

The Royal Dilemma

Anoushka Kanitkar



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Once upon a time...

Wait. Nope. Let's do this again.

I'm a princess, trying my best to be a good little diplomat and help with the kingdom's welfare. I will never inherit the throne, because I am female (which is so dumb, really), and so I have to spend my time in the background, helping with the mechanics. Unfortunately, that was not how I wanted to spend my life.

Yesterday, I told my parents the truth. I knew it was crazy, but I hated being a princess. The moments when I felt most alive was when I was on my horse, the wind blowing through my hair, taking jousting or sword fighting lessons in the sun. (In secret, of course.) I wanted to be a knight. The looks on their faces told me what they were thinking before they said it- I was an abomination. The king was clear when he told me what the consequences would be here in the kingdom of Foxwick, I, Princess Maya, would be exiled. I had one day to think about my decision.

I paced in my room, muttering to myself and running my hand through my hair. I was stressed to the point of combustion because of what I was about to do. .

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“What am I thinking? I would be exiled from the kingdom! I would...” I trailed off, my mutters fading. I had to give up. Or, I could...

I grabbed a tunic and tights, and threw them on in my bathroom. I grabbed a plain canvas sack, shoved some similar outfits into it, and rushed back into the bathroom to grab some basic amenities. I was ready. I put on a cloak and hurried down to the kitchens. The head cook, Marianne, noticed me and waved me over.

“Where are you going, sweetie?” she asked. Marianne had been my nanny until I was 12, and she knew me like I was her granddaughter.

“Oh, just, you know, out. I needed some air.” I replied, shrugging.

“Let me guess, you came down here for food?” she said with a smile.

“Of course I did!”

She packed me a little knapsack full of a few apples, a small loaf of bread, some cheese, and a small jar of preserves. Marianne knew my giant appetite more than anyone. She also knew that my “out for some air” trips could go on for hours, which is why she packed more food than for an average trip. This, I was very grateful for.

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“I carefully put the knapsack into my larger sack and set off towards the gardens, waving goodbye to Marianne. I found myself tearing up. I was going to miss her.

I reached the back doors that lead to the stables and gardens and told the guards to let me out. They shared a look and opened the doors silently. I casually walked to the stables and let myself in, walking down the row of stalls, breathing in the musky smell of the horses and freshly laid hay. I stopped at the end of the row, where my horse, Elf, was waiting. I unlocked her stall door and walked inside. Elf nuzzled me and I stroked her cocoa brown side. I stepped back and unhooked her saddle from the wall and buckled it around her. Elf neighed gently; I imagined she was saying, “Where are we going?” I gave her a sad smile.

After I had packed my things away in Elf’s saddlebag, I swung my leg over her back and settled myself on the saddle. Patting her neck, I nudged her with my heels, and we started at a brisk trot. When we reached the edges of the palace grounds, I slowed down and looked back at my childhood home, the flags flying high and proud above the gray turrets. I turned back around, heading towards the gates. The guards let me out, and once out of their sight, I brought Elf into a gallop, leaning into her neck and letting my cloak and hair fly back,

I was home free.

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About an hour after we set off, I stopped Elf and slid off the saddle. I lead her by the reins to a stream which I knew was nearby. Yes, I had been this far out before. She drank generously, and I cupped the water in my hands and drank as well. I let Elf graze as I leaned against a nearby tree and unpacked one of the apples Marianne had packed me. I thought about what I was doing. I mean, I had considered it before, but I'd never done it. I'd never run away. I leaned my head against the tree, emptied my mind, and closed my eyes.

A little while later I jumped back onto Elf, and we were off again, riding into the bright orange sunset. Not looking back, not even once.

Two days later, I reached the kingdom of Belsington. The guards stopped me at the gate.

"What is your business here?"

I took off my headgear and looked them squarely in the eye.

"I am Celina of Amadeaux, I am here to serve as a knight."