

### \*~Deleted Scene: Awaiting Prince Liam~\*

Despite having successfully retrieved my love spell, I still had to await an agonizingly long time to use it, two full weeks, in fact, a time that seemed even longer considering I was determinedly ignoring a specific guard.

What was taking Prince Liam so long to grace us with his royal presence? Didn't he realize that the love of his life was waiting most impatiently for him at the Sortileyen palace? Finally, the next chapter of what promised to be the most thrilling and wonderful in *The Story of Rosalina* arrived when Eileen turned to Aiden at breakfast one morning.

"Isn't Liam due to arrive today?"

I dropped my fork with a loud *clang*. "Prince Liam is coming?" It was about time.

Eileen sighed, undoubtedly knowing the reason for my excitement over this news, whereas Aiden frowned. "You still hope to pursue him?"

"Indeed. The princess' quest isn't complete until she's united with her prince."

"And what is your latest scheme to achieve that?" Eileen asked warily. "Surely, not that love spell."

Aiden's manner became gravely serious. "You will not spell anyone within this palace, especially not a betrothed heir."

"One who doesn't wish to be betrothed," I pointed out.

"Be that as it may, being spelled out of his political contract is no way to break it." Aiden glanced at Ali...Alastar. "You still have her spelled chocolates?"

He bowed. "Of course, Your Highness. She made an attempt to steal them back but I foiled her in the end."

That's what *he* thought. It took every ounce of willpower not to smirk. Aiden continued studying me rather suspiciously and I squirmed beneath the intensity of his gaze.

"I admit I fully intended to spell Prince Liam, but Guard Alastar annoyingly destroyed that plan through thievery." I sent the guard-in-question a piercing glare from where he stood rigidly at his usual perch against the wall, guarding us from whatever potential hazards could befall us during breakfast. He merely tilted his head in response, a challenging look in his eyes.

"Once again, thank you for your interference," Aiden told him. He bowed.

"I'm pleased my keeping Miss Rosalina out of mischief pleases you."

I scowled as Aiden returned to his eggs and sausage, seeming satisfied that the matter appeared settled. Unfortunately, Eileen knew me better. She studied me apprehensively.

"You have another plan up your sleeve, don't you?"

I smothered jam on my toast. "I'm not a heroine who gives up. You didn't in your own happily ever after."

Eileen exchanged a loving smile with Aiden, which he returned as he wove his hand with hers. "I do believe true love is worth pursuing but I'm concerned you're making yourself to fit with Liam. Love shouldn't be forced. I don't want you to see you unhappy."

"If I get my prince, I won't be." I set aside the raspberry jam and proceeded to add a layer of peach jam on top. I felt the heat of *his* gaze. "Is there a problem, Ali?" I peeked up at him to discover him frowning at me.

"How many layers of jam are you planning on drowning that piece of toast in?"

I dipped my knife into the strawberry one next. "I like sugar."

"Unsurprising." His lips twitched, even though my partiality to jam wasn't at all amusing. "You also like *trouble*." The look he gave me made me certain he knew *exactly* what I was up to. Knowing him, he probably would uncover my scheme before long. I had to give Prince Liam the love spell before that happened.

"And you like preventing heroines from finding true happiness."

"When you finally embark on a path that will bring you true happiness I promise to let you walk it to your heart's content. Until then..."

A strange flutter filled my stomach as I met his intense hazel gaze. We stared one another down in an attempt to break down one another's defenses. When I finally looked away, I noticed Eileen giving Aiden her usual knowing smirk. I narrowed my eyes.

"What's that look for?"

"Oh nothing," she said lightly, and she returned to her breakfast without any further comment.

The hours between when breakfast ended and Prince Liam was due to arrive stretched on endlessly. I tried all manner of things to make time go more quickly but it mischievously decided to slow to a crawl simply for the fact I didn't want it to.

I spent the morning with Eileen while Aiden was occupied with meetings until I lost her company when he was released from his tedium. Which was how I found myself wandering the gardens alone just before lunch.

"Stomping amongst such beauty? This looks to be a dark scene in *The Story of Rosalina*."

I stiffened. Of course *he'd* be here. I turned to glare at him. "I haven't decided to be friends with you again, so don't expect me to talk to you." Nevermind the strange urgency I'd been fighting for days to do just that.

Alastar leaned casually against a hedge. "Story still not going according to plan, or are you merely impatient to stir up trouble?"

"I'm not stirring up *trouble*," I snapped.

Up went his eyebrow. "Then how do you explain your recent raiding of my room? I was under the impression that thievery and trouble were one and the same."

"I was *questing*."

His lips twitched. "Ah, a word with many definitions according to your mischievous mind. I should have known it would cover *stealing* considering you last used it to describe the fact many imperial plans mysteriously ended up in your satchel."

Heat flared my cheeks as I spun on my heels to stomp dramatically away. I should have known he wouldn't allow me to escape, not when he believed it his annoying duty to make my day was miserable.

"You have a plan," he stated as he caught up and walked easily beside me.

"Of course I do. I told you I'm not a heroine who gives up."

"Even when you're pursuing the wrong goal?"

"As the heroine in my story I choose the goal to pursue, not you."

"I snuck a peek at the ending of this story of yours and Prince Liam is *not* how your story is supposed to—"

I gasped and spun on him in horror. "You sneak peeks at the ending of stories? How could you, Ali? I'm utterly disgusted."

His lips twitched and he actually bit them, as if needing an extra barrier to suppress his laugh. "I most certainly don't. That would ruin the fun. But I admit my curiosity was too great when it came to yours. Your tale is just so...*twisty*."

I pressed my hands to my hips. "How so?"

"Do you really want me to ruin the story for you, Rosie?"

I clenched my jaw. "That would be most disappointing."

"Then I suppose you'll just have to wait and find out, for I anticipate many surprises in your future."

With that he strolled away, whistling as he went, leaving me scowling after him. He'd be the one with the surprises, not me, for nothing would prevent me from ensuring my story followed my carefully plotted outline.