

~Deleted Scene: Horrified Realization~

Prince Liam brushed my shoulder, compelling me to look into his concerned expression. "You seem sad, my petal. I know just the thing to cheer you up?"

Trepidation knotted my stomach. It tightened when Prince Liam withdrew a piece of parchment and smoothed it out.

"I also have a token of affection for you—on my way here I composed another love poem. Would you like to read it?" He handed it to me reverently.

My Darling Rosie Petal:

What is beauty? It is you. What is love? It is you. Who is my heart? It is you. What is the motivation for each breath I take? It is you. Who is the one I think about every single moment? It is you. Who is the possessor of my heart and the one I adore above all others? It is you.

Ever Only Yours, Your Adoring Liam

I stared down at the note, trying to make myself feel something, *anything*, but as usual I didn't.

"Well?" Prince Liam's hopeful plea caused me to look up. "What do you think, petal? Do you like it? Please say that you do."

"It's quite..." I sighed wearily, so tired of whatever game the prince and I were playing. "There are no words."

"My thoughts exactly, my sweet. No matter what poetic phrase I pen as an ode to your beloved heart, mere words cannot capture the depth of my feelings. But I'll keep trying so that I may continue spoiling you with tokens of my undying love."

Oh great.

Prince Liam smiled at me—my resistance to his romantic gesture entirely lost to his spelled, lovesick hopes—and turned towards our chaperones. "Perhaps you can read this latest poem out loud so Eileen and Aiden can be reminded of my love for you. Would you two like to hear my latest love letter for Rosie?"

Aiden groaned from the sofa where he'd finally settled back with Eileen after his pacing, just as he always did whenever Prince Liam insisted on sharing his latest tokens of devotion.

"If we must." While he looked like he'd rather hear passages read from the dictionary, Eileen forced herself to smile, one that didn't quite reach her eyes.

“Of course. Any compliments about my dear friend are certainly welcome.”

I gaped at her, betrayed by her encouragement, before spinning onto His Highness. “Please, Prince Liam, this letter is far too special to be shared so casually; instead it should be treasured.”

Prince Liam studied me for a moment before nodding. “A lovely idea, my sweet. Very well, we’ll keep these particular affections of my heart for you just between the two of us, as you wish.”

Aiden appeared relieved to be spared an awkwardly mushy moment but it was nowhere near the relief I felt to be spared reading another horribly embarrassing letter out loud, as I’d already been forced to do many times before leaving for Arador, each experience worse than the last.

I made a show of folding the letter with the utmost tenderness, as if it and its contents were truly precious to me, but really it was an excuse to not only avoid looking at Prince Liam but to give me something to do in what promised to be a tedious visit, longing to be anywhere else.

As Eileen and Aiden returned to their private world that consisted only of one another, I was left with Prince Liam reciting accolades to my unparalleled beauty, now one of my least favorite topics; I could be covered in warts and it wouldn’t matter to one blinded by magic.

I promptly tuned him out to daydream up possible alternatives of where I’d rather be than here. There were so many wonderful options—from exploring the dungeons to being kidnapped by an evil witch and carried off bound and gagged on her broomstick. I’d just settled on curling up next to a sleeping dragon as a nice alternative to enduring this visit when Prince Liam caressed my face to draw my attention.

“You’re daydreaming again, my darling love. Won’t you share the thoughts of that delightful mind of yours?”

“Just thinking about dragons.” My gaze instinctively darted to Ali’s. His lips twitched and I managed a smile back. Unfortunately, Prince Liam noticed our exchange and his eyes narrowed as he once again tried to tug my wavering attention back to him.

“What about dragons?”

“Just how pleasant it would be to be currently sleeping next to a particularly hungry one.”

Prince Liam seemed thoroughly perplexed while Ali snorted. I beamed at him, my first smile since this tedious visit in the parlor had started. He returned it with a wink, as if he knew exactly why I'd been thinking of starving dragons and how pleased I'd be to offer myself up as a tasty morsel for them to enjoy.

Annoyingly, this exchange also wasn't lost on Prince Liam. "My petal, you're looking at my foe again, and rather *tenderly*, too."

A blush heated my cheeks as I severed our gaze with a gasp but the damage had already been done, which meant I'd have to deal with what was becoming a habitual spiel of self-pity and love sick woes from this annoying prince.

"Oh no, Prince Liam, I—"

"*Liam*," he insisted with a whine. "You drop the title for that guard but not for me, your true love?"

I bit my lip hard to avoid the string of obscenities threatening to tumble out. Heroines didn't curse, even when the situation warranted it.

Prince Liam leaned closer, blue eyes wide and imploring. "You don't *feel* for that guard, do you?" he hissed, a whisper I fervently prayed would remain just between us rather than being carried to the others in the room. "He hasn't stolen the heart that's mine, has he?"

"No, of course not," I stuttered.

"But you seem so happy whenever you look at him."

"I—" As much as I loved words, they could be so difficult to arrange at times. Which ones could possibly help me in what was rapidly becoming quite the tangled mess? "I —"

"Tell me, Rosie." Prince Liam seized my hand. "What can I do to make you the happiest of women who's ever graced this earth? I must know."

Nothing, for despite my having spent an abhorrent amount of time believing otherwise, he wasn't my prince...yet despite my attempts to reverse the spell, he was spelled to believe otherwise. I'd spelled the Crown Prince of Draceria into believing he was in love with me and I had no idea how to reverse it. Horror curdled my stomach. I was a character trapped in a story I no longer wanted to be in and I had no idea how to break free from a plot rapidly spiraling to an undesirable conclusion.

The parlor was suddenly much too confining. Escape, I needed to escape. I yanked my hand from Prince Liam's burning grip.

"Stop it," I shrieked and his groveling silenced instantly. "You're driving me crazy." I leapt to my feet, ignoring the wounded look now filling Prince Liam's eyes.

"Rosie petal..." He attempted to reach for my hand again but I jerked away. I'd had enough of this ridiculous charade.