her own collection.” I spoke.

*Oh man, I hope they don’t blow my cover since my eye color already said it all!* I thought.

Nikolai sighed and said, “Very well! Hope that boy that came here from there the other day is still not working there! I would love to get back at him for throwing a fireball at me.”

“Thanks!” I exclaimed and ran off.

“Sire, are you sure you should let this Bastion fellow go so easily?” Irvine asked.

“Oh, he is just dropping an item off for my dear princess so I should go and see if she is feeling alright today.” He said and headed towards my room.

*Good luck Jasper.* I thought as I watched.

Chapter 16

Jasper

“Here we go, at least I don’t look so suspicious!” I said as Alexa as I looked at myself in her mirror. I wore a dress in a silvery grey and then heard a knock.

“Alexa!” I heard Prince Nikolai exclaim.

I stuffed my wizard robes under the bed and placed my glasses into the bedside table drawer and snatched a book and called out, “Come in!”

The door opened and called out, “How are you, my darling!?”

“Doing fine! Not fighting with swords with the guards like you expected.” I said sarcastically.

“Good! I was worried about you especially when you got an interesting visitor by the looks of it.” He spoke.

“Visitor?” I asked.

“By the name of Bastion!” he said.

“He had the same hair color as you and same eye color as well.” Irvine said.

“Right! Bastion!” I spoke.

*Oh man! Alexa, what did you do?* I thought.

I hiccupped.

“Are you okay?” Nikolai asked.

“Yeah.” I said and hiccupped again.

“Well, where is it?” Irvine asked.

“Where’s what?” I asked and held down a hiccup.

“The hair combs.” Irvine said.

*Oh man! Hair comb? Really?* I thought and then thought of something and snapped my fingers and then pulled it out. “Here it is!”

He saw it and it was a silver comb with a fairy engraved into it with a purple stone.

“This is what I asked! I remembered Bastion’s mother made these types of fine items in her own room at home while he works at a café on the edge of town.” I spoke.

“You mean that Morning Dew place?” Nikolai asked.

“Yeah, exactly! I sent a special order for the ball and that is why he was here!” I exclaimed and hiccupped.

“You better drink some water for that.” Nikolai said.

“Yes, definitely.” Irvine said.

“Yes.” I said and saw the small glass in the bathroom and ran over and drank it.

*Man, why did I have to hiccup when I get nervous or lie!* I thought.

“Maybe we should let the princess be Sire.” I heard Irvine say.

“Oh no! Maybe she needs some fresh air!” I heard Nikolai say.

“Maybe your wizard’s right, I just feel like reading today!” I exclaimed.

“Oh, please don’t be so rash! I want to walk with you amidst the flower beds!” he exclaimed and took my arm and dragged me out of the room.

*How do I get into situations like these?* I thought to myself as we exited the room.

Chapter 17

Sidney

The café was busy as ever. I had a feeling that our time at that party helped.

Even though we re-stocked the display counter, everyone has been ordering items until we ran out of muffins.

“Are the muffins in the oven?” I heard Serafina ask since she was taking on some customers at one table.

“Just popped them in!” Nathan called out.

I was relieved he was working on some of the cooking.

I do feel I had to train Nathan on handling trays since he almost dropped drinks and food at certain times.

“Excuse me!” I heard after a moment and looked up to see a guy with wheat blonde hair and moss green eyes and felt like I may have met him and probably not.

“May I help you? Do you need to be guided to a table?” I asked.

“No, I came to see about a job.” The guy answered.

“A job?” I asked.

I heard a crash out of nowhere and looked at a table where broken plates and glasses were on the floor. A mother was holding her now crying baby. Nathan was picking up some of the glass.

“Sorry!” he exclaimed.

I watched this guy go over and started to clean up some of the spill and said, “I am so sorry about my co-worker being such a klutz.”

I came over with the mop and the bucket and started to mop up the spill on the floor.

“Well, I never had such bad service even at such reputable place like this!” the woman exclaimed.

“

Don’t worry about it, we will get this all cleaned up and get a new order out for you!” I spoke.

We managed to get things cleaned up and got her a new order of drinks and pastries for her. We managed to get back to the kitchen and found Seraphina there.

“Hi their mother!” Nathan exclaimed.

“I overheard that you had a bit of a confrontation.” She spoke.

“Yes, we did clean it up though.” I spoke.

She saw the new guy and asked, “Who are you and when did you come here?”

“I’m Bastion and just arrived this morning.” He answered.

“He helped us clean up the mess stepmother.” I told her.

“Normally we’re good with just one person doing all the work but with Nathan helping you it may have made it easier.” She said as she kept her eye on Bastion. “It looks like we have another, you’re hired! You better not cause any trouble.”

“I won’t ma’am!” Bastion exclaimed.

“Welcome to the team then.” I spoke.

“Thanks.” He spoke.

“Let me get you an apron.” I said and headed towards the linen closet to get one of the work aprons and I felt like I knew this Bastion guy before. I feel like he reminds me of someone in looks.

We didn’t have any more accidents all thanks to Bastion’s help. I even coached Nathan on how to work the tray and able to balance it with small to large plates for a start. Once we closed for the night, Bastion was given an area of the alcove since most businesses in town allow their workers to live at their bosses’ home.

“Now this alcove is getting smaller and smaller.” I said as another cot was placed next to Nathan’s.

“I thought I would stay in my room but mother wanted me to sleep with you two.” Nathan said.

I nodded as my reaction.

“You seem a little distracted.” He said.

“I don’t know but this Bastion guy reminds me of someone I’ve met.” I told him.

“

How so?” he asked.

“I don’t know but I think he reminds me of the princess I met.” I answered.

“Wait, how can that be?” he asked.

“I’m back! Getting the cinders from that stove was tough and your brother is very talkative out there.” Bastion said as he came in.

I looked at him and he looked back at me.

“Is there something wrong?” he asked.

“Not sure, do you have a twin sister or are you a long-lost prince?” I asked.

“No, how can I be a prince when I just shown up!?” he said.

“You remind me of someone I can’t stop thinking about.” I said.

He blushed a little and said, “How is that possible? Maybe this person I remind you of can’t stop thinking about you?” he said and got to the cot.

I felt my heart pound a bit and thought, *is he referring to the princess? No, it can’t be! I bet she has a prince that is asking her to wed.*

“Nights out everyone!” Jason called out.

Nathan and I groaned and we both turned out the small table lamp and managed to get under our blankets for the night.

Chapter 18

Jasper

I managed to get back to Alexa’s room after a long day with Nikolai. It was a very stressful day with him. Even though we talked about him, which I can see why Alexa doesn’t like him as much as her father hoped. It was like he didn’t want to hear me talk about Alexa since I am disguised as her after all.

I felt a little relieved that I get to listen to the party planners instead of Nikolai talking about his riding horse again. Once that was done, we did have lunch and then walked around the courtyard again. Now I can kind of see why Alexa went out into town that one day since being behind castle walls is a tad bit boring. What I didn’t notice was how Irvine was staring at me very strangely but I didn’t pay any mind to it.

I lied down on the mattress with a sigh of content and said, “What a day.”

I heard a knock and then Gina came into the room.

“Gina?” I asked in surprise.

“Yeah, you sound surprised to see me! Did your day with Niko do better?” she asked as she came to the bed.

“Somewhat but it feels like he is full of himself! I can kind of see why Alex…I mean I don’t like him as much.” I said.

“Huh? You’re Alexa, or aren’t you?” she asked.

“Can you keep a secret?” I asked.

“Yeah, sure.” She answered.

“I’m actually Jasper.” I answered.

“Come on now, Jasper is in his room.” She said.

“Here.” I said and opened the drawer and took out my glasses and put them on.

She gasped and said, “You are…”

I tried covering her mouth and put a finger to my lips.

“Sorry, what happened? Why are you here? Where’s Alexa?” she asked and looked around.

“You see she is disguised as a male all thanks to a potion I made and I ended up disguised as her.” I answered.

“Where is she? Do you know?” she asked.

“I think she went to that café where that one guy she met works.” I answered.

“What? So, that means she may be in love with him!” she exclaimed.

“Yeah, I suspected that too since she did say she couldn’t get him off her mind.” I said.

“Well, he is cute despite the scar on his face.” Gina said.

“Scar?” I asked and remembered that there was a slight smudge of makeup. “I guess he had to cover it up when he came to the tea party.”

“So, how long does this potion last?” she asked me.

“Until the ball in two weeks.” I answered.

“I see, what if someone gets suspicious? You already know that you have to be around the princess at all times, right?” she asked.

“I know and I think Irvine might be noticing something’s wrong.” I said.

“Do you have a spell that might help with that?” she asked.

“Not sure, I need to look at my books.” I said.

She nodded.

We heard a knock and I called out, “Come in!”

The door opened and Irvine came in.

“Irvine, what brings you here?” I asked in my most proper tone.

“I came to see if your wizard was here.” He answered and he saw the glasses, “Especially when you’re wearing his glasses.”

I took them off quickly and said, “I wanted to check them out! I thought I would look good with them!”

“Yes! Yes! She does look cute with them on, doesn’t she?” Gina asked with a smile on her face.

“I don’t think the king would approve.” He said. “As you can see Irvine, Jasper is not in here, he has been in his room sick all day.” I said.

“Sick>” Gina asked.

I looked at her and then she said, “Right! He had a bit of a cold! He will be up and making potions tomorrow!”

“Oh really? I will make sure he is up in the morning.” He said and left the room.

“Great, he is starting to notice.” I said.

“What are you going to do?” Gina asked.

“I will think of something.” I said.

She left the room and I knew that what Alexa and I had done this morning was a mistake on our parts.

The next morning, I was in my old room before anyone woke up and hoped that Irvine hasn’t woken up yet. I was looking through the same book that I got the potion recipe from.

“I know it’s in here.” I muttered to myself in a whisper.

I did find something and it was a transformation spell almost like the one that Alexa and I used but this one was for a single person.

“Why didn’t I think of this one before?” I whispered.

I looked over the recipe and went through my ingredients and saw that I had everything I needed and put it together quickly.

“Now who will be my victim?” I asked and then remembered Gina but realized that it would be a bad idea since she is Alexa’s sister after all. Then I thought to one of the guards Alexa sometimes spars with and then grabbed a flask and lid and placed the potion inside of it. I ran to the guard’s station.

“Princess!” I heard and saw the younger one that trained her in dagger play, Copper.

“Hey copper! I never thought I would catch you here.” I said.

“

What’s with the glasses? You never wear them.” He said when he saw them on me.

“Um, I need to talk to you in private.” I said as fast as I could since I saw Irvine appearing.

“Huh?” he asked and then I grabbed his arm and pulled him away and we went into a private room near the station and locked it up.

“What’s with you? It’s like you saw a ghost!” he exclaimed.

“Okay, the truth is that I am not really Alexa, I’m Jasper!”

“What?” he asked in surprise and looked at me. “Wait, Jasper? How can I tell it is you?”

I snapped my fingers and one of the vases on the table turned into a lizard.

“Okay I am convinced!” he exclaimed.

I snapped again and the lizard changed back into a vase.

“Now, I will only say this once and that is Alexa and I drank a potion to switch places so she can see this one guy she fell for and she is a guy and I am her! Now you must drink this potion to be me because Irvine, Nikolai’s wizard is looking for me!” I said and took out the flask.

“Really? What about my armor?” he asked.

I saw what he meant and then said, “Drink it and I will cast a spell!”

He nodded as I handed him the flask. He drank it and he changed into me and that was when I casted my spell to change his armor into my wizard’s robes.

“Not bad!” I exclaimed as I looked at him.

“I hope I can make a convincing you!” he said in my voice.

“Come on!” I said and pushed him into the hallway and we found Irvine.

“There you are! I thought I wouldn’t find you.” He said.

“Well, here I am! In the flesh!” he said nervously and then hiccupped like I do sometimes.

*Thank you, Copper!* I thought and snatched the glasses off my nose quickly.

“There you are Alexa!” I heard Nikolai call out.

I cringed at it and thought, *Oh boy! Here I go again!*

“I thought we would go for a ride.” He said.

I sighed at this and said, “Sure.”

I went back upstairs and changed into one of Alexa’s pants suits and we headed for the stable where the horses were ready for us with the stable boys and got on. Me on Flower Bed, Alexa’s stallion, Copper as me on a grey house, and both Irvine and Nikolai on two other stallions. I felt relieved that they didn’t look at us suspiciously as we rode around the castle’s riding trails.

Chapter 19

Alexa

I woke up the next morning due to a sandpaper feeling going against my face.

“Huh?” I asked and saw a cat licking my face and screamed in shock.

“Is something wrong?” I heard Nathan ask as he came in.

“When did this cat come in here?” I asked.

“Oh, right! I didn’t tell you that we have one and his name is Jacques.” Cinders said as he came in.

“Here Jacques! Your breakfast is in the bowl!” Nathan called out and he jumped off my cot and went to his bowl.

“Sidney! We’re starving!” I heard the owner call out from the dining room.

“Almost ready!” he called back.

“Come on man, we have work in a bit.” Nathan told me.

I got up and headed in the kitchen with him. I felt more alive than I’ve ever been.

All my life I always was waited on and had my hand held but now it’s so relieving.

“Whoa, what’s the smile on your face?” Cinders asked since I always remembered both twins called him that.

“It’s nothing! I am just imagining the work we have today.” I answered.

“Normally I’m not the one who’s happy about it.” Cinders told me as he arranged the tray.

“Why?” I asked him.

“Sidney!” we heard again.

“I will tell you later.” He answered and took the tray to the dining room.

We served his stepmother and other stepbrother and then sat down to have breakfast with them. I wondered how Sidney’s life became like how it is today. I looked over at him which he was looking at his food. He did pet his cat time to time when it nudges at his ankles.

We opened the café a moment later and people came in to buy pastries at the front counter, which Nathan decided to manage instead of waiting tables. Cinders and I managed the sitting crowd and it felt as though the day went by fast and closed as the sun went down.

“Another day, another goodnight’s sleep. “I said cheerfully.

I heard Cinder’s sigh and then he finished cooking for the night.

Once we got to the alcove, I saw Cinders go outside with Nathan.

“Where are you two going?” I asked.

They didn’t answer and I followed them outside to an open field behind the home. I then saw orange and pink flames erupt into the air.

“Whoa.” I said.

I watched Cinders shoot out different colored flames and even noticed the blue fireballs.

“You got it!” Nathan exclaimed.

I noticed Cinders was focusing and controlling each flame like it was second nature. When he was done, I applauded.

“Bastion, how long were you out here?” Cinders asked.

“Long enough, so you do have magical talents.” He said.

“What do you mean? We just met.” Nathan said.

“Um, I heard the princess mention she met a guy that burned her fiancé with a blue fireball the other day.” I said nervously.

Cinders sighed a little.

“Whoa, you did what?” Nathan asked.

“Well, you are helping me getting this under control.” Cinders said.

“Besides, he was a jerk.” I said.

*That was too close.* I thought to myself.

“Well, at least I can get it somewhat controlled.” Cinders said.

“We have to keep it up.” Nathan said.

Cinders nodded.

“How long have you used this magic?” I asked as we headed inside.

“Since I was a teenager, I tried to be a court wizard like my dad, well to make sure my name is in the records so I won’t be illegal to use my magic if needed.” Cinders said.

“What happened?” I asked.

“I failed the exam and never tried again, even though my magic is always coming out when I get mad or upset.” He answered.

“Gotcha.” I said.

I remembered when Nikolai’s shoulder getting burned and knew that he was flustered and probably came out at that moment.

I was starting to admire Cinders for his efforts and he worked hard to keep it under control even when I see Jason getting under his skin the next few days. It made his use easier.

Chapter 20

Jasper

Six days had passed ever since Alexa had left for the Morning Dew Drop as her male self. I felt so alone despite having Gina at my side and Copper acting like me in his newer identity until Alexa returned.

We were in Alexa’s room for a moment until we had to go into one of the carriages to ride the streets to show off Nikolai to the city since that was tradition with the kings before the last one.

“What is it Jasper?” Gina asked once she tied a ribbon into the long, wheat colored hair.

I sighed and said, “I can see why Alexa is not too fond of this guy, I’m even hating him now.”

“Really?” she asked.

“I am not sure if you noticed but she hasn’t been happy with being a princess a lot lately and even Bartholomew has been around me to see if I was feeling alright but I always have to lie to show that I was.” I told her.

“Come to think of it, looking at you are doing what she does on a daily basis is making you strain a bit and your smile starts to crack a little with each thing Nikolai says to you.” She said.

“And I cringe with every kiss on the back of my hand from him.” I said with a disgusted look on my face.

“Yeah, at least he doesn’t know about what’s going on.” She said.

“What’s going on?” we heard Irvine ask as we stepped into the hall.

“What are you doing here?” I asked in a surprised voice.

“Nikolai is being impatient so I was sent up here to fetch you.” He said.

I glared and asked, “I thought Bartholomew was supposed to get me.”

“You know how Niko is, once someone doesn’t show up on time, he sends me to get them instead of palace staff.” He told me.

I glared at that thought and said, “Well, he better respect our staff because we treat them like family!”

“Family you say. Then how come you don’t treat me like family when you’re going to marry my prince?” he asked.

“That won’t happen until after the marriage.” I said and then looked at Gina, “Come on Gina, Niko is waiting.”

She nodded and we went downstairs where we found Nikolai pacing around with Bartholomew and Copper as me trying to comfort him.

“I don’t care if she is still getting ready! I just want to get this over and done so we can have our ball in a few days your old bat!”

I bristled when I heard that once I got to the landing and went over and slapped him and yelled, “How dare you talk to my butler like that!?”

I understand how Alexa always loved Bartholomew like an uncle and she would probably do the same thing to this guy if she heard that.

“Alexa, I can’t believe you slapped me!” he sputtered.

“Your highness, are you okay?” Irvine asked.

“It hurts! It hurts!” he cried.

“Princess, are you okay?” Bartholomew asked me.

“I can’t stand your face you whiny brat of a prince! All you’ve done is cry all over what I’ve done and just want to disrespect the court here! I’d rather marry my court wizard than you!” I yelled and sent a lightning bolt.

It got him and he got shocked and then Irvine glared at me.

“Alexa? Did Jasper teach you magic?” Bartholomew asked.

“Umm!” I started and then remembered a spell and used it to put them all to sleep and said to Gina and Copper, “Follow me!”

They nodded and we ran to the carriage.

“Ah Princess! Where’s Nikolai? Isn’t he supposed to be with you?” the driver asked.

“Um, he got a bit of food poisoning so we’re going without him.” I said and hiccupped.

“Very well.” He said and we were off into the streets where the crowds of people waited.

“Jasper, what the heck?” Copper whispered.

“I know I threw my cover but that sleeping spell will make them forget everything so we better find Alexa right now and I must find a way of de=spell this potion so I can bring her back.” I said.

They nodded in agreement.

We managed to get through the town and even shook so many hands and kissed babies, heck I even took pictures with some children. I did give them the lie of Niko facing food poisoning that day and people told us to give him well wishes and I just smiled. We got to the area of the Morning Dew Drop Café where I saw people cheering for us and I was surprised with all the customers they had and how big it was.

“This is it! The café that Alexa and I dropped by that one day!” Gina exclaimed.

“Perfect, we can find her in this place, right?” I asked.

“Jasper, you’re not thinking of taking her when you see her.” She said.

“Exactly! Do you want Niko to wake up to me there or the real Alexa?” I asked.

“I can tell the strain you get with him kissing your hand and I did feel a slight suspicion the other day from Irvine when he asked me if I knew any new potion recipes lately.” Copper said.

“Oh no, he is starting to snoop.” I said.

“Okay, we better find her!” Gina exclaimed.

We got out of the carriage and got into the café with the hopes of getting Alexa ack.

Chapter 21

Alexa

That morning was an exciting one because it was the morning where Nikolai and I were supposed to ride the carriage around from the schedule that was made for us. It was a way of the city knowing who their next king with their princess who will be will be ascending the throne in the future. I know Jasper won’t be happy since I wasn’t happy with him when I was in the castle.

*I wonder how they are doing without me.* I thought as I put some pastries into the front display case.

“Hurry up Bastion! The princess may be stopping by!” I heard Jason tell me as he passed by with flowers in vases.

“Right!” I exclaimed and kept working and finally got the last of them into the case.

We, as in me, Nathan, and Cinders, got the café sparkling clean and the menus straightened out in time for the first crowd to come in.

“Look alive boys!” their mother exclaimed.

*She is starting to remind me of a female version of Nikolai.* I thought and then had an image of him in a dress and snickered a bit.

“What’s with you?” Nathan asked.

“It’s nothing.” I said and wiped the smile off my face as I took a menu to greet the customers.

Seraphina has been surprised at how many more customers have been coming in while I was working there for the past few days. She even told Nathan and Cinders that they were right about having an extra hand despite the other twin not doing anything to help. At least Nathan was able to keep tis balance while carrying the trays of food. I felt a little satisfied at the work I’ve helped with but the thing that I tend to feel more is my heart pounding every time I’m around Cinders.

A few more groups came in and that was when people called out, “They’re here!”

Some of the crowd went outside and I did notice the familiar banner that my father had made after the last king died. I felt a slight longing for being in that carriage until I saw Gina, Jasper, and someone else as Jasper come running in.

*Who is posing as Jasper?* I thought.

People were cheering and yelling out, “Congratulations Princess!”

“I can’t wait for the ball!” a regular customer exclaimed.

“Thank you everyone! I can’t wait for it either!” Jasper said in my voice.

“Can I take you to a table?” Cinders asked.

“Yes please!” Jasper answered and then noticed I was there and saw that he was staring at me.

*Is there something wrong?* I thought since I had a feeling that something may have taken place.

“Bastion!” Seraphina exclaimed.

“Yes ma’am?” I asked.

“Please help Sidney take care of the princess and her company.” She said.

“Yes ma’am!” I exclaimed and went over to the table and asked, “May I take your drink order?”

“Yes, some glasses of iced tea for us!” Gina answered.

I took the orders and poured the drinks and came with them and placed them on the table.

“

Past…Alexa…if you can, meet me outside when we pay for our order.” Jasper whispered.

I

Nodded.

I managed to finish the service with giving them their sandwiches they enjoyed and Jasper even ordered the apple and honey tart Gina and I owed him before I asked him for the potion. I told Nathan that I need to get something outside and went around to the front where I saw the three coming out.

“There she is.” Gina told they and they came over and I led them to the open field out back.

“Okay guys, who is posing as Jasper and what’s going on?” I asked.

“It’s me Copper from the guard and he wasn’t kidding when you are here as a guy.” Copper said.as Jasper.

I remembered that he was the newer guardsmen and said, “So you decided to have him in all this?”

“

Irvine was being suspicious since I wasn’t being around you when all court wizards have to be around the monarchs they are assigned to.” Jasper told me.

“Seriously? He is starting to snoop?” I asked.

“Yeah, he heard us say something about you and I felt as though he came to see us instead of being sent by Niko to fetch us for this carriage thing.” Gina said.

“Great, there is going to be a major discussion whenever I get back.” I said.

“Um…” Jasper said and hiccupped.

“What is it?” I asked him.”

I sent out a lightning bolt when I noticed how Niko was disrespecting Bartholomew and I knocked them out so they won’t remember and I made a last-minute decision for us had to come here to get you back and that I can de-spell the potion.” He told me.

“What?” I asked.

“Sorry Alexa, I know you’re not supposed to be back until the ball with it but this is getting troubling for all of us and Irvine is starting to become suspicious.” Jasper said.

I sighed and said, “I guess I have to go.”

I heard a noise and then saw the other stepbrother run inside and I gasped.

“Who is that?” Gina asked.

“

That is Cinders’ other brother! I think he might have heard us!” I answered.

“Then let’s go!” Jasper exclaimed.

I nodded in agreement and we got into the carriage until I heard, “Bastion!”

“Crap!” I exclaimed and turned to see Cinders appear.

“

Where are you going?” Cinders asked as he caught up. “You know the princess as well?”

“Um…” I started.

“He not only knows her but is the princess!” Jason exclaimed as he appeared.

“What? How is that possible?” Cinders asked.

I looked at Jasper and then he said, “I guess we have to do the explanation.” He said and then muttered a spell and his voice came out of his mouth. “Much better! Alexa, better hurry! Who knows if the sleeping spell will keep working?”

I sighed and said, “It is true Cinders, I was changed into Bastion because I couldn’t take my life at the castle anymore and also…”

“How could you do this to me after being able to have someone help us on staff and that I trusted you when I told you about my magic?” Cinders yelled.

No flames came out of his hands since he has been training the past six days to control them.

“I am so sorry.” I said with tears coming to my eyes.” I said.

“Forget it!” he exclaimed and went back inside.

“Cinders!” I called out.

“Come on Alexa, we better go back.” Jasper told me.

I sighed and went into the carriage and we left the café front and thought. *Sorry Cinders, I guess I couldn’t explain that I was starting to fall in love with you.*

We got back to the castle where we hurried to Jasper’s room and he made the de-spell potion and we changed back. I even changed into the gown he wore and found Nikolai pacing around in my room.

“There you are! I was wondering where you ran off to all day! I thought we were supposed to have a carriage ride but the king told me that you were already gone while I was napping.” He said.

*Oh right, he doesn’t remember anything.* I thought.

“Well, we did say that you fell ill and did everything without you.” I said with a smile.

“Good, we have more ball preparations and that starts with looking at outfits.” He said,

“I can’t wait.” I said and sighed.

*Yeah, I can’t wait…* I thought.

Chapter 22

Sidney

I got inside the café and passed through the entire place ignoring people calling for me to get my attention. I felt like I didn’t want to serve anyone at that moment. I even ignored Nathan calling for me since he saw the look on my face when I got back inside.

I found Jacques curled up on my cot and I took my apron off and threw it aside and plopped onto my cot. Jacques meowed in surprise and stepped away.

“Sorry Jacques.” I said and petted him.

“Hey man! What’s up with you? It’s like you came over here like a zombie!” Nathan exclaimed as he came into the small alcove.

“Leave me alone.” I said.

“Huh?” he asked.

“Nathaniel! Where’s Bastion!?” we heard.

I cringed at the question since I knew the truth about him or shall I say her since it was really Princess Alexa of all people!

“I don’t know! I was hoping he would come back in right after Sidney.” He told her.

“Well, go and find him!” she yelled.

“I will go.” I said and got up and took the bicycle and started to ride around the town to act like I was finding Bastion but I was really clearing my head. I managed to get to the river on the other side of town and thought about Alexa and how she deceived us all.

“I trusted her in that form especially with my magical talent! I never thought she would do something like that when she is supposed to be getting married from the announcement this morning.” I said to myself.

I felt my heart pound a little bit more since it was doing that when she was in that form and I had a feeling that I sort of knew it might have been her.

“Why am I feeling like this? She deceived us but at the same time she was like me and knew the pain of being a servant except…I don’t know anymore…” I said and sighed and then a few fireballs came out from my exasperation.

“Whoa! That is amazing!” I heard and then saw one of the guardsmen who was patrolling.

“Um, sorry if I’m trespassing, I will head back home.” I said and sat the bike back up.

“Wait a second, you look familiar! You’re from that café.” He said.

“I guess my reputation as their wait staff perceives me.” I said sarcastically.

“Yeah, we heard Prince Nikolai scream that day of the tea party and I remembered seeing someone resembling you running away! Did you do something to him?” he asked.

“Um, yeah, don’t arrest me because I didn’t mean to use a fireball on him that came out when I was yelling back at him.” I said when I remembered what had happened.

He laughed and said, “Sorry! We have been noticing that he is getting on everyone’s nerves, especially the princes’ when he found her training with one of our guys.”

“Huh?” I asked.

“I better get back to work! Oh, by the way, pass this onto the owner if you can, all businesses are invited to the ball in a few days to serve food and sell trinkets during the afternoon through the dance.” He told me and headed back to his task.

“Thanks!” I called back and then rode on home.

I thought about what he had said and then thought, *I guess her fiancé is not as great as how people expect? Then why wasn’t he with her? I rather not know.*

I got back home and got back to my cot and took out the note she had written to me with my tip and felt warmer knowing that she was the one who wrote it and knew that I have feelings for her.

Chapter 23

Alexa

It was the day of the ball and I felt heavier as ever. My maids noticed how sad I was the past few days and tried to cheer me up with the castle gossip but I still had Cinders’ face on my mind. I knew I shouldn’t have deceived him but at the same time if I went in my whole princess glory then I wouldn’t have been able to work with him like I belonged there.

The guards even noticed how upset I was while I tried to spar and Copper knew that he was on my mind.

I decided to look at the vendors in the courtyard area that afternoon of the ball with Gina and Jasper since I knew Nikolai wouldn’t like to look at our citizens’ work on their trinkets and doesn’t want to meet Cinders after meeting him on the day of the tea party. I sometimes smile at how he was defeated by him because I figured out who he was from watching him use his magic that one evening.

“Hello princess!” some of the vendor girls exclaimed.

“Hi there!” I exclaimed.

It felt good to be surrounded by the city folk again since I worked in the café for almost a week and I wished I could leave the castle a lot more rather than being cooped up so much until I become queen where the real travels begin.

I felt more at home as I talked to the vendors and even children surrounded me and tugged me over to their parents where they hugged me and kissed my hands. They even gave Gina and Jasper hugs like they knew us for the longest time when I rarely get to see them before the café work. Some of them gave us free items and I was even given a small swan headdress with a suggestion to wear that night, which I will pass it onto the maids who will be helping me to get ready in the evening. I did notice the Morning Dew Drop Café staff being in the food area and recognized Nathan and Cinders working the table by selling their goods.

“I guess you really love him.” Jasper whispered.

“Huh?” I asked.

“It’s obvious Alexa, you can’t stop staring at him and I know he was on your mind ever since we got back with you.” Gina told me.

I sighed and was about to turn until I heard Seraphina call out, “Oh my goodness! It’s the princess!”

*Oh no! I was spotted!* I thought and then turned and smiled with a thought, *I hope she doesn’t realize I was Bastion in disguise if that little brat didn’t rat me out.*

“Hello there!” I exclaimed.

I noticed Cinders twitch a bit when I spoke.

“I am so glad you decided to grace us with your presence!” she exclaimed.

“Of course, I have enjoyed your tarts that your staff had brought to our tea party.” I said which I started to feel a slight warmth on my cheeks.

She smiled and said, “Well, Sidney is a very hard worker both during work and after work.”

“Do you have any other staff?” Gina asked.

“Gina…” Jasper started.

“Yes, my son Nathaniel helps Sidney with the chores and managing the café.” She answered.

I remembered how the three of us were the ones doing everything while Jason, the brat, was always lounging around looking at his nails. He even asked me one night to take his favorite jacket down to the dry cleaner’s and whined about how a button had popped off, which the owner apologized for that and gave a discount on the next appointment.

“No, I normally have my two sons doing all the work except there used to be one gentleman that did help but he disappeared all of a sudden.” She said.

Cinders noticed how embarrassed I was and then grabbed something and handed a plate to me with a huge piece of cake and said, “To the princess! Congratulations on your engagement and good luck at the ball tonight.”

“Um…” I started.

“Come on Alexa, we don’t want to hold these nice people up from their customers.” Gina said and pulled me away.

I knew that Cinders was a little distraught from how his stepmother talked about me as Bastion. I guess I really knew how to help even if I wasn’t in my gown and tiara nor waving at the citizens. I felt awful for how I just left after how angry he felt but knew he didn’t want me to explain anything.

We did enjoy the cake and went around the other vendors who handed free gifts again and then we got back inside where I headed straight for my room with the vision of Cinders still on my mind.

It was evening and my maids helped me with the small headdress which matched the white ball gown that was made for me. The wings of the headdress fit over my ears and the head was high like how I posed myself in the mirror and noticed the shine of the jewel that was on a small bar that rested on my forehead.

“So beautiful like your mother!” I heard and turned to see Bartholomew.

“Bartholomew? Where’s my father?” I asked.

“He is getting ready for the ball and making sure that the guards watch over the castle and the town while the ball is going on.” He answered.

“I see!” I said as I looked down. “Business as usual.”

“Alexa, what’s wrong? You have been not yourself lately.” He said.

“Well, it’s something I haven’t told you.” I said.

“Then tell me.” He said.

I told him about seeing Cinders at the café his family owned the day after the garden party and then how Jasper and I switched places all thanks to a potion.

“No wonder you were hiccupping.” He said with a little bit of a laugh to his voice.

“Yeah, I was working with Cinders and his stepbrother, Nathan, until Jasper, Gina, and Copper as Jasper and we all revealed everything to Cinders.” I said.

“Have you seen him in the courtyard since all the businesses were selling their wares all day?” he asked me.

“I did but he never looked at me due to how hurt he was from our deceiving him.” I answered.

“I see, one question is do you have any feelings for him?”

I was silent for a moment and remembered how my heart thudded around him and was about to say something until the door opened and Jasper came in to say, “It’s time Alexa!”

I nodded and then gave a smile to Bartholomew and said, “It’s time! Time to be with my fiancé.”

He watched me join Jasper and knew that my fate has sealed.

The ballroom felt like a spectacle with the chandeliers glowing bright like stars. I did see the center pieces on the tables glow like fairies in globes with flowers surrounding the glass balls on them. I did see the fountains outside glow bright with the candles floating in them and guards in their white robes to match my dress while guarding the entire castle.

“Princess Alexa?” I heard and saw Nikolai in a white suit matching my gown as well but had a small crown on his head and a necklace with his family crest on it around his neck made him look more mature and handsome than his attitude that he was showing all this time.

“Good evening prince.” I said.

“It’s time to take her hand.” Irvine said.

He nodded and took it and we headed for the dance floor where everyone applauded and then the orchestra started to play at that moment.

*I don’t get why with being around my subjects and family, why do I feel so lonely?* I wondered to myself.

Chapter 24

Sidney

We had people appear at our table in the courtyard since our pastries’ aroma brought them over and people bought them and ate them on benches in the area.

“I guess people wanted to mingle out here before the ball.” Nathan said.

“Looks like Jason is enjoying it.” I said and noticed that he and stepmother were chatting up a storm with the guests while we had to take care of the customers.

I wished that Bastion, or shall I say Alexa, was around to help with some of this work since we have been swamped with guests from abroad and in town. I was even surprised that Alexa had a nerve to visit after what she had done. I knew she was trying to talk to me but I couldn’t look at her while I worked, especially when I handed the cake over.

“Hey man, what’s wrong? You haven’t been yourself lately.” Nathan said.

“I don’t want to talk about it.” I said as I added whipped cream to some of the pie slices and handed them to a couple and said, “Here you go!”

“Thank you!” the woman exclaimed and I watched them head towards a bench and sighed since I felt as happy as them days ago when I was around Alexa and that was when I felt my heart pound but then knew I wouldn’t be able to see her again.

“Excuse me!” I heard an older voice say and then I saw an old man wearing a white tuxedo and thought that Alexa is making her staff wear white like she would.

“

May I help you?” I asked.

“Are you Cinders?” he asked me.

“Yes, who are you?” I asked.

“The name is Bartholomew and I am Princess Alexa’s butler! I want you to come with me.” He told me.

“Huh?” I asked.

Nathan noticed it and asked, “What is going on? Who is this guy?”

“This is Alexa’s butler.” I said.

“Huh?” he asked.

“Well, you remembered Bastion?” I asked.

“Yeah, what about him? Didn’t he disappear?” he asked me.

“Yes, but he was actually Alexa.” I answered.

“Wait a second, how?” Nathan asked.

“Well, her court wizard and her switched places all thanks to a potion and ever since she came back, she couldn’t stop thinking about you.” The old man answered.

“That can’t be! She’s engaged to that one prince who tried to kick me out during the tea party that one day.” I said.

“Which led her to do what she did.” Bartholomew said.

“Huh?” I asked.

“It’s because she couldn’t stop thinking about you even when she came back the other day.” He said.

I remembered I cut her off before she tried telling me something and then it hit me that she was going to say that and said, “Then take me to her.”

“But what about mom and Jason?” Nathan asked.

“Tell them I had something to do.” I said and went to the castle with Bartholomew and I heard the music from the ballroom and got to a room where I showered and was changed into someone that would be fit to be a prince.

Chapter 25

Alexa

After a few dances with Nikolai, we got to the table that was meant for us where my father was waiting for me. I smiled as he kissed my hand and greeted me and we had some waiters come to give us appetizers and drinks to enjoy with the king.

I was silent as Nikolai talked with him and I felt like I didn’t want to be there. I did feel my mind wander off to Sidney and how didn’t look at me.

*I can’t believe he is still mad at me! I should’ve apologized but I know Seraphina would wonder about what I meant.* I thought.

“What’s wrong?” Nikolai asked when he noticed me.

“Nothing, nothing’s wrong.” I answered.

“You have been acting even weirder since you got home the day you were in the carriage.” He said.

“Oh really? Why would I?” I asked.

“I mean, you wore Jasper’s spectacles and then you have been so robotic for days like you didn’t know how to act like a princess and even hiccupped time to time.” He said.

*I guess he doesn’t know.* I thought since Jasper was me after all.

“Now you are acting even more spacey!” he exclaimed.

“

Well, ever since you found me sparring that one night, I started acting like the princess you wanted.” I said.

“I wasn’t expecting a robotic one! I want one with personality! You should act more like Gina!” he exclaimed.

I glared at him and said, “Will you ever shut up!?”

“Excuse me?” he sputtered in a surprised voice.

“I did give you myself! I love sparring against the guardsmen and able to have some freedom and not have someone always wanting to save me from all the things I like! I also don’t appreciate anyone who treats my staff like trash all because I was getting ready!” I exclaimed.

Which I was glad Jasper was telling me about that because it pissed me off.

“But I couldn’t wait for you anymore!” he exclaimed.

“Which you shouldn’t take it out on them!” I shouted back.

“Alexa?” my father asked.

“Well, I never seen a tomboyish princess that doesn’t like to be like one!” Nikolai yelled and got up and ran off.

“What was that all about?” my father asked me.

“I am not sure.” I said and got up. “I need some fresh air.”

I left the ballroom and headed outside to the garden and felt better.

Sidney

I was put into a suit that was red and gold and then was given a mask that looked like phoenix flames.

“What?” I asked.

“I thought it would suit you since she knows your face even that scar.” Bartholomew said.

“I get it, so she wouldn’t see me.” I said.

“You got it.” He said.

We left the room and headed downstairs to the ballroom where Jasper came out and saw us and asked, “Have you seen Alexa?”

“What happened?” Bartholomew asked.

“

Well, she yelled at Nikolai and left the ballroom to the garden and I was going to find her.” He answered.

I had an idea and said, “I will find her.”

“Wait a sec, you’re that Cinders guy that Alexa has been crushing on!” Jasper exclaimed.

“Yeah, it’s me! Just tell me where she ran off to.” I said.

“Not sure where in the garden she might be in but she has a swan headdress on her head and wearing a white dress.” Jasper said.

“Thanks!” I exclaimed and ran out one of the doors that led towards the garden.

Jasper

I watched him go and turned to Bartholomew to ask, “What are you thinking?”

“What do you mean?” Bartholomew asked with a chuckle.

“You want to bring them together, aren’t you?” I asked.

“All I want is Alexa to be happy.” He said.

“

Me too, especially when I was…” I started and then noticed Irvine in the corner of my eye and whispered to Bartholomew, “Don’t look now, Niko’s wizard is in the hall.”

He noticed it too and then he said, “Make sure you find those two.” Bartholomew whispered.

I

Nodded and headed out the doors and I had a bad feeling what may happen next.

Chapter 26

Bartholomew

I walked to where Irvine was and saw him walk back inside the ballroom but grabbed him.

“I guess you heard what was going on?” I asked.”

I don’t know what you’re talking about.” He said.

“Jasper saw you in the corner, what did you hear?”

“Hear? What I saw! It seems like you want to wreck her marriage to Prince Nikolai.”

I glared at him and said, “I don’t think my princess would want to marry your prince when she has a heart for someone else.”

“So, she does love someone else! Maybe I should tell him what I found out.” He said.

“Tell me what?” we heard Nikolai and saw him walking out of the ballroom.

“Sire, I guess you’re looking for the princess?” Irvine asked him.

“Yes, I want to find her so I can bring her back in time for the toast!” Nikolai exclaimed.

“

Maybe you would be lucky in finding her in the garden.” Irvine said.

“Figured as much.” Nikolai said and headed for the gardens in a faster pace.

“Are you crazy? I want her to be happy!” I yelled.

“I want my prince to be happy as well and he wants to marry your princess in order to give this town the king they want in the future.” Irvine said with a smirk.

*I hope Cinders will find Alexa in time.* I thought to myself.

Sidney

I found Alexa sitting on a bench alone near one of the fountains. I saw the gold and the jewel sparkle in the candlelight of the floating candles in the fountain and watched her place a hand in the fountain which the candle near it went out with the splash.

I came out of the bushes and sent a small fireball at the candle and relit it and she was surprised and noticed me. At first, she had the knowing look but couldn’t see my burn scar under the mask.

“I guess you were watching me.” She said as she got up and walked over to me.

“Yes, I have.” I said.

She looked closely and she had a quizzical look on her face and asked, “Do I know you from somewhere?””

That is one question I don’t have an answer for.” I answered.

“Oh really? That fireball reminded me of someone’s magical flames he displayed a few days ago.” She said.

“Oh really? Maybe I have the same kind of magic like your friend.” I said and then held out my hand. “Would you like to head back to the ball?”

“I guess.” She said and took my hand and we started to head back towards the ball.

Alexa

I felt my heart pound once I took this man’s hand. I felt nervous and excited at the same time because I never seen this person before or maybe I did but his face is hidden so I won’t see it.

*This is how I felt around Cinders! The problem is it may not be him but he has the same kind of magic is similar but can’t confirm if it is his!* I thought.

“Something wrong?” he asked.

“No, nothing is wrong! Just glad that you arrived instead of my fiancé.” I said.

“Oh really? How so?” he asked.

“I don’t know but you remind me of someone from the black hair color and same height and the magic that was used! He shown me the same kind of magic…well…when I was disguised as a guy all thanks to a potion my Court Wizard had made.” I answered.

“Oh, really now, why did you do something like that?”

I felt my heart pound even faster as we walked and got closer to the castle where we heard a child call out, “Mommy! I am bored!”

The man let go of my hand and called out, “Ladies and gentlemen! I am the Masked Magician and I have a show for you!”

My subjects looked over at him and then he started to form the same-colored flames into the air and started to make them pop like fireworks.

Some of the children watched in awe and one of the men in the courtyard came to me say, “That is amazing! Do you know this person?”

“I am not sure! I thought I did.” I answered.

“There you are!” I heard and saw Jasper come up to us.

“Jasper? What are you doing here?” I asked.

“I came to find you to get you back to Nikolai.” He said.

I sighed and then watched the fire show and this time the stranger was juggling the flames in the air.

“What if I don’t want to go back?” I asked.

“So, it is true! Your heart does belong to someone else.” He said.

“How can it be when she is engaged to me!?” Nikolai yelled.

“Nikolai?” I asked.

He saw the guy with the mask and asked, “Is that him?”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“Is that the person you gave your heart to?” he asked.

“I am not entirely sure.” I answered.

I saw him run over to the guy who made fire dragons fly into the air and children cheered and applauded. He was punched in the face and people gasped.

“Nikolai!” I yelled.

“I got him!” a guard yelled and got Nikolai off.

“Let me at him!” Nikolai screamed.

I saw the guy on the ground holding his face.

“Are you okay?” Jasper asked him.

Nikolai wrestled out of the guard’s arms and ran over and tackled him to the ground and punched him again.

“Stop!” Jasper yelled and zapped Nikolai and he went to the ground as the electricity stunned him.

The guy got up and ran off and I noticed that his mask was left behind.

“Who was he?” a child asked.

“I don’t know.” I said as I walked over to pick up the mask. “I couldn’t see his face.”

“Will you be okay Alexa?” Jasper asked.

“I will be, what about Nikolai?” I asked.

“He will be down for now! I couldn’t let him hurt that person even further.” Jasper answered.

I felt tears come to my eyes and said, “It’s my fault.”

“

What?” he asked.

“It’s my fault that that person had to be beaten up due to Nikolai’s jealousy.” I answered.

He sighed and said, “Come on, let’s get back inside.”

I nodded.

The guard picked up the knocked-out Nikolai and we all went inside. I told Bartholomew to pass a message to my father that the toast is off and that I will be in my room for the rest of the evening. When I got there and taking out my headdress, I heard a knock.

“Who is it?” I asked.

The door opened and heard, “It’s me, Gina, can I come in?”

I sighed and said, “Might as well.”

“I heard that that toast was cancelled and went to find Jasper and he explained to me what had happened.” She said and came over to me.

“I guess Nikolai is not the prince that you think I should marry now, huh?” I asked.

“Of course not, how dare he take out someone who was performing fire magic in the garden.” Gina said.

I sighed and said, “Now I will probably be painted as someone who is dumb enough to fall for him or marry him.”

“Which you’re not aren’t you?” Gina asked.

I shook my head and said, “No way! I think he was awful too and now seeing him for his true colors is making me cancel the wedding!”

“Good! I would do the same.” Gina said.

“Looks like I will be having that talk with father in the morning.” I said.

Gina helped me out of my gown and into a nightgown and she left the room so I could get some sleep. Once she left, I looked at the mask which has a dent on one of the cheeks and asked, “Is it you Cinders? Or is it someone else that wore this tonight?”

I placed the mask into my bedside table drawer and fell asleep.

Chapter 27

Sidney

I ran towards the courtyard area to meet up with my family. I heard the sting from when I got beaten up by that Nikolai guy. I decided to take off the mask and touched my face and found out that my mask was not there.

“Oh no.” I said to myself and then heard another fountain nearby and went over to it. I looked at my own reflection in the water and saw that my face had a gash from when I fell on the ground. I did see my cheek near my burn scar was swollen and I had a black eye.

“Damn it, that bastard gave me a shiner.”

I heard a whistle and looked up to see Nathan.

“Nathan?” I asked.

He came over and said, “Whoa! How did you get hurt?”

“Alexa’s fiancé beat me up.” I answered.

“Whoa! So, a prince kicked your ass, huh? Never thought that would happen.” Nathan said.

“More like a prince with one major jealous rage! Is Seraphina around?” I asked.

“No, I stayed behind while she was in the ballroom promoting the cafe in case you came back.” He answered.

“She noticed I was gone?” I asked.

“Sort of, I told her you went off to find a bathroom.” He answered.

“What about Jason?” I asked.

“Went to dance with a few girls that recognized him from the café.” He answered.

“Never thought he would be the popular one despite doing nothing but sit around and whine.” I said.

“Come on man, let’s get back to the van so you can clean up.” Nathan said.

I nodded and we got back to the truck where I switched into an extra uniform and apron that was in the back of the van. I found the First Aid Kit and worked on my face which Seraphina and Jason were surprised to see the cheek and eye and big scrape.

“What happened to you? Lose a fight with another hearth?” Jason asked.

“Not really.” I said.

“No matter, the ball is starting to wind down since the king announced that the toast won’t be held and the prince is not feeling well again.” Seraphina said.

*No way, that means Alexa stopped the ball from continuing.* I thought.

“Let’s get going.” Seraphina said as she got into the van.

We got the plates and the remains of the food which we gave to some of the passersby and then drove back home and it was close to midnight when we got back.

“Don’t stay up too late! We open in the morning!” Seraphina exclaimed as she got inside with Jason following suit.

“Yes ma’am!” Nathan and I said.

“I wonder why the princess would end the ball so suddenly?” we heard Jason as we brought in the dishes and utensils we used at the castle.

“Not sure! All I know is the prince wasn’t feeling well, maybe something happened to the main course in the room?” Seraphina said.

“Or maybe someone tried to slip in something into his drink.” Jason said.

“No matter! We better get some sleep so we can open tomorrow.” Seraphina said and we watched them head upstairs.

Nathan and I got to our alcove and I put my head into my hands even if my face stings like crazy.

“Are you okay man?” Nathan asked.

“I feel like crap! I wished I hadn’t taken on that disguise earlier.” I answered.

“Look man, you did what you thought what was right and you were in love with her, weren’t you?”

“Yeah, I was and yet people do stupid things for love and mine was one of them.”

“Don’t worry about it man, you may see her again whenever she passes through town.”

“I hope so.”

We both got to bed and it felt like our sleep was short once the sun had risen and we started to prepare breakfast for all of us. We had to sit through Jason’s accounts of being with the girls that spotted him over at the ball.

“It was amazing! I don’t get why the princess and her fiancé weren’t there and enjoying every moment of it.” He said.

“Maybe the princess wanted a little bit of fresh air.” Nathan said.

I kicked him in the foot as a way of saying, “Shut it!”

“I heard that the princess might be falling for another person.” Jason said.

“Oh please, why would she fall for someone else when she is supposed to be marrying royalty to keep the blood going?” Seraphina said over her tea.

“What if that prince acts like a jealous brat?” I asked aloud.

“Why would you say that? Its sounds like you have met him.” Jason said.

“Maybe I have heard it from someone.” I said and stood up and gathered my plates. “Come on Nathan, we should get ready to open.”

Nathan nodded and followed suit.

“Sidney?” Seraphina asked.

“Yes stepmother?” I asked.

“Go upstairs and use my powder to cover up all those injuries.” She said.

“Yes ma’am.” I said and dropped the dishes into the dishwasher and headed upstairs to use the powder on my face. It felt like the day at the tea party when castle staff had me do the same thing but with my burn scar.

I thought about Alexa and how kind she was that day and even more kind when she became Bastion and then said, “I wonder how she is feeling after what had happened.”

“Opening time!” I heard Seraphina call up the stairs.

I sighed and got back downstairs and opened the café for another day of work.

Chapter 28

Alexa

I felt the first rays of the sun come through my window and groaned as the warmth touched my bed. I couldn’t sleep during the first hour I tried. I even had a guard grab Jasper quick for a quick sleep spell that helped.

“Alexa!” I heard Gina call from outside my room.

I groaned and got up and went over to the door and asked, “What is it?”

“Father’s calling for you.” She said.

I got ready and went to his office where I saw Nikolai with bruises on his face.

“What is going on?” I asked.

“Well, Nikolai came down this morning to tell me about what had happened at the ball last night.

I groaned since I remembered how he beat up the guy with the mask and that Jasper stunned him and I am guessing he got the bruises from falling face first to the ground.

“Alexa, I am very disappointed in you! You have even disappointed some of the court with your actions by leaving your own ball and being spotted with another man!” Father said.

I was silent.

“Do you know how much this hurts your reputation as the princess?” he asked.

“No, honestly I don’t care about that right now.” I said.

“What?” he asked.

“Look, I know I am supposed to marry Nikolai and have my happily ever after but all he is nothing but a spoiled and whiny brat that I couldn’t take it anymore! Everyone expects me to be happy with him and I am not.” I said.

“How can that be? You were all smiles when we were together.” Nikolai said.

I shook my head and said, “That was not really me.”

“Huh?” Nikolai asked.

“What are you talking about sweetie?” Father asked.

“That was Jasper disguised as me and I was a man named Bastion since it was an identity change potion, we both drank.” I answered.

“

Impossible! That means he was acting like you. Then who was him?” Nikolai asked.

“One of our guards by the name of Copper.” I said.

“Why did you do something like that?” Father asked.

“Because I didn’t like how I was treated by Nikolai and the worst thing of all he beat up an innocent guest last night at the ball.” I answered.

He looked at me and then at Nikolai and said, “He told me that he beat him up!”

“Not true.” I said and explained what had happened the night before and Father listened to me closely.

“You’re Highness that is not true!” Nikolai exclaimed.

“You’re not marrying Alexa!” he yelled.

I sighed in relief and said, “Thanks Father.”

“

When you told all the things just now thinking about it, I felt like I was doing the best for you but noticing how much you have grown I think that it’s time for you to choose the one you love over this imposter.” Father said.

“Thanks Father.” I said and hugged him.

“So, you think breaking the engagement would keep me away? I will marry your daughter.” Nikolai said.

“Huh?” I asked. The

At that moment, the door burst open and in came the guards with Irvine.

“What is going on?” I asked and noticed Copper and his eyes were blank. I did notice he was wearing higher ranking clothes despite him being a rookie.

“Guards, arrest the king!” Irvine exclaimed.

“Yes sir.” They said in unison and they went over to my father and he yelled, “What is the meaning of this Nikolai!?”

“I had a feeling you may do something like this since I did notice the caring look your daughter had given to this person that wore a mask last night.” Nikolai said.

I remembered the masked person and said, “So, you think arresting my father would force me into marrying you?”

“Of course! Your father chose me to marry you and I will make sure I will be the king!” Nikolai exclaimed.

I gasped.

“Also, I knew your butler and wizard were in the plan to change your mind as well.” He said.

“Oh no.” I said and then asked, “What if I don’t marry you?”

“I will have you arrested as well and see how it will feel until you change your mind.” He said.

I looked at my father who was on the floor with the handcuffs on his wrists and he said, “Don’t do it Alexa! He has gone mad!”

The guard kicked him and he screamed in pain.

“No don’t!” I yelled.

“Just say you will marry me and he won’t be harmed.” Nikolai said.

I felt tears go to my eyes and said, “Fine! I will do it!”

“Good.” He said.

I heard the guards take my father away and then I went upstairs to my room where I cried on my bed. I knew that I couldn’t get out of this or I will be in the dungeon myself. I knew I had to do what I needed to do.

“Alexa!” I heard Gina yell and then a knock.

“Gina!” I exclaimed and ran over and opened the door and hugged her as she came in.

“What’s going on? I saw the guards dragging father off to the dungeon and tried to ask Copper what was going on but he didn’t answer!” she said.

I told her what had happened in his office and she gasped and said, “How dare they do that to him?”

“I have a feeling that Irvine brainwashed some of the guards in order to get him.” I said.

“I can’t believe Nikolai would act like this.”

“Obviously to marry me even if the engagement was broken off.” I said.

“What are you going to do?” she asked.

I looked at my bedside table and then opened it and said, “Take this to Jasper! He will know what to do!”

I took the mask out of the drawer and handed it to her.

“Huh? How did you get this?” she asked.

“Remembered when I told you about the guy that Nikolai beat up? He was wearing this mask and I think Jasper had something to do with it.” I answered.

“Okay! Just hang in there, okay?” she said.

“I will!” I said.

She went into the stairwell in the back of my room and ran down the steps which I could hear her running as fast as she could.

“Good luck sis.” I said.

Chapter 29

Jasper

I was looking over my spell books until I heard a knock and Gina calling my name. I opened the door and she came in frantically.

“

What is it?” I asked.

“Have Irvine or Nikolai come down here yet?” she asked.

“No, why?” I asked.

“Well, they’re looking for you because of last night.” She told me.

“What?” I asked.

“Yeah, they also had father arrested when Alexa revealed what you and she did and how she revealed what Nikolai did to the guy who wore this mask.” I said.

I saw the mask that Alexa had picked up and noticed there was a little bit of damage from when Cinders hit the ground the night before.

“I will tell you that the guy who wore that mask was the one that worked at the café.” I told her.

“

Wait, the guy with that weird looking mark on his face” she asked and remembered him. “He is so nice and everything! Is that one that Alexa…?”

That was when we heard a pounding on the door and Irvine calling out, “Jasper! Open up!”

“Oh no.” she said.

“You need to get to him!” I told her.

“Huh? Why me?” she asked.

“

Because you’re the only one can have him save us all.” I told her.

She nodded and hugged me and said, “Be careful.”

“Now hurry!” I exclaimed.

She ran into the hidden stairwell in my room and I made sure she was gone and then that was when the door burst open.

“Hello Irvine.” I said.

“Was there someone in here with you?” he asked.

“None.” I said.

“I thought I heard someone like a female voice.” He said.

I hiccupped at that moment.

“Look for any signs of anyone who may have been here while Copper arrests this traitor!” Irvine ordered.

I watched our guards look around my room while Copper put handcuffs on my wrists as I said, “What the hell are you doing Copper?”

He didn’t answer and saw the blankness in his eyes. “You brainwashed them, didn’t you?”

“Of course, I could do it to the princess but she will be keeping her free will for now.” He said.

“How dare you! This is not what a court wizard does!” I yelled.

“A court wizard is supposed to help their prince, princess, or their monarch with what they want and Nikolai wants Alexa and whoever stood in our way in the dungeon.” He told me.

I was dragged off at that moment and heard Irvine cackle as I was taken away.

I was thrown into a cell a moment later and heard, “Jasper?”

I saw Bartholomew and the king in two other cells and said, “Your Majesty! Bartholomew! I guess they got you too by the looks of it.”

“And you as well.” Bartholomew said.

“Tell me something Jasper, is it true that you wanted Alexa to have someone else?” the king asked me.

“Well, your daughter had someone else in mind all this time, not sure if you’ve noticed but we wanted her with this person over Nikolai.” I answered honestly.

“I see, so she has grown up after all.” He said and looked down. “I thought I weas doing the right thing as king but sometimes it never works out in the end.”

“Don’t blame yourself Your Majesty, all we have to do now is just trust in Alexa and everything will be alright.” I told him.

“Jasper does have a point, even she would lose her crown if she wanted.” Bartholomew said.

“I guess she was that happy when Jasper and she switched.” The king said.

“I guess you know about that as well.” I said.

“She told me about it earlier and what Nikolai had done to that poor man.” He said.

“Good, I feel like a weight has been lifted.” I said.

*I’m counting on you Gina.* I thought to myself.

Chapter 30

Sidney

As the day went on, I noticed how the sky was starting to darken and the winds were picking up. Nathan and I had to go out in the cold storage shed and felt the winds ripping at our clothes and aprons.

“Whoa! How did this weather come around?” Nathan asked.

“Not sure, but something’s wrong I can feel it.” I answered.

As we got back to the café, I noticed storm clouds were taking shape and we saw some of our customers leaving. Some of them even had to-go containers with their food.

“Looks like we’re closing early.” I said.

We got inside and found Jason and Seraphina putting orders into containers.

“About time you guys got back!” Jason yelled.

“Sorry, we had to look hard for the extra green onions.” I said.

“No matter! More people are asking for the orders to be taken home with them!” Seraphina exclaimed.

We started to help them and heard, “Hey! I need the check!”

“Coming!” I called and went to look up the tickets and took the checks to the people who hadn’t paid yet and some of them told me to keep the change and hurried out of the café.

“What is going on? I never seen customers rush out like this.” Nathan said.

“

Probably it’s your horrible service.” Jason said.

“No, I think there’s something horrible going on.” I said and looked out the window that faced the castle and saw a dark ominous cloud around it and then ran to the alcove to get my old telescope out. I ran upstairs and went to my old balcony and looked out over at the castle again and saw lightning coming out of those clouds. “Something is definitely going on.”

I noticed a girl run towards the café door and got inside and then heard shouts from downstairs such as, “Go away!”

“But I was told the person who has a weird mark on his face is here!”

I recognized the voice and knew it was the girl that was with Alexa and ran back downstairs to the café. She was arguing with Seraphina and Jason.

“You’re at the wrong place!” Seraphina yelled.

“Excuse me!” I exclaimed and took the girl’s arm and ran outside with her.

“Sidney!” Seraphina yelled.

I managed to get her to the field behind the house and said, “You are the girl that’s with Alexa, aren’t you?”

“Yes! I’m her adopted sister actually.” She said.

“What is going on and why did you come for me?” I asked.

“Nikolai has imprisoned Jasper, Bartholomew and my father in order to force Alexa’s hand into marriage.” She answered.

“What? Is it because of last night?” I asked.

“Alexa told me that he beat you up but I don’t see the injuries.” She said.

I got up and ran over to our well where I grabbed the bucket and filled it with water. I washed off the makeup and revealed the black eye, scrape that still stung, and the bruise near my burn scar.

She gasped and said, “It is true about what she said.”

“Yes.” I said.

“It even shows here that you got hurt.” She said and took out the mask and I saw that there was a dent with a few cracks from it.

“Yeah, that is what Bartholomew had me wear to say that I was just a stranger unless my fire magic might have told her who I was.” I said.

“Magic?” she asked.

I formed a dark green fireball in my hand and told her, “During the time she was here in her disguise, I was able to show her that I can use rainbow flames like my father and done some tricks for some children in the garden last night after hearing how bored they were and that was when the prince hurt me.”

She was in awe and said, “It is true about what took place and you were just entertaining people.”

I nodded.

“Now you must save her, who knows how much time we have.” She told me.

“Are you sure?” I asked.

“Look, you’re the one who has captured my sister’s heart and with those flames you can save her.” She told me.

I smiled and then took the mask and put it on.

“You don’t have to wear that.” She said.

“I know except I will reveal myself when the time comes.” I said. Her.

“Very well, let’s go!” she exclaimed.

We ran off and I had the images of Alexa in my head as we headed for the castle.

*I shouldn’t have been angry with you! I understand now what you were doing and I’m sorry about that.* I thought.

Chapter 31

Alexa

I stayed in my room hoping that Jasper “When the vows are said, you better let my father go. “Would find Cinders but I had a bad feeling that he was captured and Gina would have been found out since she didn’t return.

I heard a knock and called out, “Come in!”

The door opened and I saw some of the maids come in with a huge bag and makeup and hair items in hand.

“What’s this?” I asked.

“The prince sent us to get you ready for your wedding.” One of them said.

“He wants to marry now?” I asked.

“Yes!” another said.

I thought back to what Nikolai said and then sighed and said, “Very well.”

I then saw the swan headdress and said, “But wait! With my veil, I would like this incorporated.”

I handed one the of the maid’s headdress and she nodded and they started to work on me. Once I was done, I was wearing a white and silver trimmed wedding dress with detached sleeves. I had the veil with the swan headdress on top which made my eyes radiate even more in the mirror.

*If only I was marrying Cinders instead of Nikolai.* I thought.

“You don’t like it princess?” a maid asked.

“I do but…” I started.

“But what?” she asked.

The door opened and then Irvine called out, “Lovely as always!”

I looked at him and glared at him.

“Don’t give me that face!” he exclaimed as he walked over in a white and blue suit.

“Better let my father go once the vows are said.” I told him.

“Don’t worry, we will once you’re married.” He told me and took me by the arm and pulled me out of the room. I felt like I was a real caged bird with what is coming next.

We got to the ballroom where I heard organ music and my other maids appeared and were in awe when they saw me.

*This is it! I hope that Gina or Jasper get here and soon.* I thought as Irvine and I went inside.

Sidney

We got to the castle through the downpour. It felt cold like ice as it hit us and heard the thunder boom above us.

“Someday for a wedding.” I joked.

“This way.” Gina said as she led me to a hidden stairwell.

“How many of these do you guys have?” I asked since I was led to one the night before.

“A lot! Alexa and I enjoy using them so that we roam freely!” she answered.

We heard organ music from above as we got closer to the center of the castle.

“Oh no! The wedding is about to begin.” She said.

“Looks like we’re going to crash it.” I said with a smile.

“Are you crazy!?” she asked.

“It’s the only way I can get her.” I said.

We got into the hallway in front of the ballroom and saw guards at the doors.

“Let me take care of them.” She whispered and walked up to the guards.

“Gina! Where have you been?” one of them asked while I hid among the tapestries.

“Well, I went for a walk!” she exclaimed.

“You’re soaked to the bone! I don’t think a princess should go into her own sister’s wedding like that.” The other said.

I managed to get into the room and saw the room filled with staff and guards and did see the familiar swan headdress from the night before.

*It looks like she wore that with her dress. Doesn’t exactly match but it is her…stay focused Sidney! You’re here to save her!* I thought.

“Dearly beloved, we are here today to celebrate these two in marriage.” I heard the priest say.

A

I ran among the columns; I did see a slightly evil smile on the prince’s face and knew that he was hoping he will get what he wants. I really want to hit him for what he did to me the night before.

Alexa

I felt like I was doomed as I took each step with Irvine and knew that I will be marrying a psychotic man that has forced my hand to marry him.

“Are you alright princess?” Irvine asked in mocked caring voice.”

I am! Just nervous that’s all.” I said in my slightly nervous voice.

“

Don’t worry, you will be married and live happily ever after.” He said.

*Happily, ever after my ass!* I thought.

We got to the altar where Nikolai took my hand and had a white and silver trimmed tuxedo himself and looked at me with a slightly, psychotic grin and I felt a major chill go down my spine as he lifted my veil.

*Please Jasper! Get here already with that guy with the mask!* I thought.

“Dearly beloved, we’re gathered here today to marry our princess to this prince! Whoever disagree with this momentous occasion, speak now or forever hold your peace!” the priest exclaimed.

“Me!” we heard and a big blue fireball flew at Nikolai and he screamed and ducked as it hit a tapestry which deacons hurried over to extinguish the flames.

I turned to see the guy with the mask on and noticed he was soaked from some rain that I heard falling on the windows as I headed downstairs with Irvine.”

You!” I exclaimed.

He ran over and he took my hands and said, “I’m here.”

I blushed and asked, “Will you remove the mask?”

He lifted it and revealed himself as Cinders.

“Cinders? It was you?” I asked.

“Yes, Bartholomew figured that I would surprise you but with this on.” He said.

“No wonder I recognized the magic.” I said.

“Irvine!” Nikolai yelled.

Out of nowhere a fireball flew at Cinders and got him and he screamed in pain.

“No!” I yelled and held him as he fell to his knees.

“So, it was the café boy from the tea party.” Nikolai said as he looked at Cinders who was in major pain.

“You monster!” I yelled.

“Don’t tell me you care for this guy; he has nothing but a weird, discolored mark on his face.” Nikolai said. When he saw the mark on his face.

“I got this mark…when I was young…I fell asleep too close to the hearth…that is why I have the nickname Cinders…” Cinders told us as he stood up.

“Irvine, kill this guy so I can have the princess as my wife.” Nikolai ordered.

Another fireball formed and Cinders stood up and said, “Princess, run!”

“Huh?” I asked.

“Just do it! I don’t want you to get hurt.” Cinders said.

I nodded and kissed him on the cheek and ran off and then heard, “Guards!”

The guards blocked my way and yelled, “Let me go!”

They didn’t answer and that is when I noticed their eyes were blank.

“You’re not going anywhere!” Nikolai exclaimed.

I saw one of the swords in the guards’ sheath and I took it out and swung at him with a yell and got him in the face. He screamed in pain and kicked me down.

“No Alexa!” I heard Cinder’s yell and he used a fireball on Nikolai and Irvine which they screamed in pain which I found an opening and ran out of the ballroom through one of the garden doors.

*Please Cinders, keep fighting!* I thought as I ran deeper into the garden.

Chapter 32

Sidney

I managed to take down Irvine and Nikolai and did see Alexa ran through the side doors that exited into the rain and I ran to the door.

“I think…not…” I heard and felt something sharp go into my leg and saw it was an icicle.

“What the hell…he knows ice magic too?” I asked and managed to get back up and tried to run but felt lightning hit me and I went to my knees again.

“Looks like you will be losing today!” Irvine said as he stood on over me.

I saw that I made some burns on him and I knew I was done and over with if he got me again.

“Let him go!” I heard and lightning zapped him and he screamed and went down to the floor.

“Cinders!” I heard I thought I heard my nickname and then felt strong hands lift me up.

I did see a man that looked like Alexa was the one helping me.

“You’re…Majesty?” I asked.

“Is this the one Bartholomew?” the King asked.

“

Yes, it is.” Bartholomew answered.

“Wait, Bartholomew? How did you get out of here?” I asked.

“Well, the guards outside weren’t really entranced and I explained what had happened to the king.” Gina said.

“I must find your daughter; she is out there and I have a bad feeling that she may be in danger.” I said.

“Very well, but you must need to get that leg looked at.” The king said.

“No time…” I started as I was placed into one of the pews.

“He’s right, there is not much time before Nikolai finds her.” Bartholomew said and saw my apron on. “Take that off Sir Cinders.”

I saw it and nodded and took it off to hand it to him. I saw him tear it up and wrapped my leg around the icicle and then helped me up to say, “Come on, let’s find her.”

I nodded and we went into the storm to find her.

Chapter 33

Alexa

I ran through the slight downpour as far as I could. I had tears coming down my cheeks with worry for Cinders.

*I am so sorry everyone for getting you all into this!* I thought and remembered the potion that Jasper and I drank to switch places and then the ball and how Father was arrested.

I managed to get to the fountain where I sat on the bench until the masked Cinders found me. I saw the candle he had lit was out and slightly melted in its flower sconce that it floated in.

I felt so numb in the rain and thought about my father and everyone else. I felt like a fool for everything I’ve done. Then I thought of poor Cinders who tried to save me back there.

“Alexa!” I heard and it was Nikolai calling.

“Damn it…” I whispered and got up and hid among the bushes.

“Where are you?” Nikolai called out.

I still had the sword in my hand and called out, “Over here!”

He came into the area and I saw that his face was bleeding and I held my sword to protect myself.

“Aw, you’re all soaked.” He said with that same crazy smile on his face.

“Step back!” I yelled.

“Aw, you shouldn’t be so scared of me! I love you!” he said.

“You call this love? As in the craziness you have shown since this morning. You even hurt a close friend of mine!” I yelled and remembered what he had done the night before.

“Tell me something, that man that shown up that you called Cinders, how long have you loved him?” he asked once he got close.

“I…I…” I started.

“She had loved me for the longest time.” We heard and saw Bartholomew with Cinders and I saw that his leg was wrapped up with an icicle sticking out from the bandages.

“Cinders…” I started.

“You! You jerk! You have ruined my fiancé’s love for me!” Nikolai yelled.

“To tell you the truth, I never loved you.” I said.

“What?” he asked.

“I couldn’t stand your attitude ever since you came to the castle which led me to do the role switch with Jasper!” I said.

Cinders managed to let go of Bartholomew and limped over to me and he said, “It is true, you couldn’t stop thinking about me.”

I shook my head and then I saw him reach into his pocket to hold up the sheet of paper and asked, “What is that?”

“It’s the note you left me with the tip you left behind.” He answered.

“

“Wait, you had that all this time?” I asked with new tears forming in my eyes.

He nodded and got Bartholomew to let go.

“Of course, when I saw it, I thought it was precious and hid it away.” He said as he limped over to me.

I closed the distance and hugged him and said, “I am so sorry for fooling you.”

“It’s okay, I understand now.” He said.

“

How dare you!” Nikolai yelled as he grabbed me by the veil and pulled me away and I screamed.

“Let her go!” Cinders yelled and sent a green fireball and it got him in the arm and he screamed to let me go.

I managed to get him in the thigh with the sword and he screamed and landed in the fountain.

I ran to Cinders and we both hugged in the rain.

“Are you okay?” he asked me.

“

Yeah, will be once I get out of this dress.” I said.

He smiled and then he kissed me and I kissed him back.

Guards finally arrived as Bartholomew was helping Cinders’ leg. They were confused to see Nikolai in the fountain.

“Hey, I think the prince needs some help with his injuries.” I spoke up.

“Princess?” one of them asked.

“And once they get taken care of, throw him into the dungeon.” I ordered.

“Yes ma’am!” They exclaimed.

We got to the castle where Cinders passed out from his injuries and the maids and guards got to him the infirmary to be looked after.

“Alexa.” I heard my father and I ran to hug him.

“I am so glad you’ve been helped! How did you and Bartholomew get out of the dungeon?” I asked.

“Irvine didn’t entrance all of the guards so they were able to get father out and in time to help you two.” Gina said.

I smiled and said, “Thanks for what you’ve done.”

She smiled and said, “Where’s Cinders?”

“He is in the infirmary now; he will be fine from what had happened.” I answered.

“I am really sorry Alexa for what I’ve put you through.” Father said.

“I should be the one to apologize with what I have done.” I said.

“Forgive you, but you should have come to me with how you really felt about Nikolai.” He said.

“But you were so happy with me being engaged to him and you didn’t want to hear me complain about him so I wouldn’t disappoint you.” I told him as I looked down.

“The only thing I want to see is you happy and in love and it seems that you found that person.” He told me.

I nodded and thought, *Get better Cinders!*

Chapter 34

Sidney

It felt like a dream with my being in the castle. I remembered that I was taken into a nice, warm room to have my injuries to be taken care of. I did smell a mossy scent in the air and hardly felt the burn on shoulder from Nikolai’s Court Wizard before he got me in the leg.

I woke up to warm sunlight on my face and noticed that I was surrounded by huge, fluffy pillows and felt the feather-like blanket on me and then heard, “Hey! You’re awake!”

I turned to see Gina, Alexa, and Jasper standing in the room.

“Hey, you’ve been waiting for me?” I croaked.

“Somewhat, Alexa has been checking on you for the past week and a half and dragged us down here to check on you!” Gina answered.

“Come on now, you two were also worried about him.” Alexa said.

She giggled and Jasper laughed a bit.

I smiled and thought I would feel pain from the bruise Nikolai landed on me but noticed it was faint.

“Here you go!” Alexa said and handed me a glass of water.

I was helped to sit up by Jasper and I took a drink.

“That magic you used, you are Bert Kingsley’s son, aren’t you?” Jasper asked.

“Huh? How did you know?” I asked.

“Well, I saw that your father was a court wizard and he quit, then I noticed your name in the list of wizards being tested and it said you failed.” Jasper told me.

I looked down and said, “I worked hard on that test but not hard enough to pass and then became my stepmother’s slave of course.” I said.

“What if I told you, I pulled some strings for this?” Alexa asked and handed me something.

It was a scroll and opened it to see: “On Behalf of the King, This Certificate is Rewarded to Sidney Kingsley!”

“How?” I asked.

“Our father was very grateful that you saved us all with Alexa’s help and he wanted you to have that and be one.” Gina said.

“Not only he was glad you saved me but he also noticed I have my heart set on you.” Alexa told me.

“Huh?” I asked and looked at her.

“When I was Bastion, I watched you control your fire magic every night during those two weeks and you proved your work, plus you haven’t stopped thinking about me even in that form.” She said.

I thought to those nights and felt the familiarity of the moss green eyes.

“No, I recognized your eyes from that moment but never thought it was you.” I told her.

“I should have told you then you shouldn’t been hurt at the ball.” I said.

I shook my head and then said, “Even though I was at the ball that night, you wouldn’t have known it was me under that mask until I saved you and then you saved me with your own blade.”

She blushed and said, “Well, when I become stressed from my duties as princess I tend to practice with my guards.”

“Like me!” I heard and saw a guard with a new robe. “She does know how to handle one of our swords since she did take one of our sergeants’ sword that day.”

She giggled.

“So, cinders, what do you say? Will you marry Alexa?” Jasper asked.

I thought and then said, “Yes, but I need a favor!”

“

Huh?” she asked.

We arrived outside Seraphina’s café in the carriage with some vans behind us and the both of us were helped.

“Cinders?” I heard Nathan ask.

“Is that Sidney Nathaniel?” I heard Seraphina from inside.

She and Jason came out with Jason yelling, “About time you came back! You know how much my nails were ruined from washing dishes!?”

Nathan looked me up and down and saw the cane in my hand and asked, “You look snazzy in your new clothes and cane.”

“I had an icicle stabbed into my leg.”

“While saving me.” Alexa said.

“

You’re Highness! I didn’t know you were also coming!” Seraphina exclaimed.

She noticed the vans and Nathan asked, “Why are these here?”

I gave the signal to the drivers that were wearing the castle colors and they opened the cargo doors and waiters in our café’s colors came out and three chefs as well.

“Seraphina, I bring you your new café staff.” I announced.

“What?” she asked.

“Where did these come from?” Jason asked.

“They were extras in the kitchen so Cinders or shall I say Sidney from what you have been calling him asked me to bring you knew staff to work instead of having Nathan and Jason do it.” Alexa said.

“By the way stepmother, remembered that Bastion guy? Well, it was Alexa who joined us in disguise.” I said.

“What?” she asked and looked at Alexa.

“Yeah, it’s true! I was surprised that Sidney and your son were the only workers and I agreed that you need more hands-on deck and what better way is to bring my extra kitchen staff to you.” Alexa said.

“And another thing stepmother, Nathan will be the one heading the staff instead of you so you can keep track of your balances.” I said.

Nathan smiled and said, “You’re awesome man!”

I smiled and said, “Of course I am!”

“Wait, what about you? Are you coming back?” Jason asked me.

“No, I am marrying Alexa.” I said.

“What!? I thought she was engaged!” Seraphina exclaimed.

“I never loved Nikolai, I only loved Sidney.” Alexa said as she looked at me lovingly. “Every feature even his burn scar.”

“So Master Nathaniel, what do you need us to do?” a chef asked.

“Get in there! We have some orders to fill!” Nathan exclaimed.

“Yes sir!” the staff exclaimed and went inside to do their jobs.

“Sidney…” Seraphina started.

“Yes?” I asked.

“I never said this to you, I am so proud of you.” She said and hugged me.

“Thanks stepmother.” I said.”

Please look after yourself and the princess.” She said.

“I will!” I said.

“By the way, um Jasper wants a dozen of those apple and cream cheese tarts!” Alexa exclaimed.

“Of course! Of course!” she exclaimed and laughed.

We did enjoy some food at the café and were welcomed back anytime. I saw Nathan smiling as he took on his role as manager.

We got back to the castle so we could get ready for our wedding that night.

As I was getting ready for the wedding, the king appeared.

“What is it Your Majesty?” I asked.

“I haven’t thanked you enough young man for saving us.” He said.

“Should thank Gina for getting me.” I said.

“Which I have and Jasper for pushing her to get you.” He said.

“You know, when your daughter first appeared at the cafe I couldn’t stop thinking about her even as Bastion.” I said.

“I can see that even in your eyes! Your magic will be important to us even if any other threats may arise.” He said.

“I figured as much, I would say you better let us go out and about time to time in town! I know Alexa would enjoy having some fresh air in town.” I said.

“Of course! I will make sure you two enjoy your marriage in here and outside.” He said with a big smile.

We had the wedding in the gardens outside the ballroom and this time Alexa wore a wedding dress with gold trim and did wear headdress that looked like flames that crowned around her veil. I did wear a ringlet that looked like my fire magic as we both wed under the sunset.

“Will you Sidney Kingsley take Alexa to be your Royal Wife?” I was asked.

“I do!” I said.

“And you, Alexa, will you take Sidney to be your Royal Husband?” she was asked.

“I do!” she exclaimed.

“By the power invested in me by the court! I pronounce you two as husband and wife! You may kiss the bride!” the priest exclaimed.

The both of us kissed and everyone applauded.

The reception was held in the ballroom and we all danced until I felt pain in my leg again. Jasper even did his own fire magic but it wasn’t as colorful as mine but everyone cheered for him. I did see Gina give him a kiss and he hiccupped after she walked off. Gina did catch the bouquet and knew that another royal wedding would happen but between her and Jasper.

Once in our chamber, we held each other on the balcony that faced over the town that was starting to return to their homes.

“This has been the happiest day of my life.” Alexa said.

I nodded and said, “Indeed!”

“If I were to marry Nikolai I wouldn’t be as happy as this.” She said.

“What happened to him and Irvine?” I asked.

“He was sent back home in shame; we did get a letter from his father that he is no longer welcomed in the castle once he knows how to get over his broken heart and jealousy.” Alexa said with a smile.

I laughed.

“Now, we should get some sleep my Royal Husband!”

“Of course, my Royal Wife!”

We both got to bed and slept our happiness into a true happily ever after!

Another fairy tale awaits in another town…

Michelle runs his books hop with his mother, who tends to invent their basement underneath. Once a mysterious woman under a hood shows up, he can’t get her out of his head and heart. A new adventure will bring them together once he must find his mother.

Gabrielle has been a kind soul but with a selfish brother, Alicia. Once they meet a beggar who was a sorcerer in disguise, their new beastly forms were given to them alongside strange magical tattoos that would change if they fell in love. Will they in the end?

Based on the tale of *Beauty & the Beast,* we bring you *Rose Thorns of Love: Another Backwards Fairy Tale*

Coming Soon

About the Author:

Marinela has been writing most of her life. She has looked up to writers such as Jim Butcher, Lara Adrian, Mimi Jean Pamfiloff, and Kaz LaFave.

Despite having a rare form of Retinitis Pigmentosa, she relies on using adaptive software and devices for her writing. She gives back to the blind community by teaching others how to use their adaptive devices. She currently lives in Daytona Beach with her husband, Richard.

Sidney has a special power inherited by his dead father. He is able to use rainbow colored flames that can come out at will or in emotional distress.Despite having this power and hoping to become a Court Wizard, his stepmother and twin stepbrothers always keep him cleaning their home, cook food, and run their café attached to their home.

Alexa is seen as the princess that is supposed to serve everyone and marry a prince. Just when she is brought home a new fiancé by her father, she wants someone better. After seeing Sidney at a garden party and then at the café later on, she can’t seem to stop thinking about him. Will she ever get the man she loves or marry someone she doesn’t? Can she do it before the ball strikes twelve?

This story is the first in a new series with magical hijinks in a new version of the classic Cinderella story.r