

## A WINTER ENCOUNTER

It all started one winter day. It was the first day of holiday and I, 16-year-old princess Roxie, was preparing to go outside and play in the snow with my siblings, when suddenly one of the guards stopped me and told me all the household children were to go to the throne room.

I am the 13th in line for the throne and I have 22 siblings. Both the king, my father, and the queen, my mother, are very loving, kind-hearted and want only the best for the kingdom and their children and all of us get along well and care for one another. So when we were all gathered in the room and saw our parents dead serious, we got concerned.

Father stood up, looked at us warmly and said we were all called here because there was some trouble going on in the kingdom and told us we weren't allowed to leave the castle walls at any cost. Of course we were shocked and not very pleased by the sudden news and wanted to know why, so we started asking all kinds of questions. It was getting out of hand but the oldest sister Lily then calmed us down and spoke with our father. She was always like that. Calm, cool and collected. Father only gave her a look, like he always does when he knows that this is a kind of subject he can't talk about in front of the younger part of the family and later meets with the older ones in "secret" to explain the details.

Lily then asked us to go back to our rooms and said she had to discuss something with our parents, so we quietly left the room. I was pretty mad at my father for requesting such a thing, though deep down I knew it had to be done for our safety. You see, my parents, being the king and queen, are able to do whatever comes to their minds, just to keep us safe. I love them with all my heart, but they can be way overprotective at times.

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And so we were forced to spend the whole day inside without anything to do. The next days dragged on just like the first. Because I had nothing to do during the days I started sleeping in the afternoon after lunch, as I was so bored and because of that I couldn't sleep at night.

Then one night I had a brilliant idea. I remembered an old hidden passageway that I discovered a while ago when walking in the woods. It wasn't too far, but far enough to know there will be no guards there.

It was quite hard to get to the passageway as it was hidden in the basement of the castle and the castle was full of guards, especially at night! I still don't know how I made it, but I did.

It felt so good to be outside after such a long time. From feeling so happy, relieved and proud of myself I didn't even notice how far into the forest I'd walked. I got really scared, not of the thought of being lost in the dark forest, but of the fact that I may not make it back in time. I started running around like crazy, trying to find something that could point me in the direction of the castle, but I just couldn't think straight.

I ran and almost tripped for the fifth time when something grabbed me. I looked over my shoulder and saw a boy wearing a mask covering his mouth and nose but not his eyes. They were brown and I felt like I could just keep staring at them because they were so deep.

I quickly pulled myself together and pulled my arm out of his grip. The first thing that came to my mind was to shout assassin, since I heard a lot about them when listening to stories from my older siblings. But for some reason I made no sound.

The boy looked the same age and like he was barely containing his laughter. I was just standing there confused. After getting his senses back, he asked why I was so deep in the forest at night and all alone. I wasn't scared of him, even though it usually wasn't easy for me to trust other people. I only told him that I was lost and had to get back to the city of Sun kingdom. I didn't tell him I was actually a princess, because we were taught not to reveal our place as royalty to strangers. He also asked for my name but I just didn't know what to say so I stated that I will not reveal my name just yet.

*And who are you?* I asked. He replied: *I, my mysterious fairy, am Noah.* And this is how our winter adventure began. He showed me the way back and we talked a lot. He lived in the Moon kingdom. It was on the other side of the forest and was just as big as our kingdom. My father and the Moon king had been best friends since they were young princes, so the two kingdoms always supported

each other and shared everything as well as this forest which was a kind of a border between them. Noah came to the forest every day with his two best friends Sarah and Filip. They created a group name and had a secret "base" lying hidden among the trees.

He also mentioned that he knew this forest like the back of his palm and that he was watching me panic-stricken the whole time from a nearby tree. I was pretty embarrassed but I managed to hold it back. Once we were close to the kingdom we parted ways.

So every day, for weeks, I snuck out and hung out with Filip, Sarah and Noah who, not long after, became my best friends, especially Sarah. I saw a lot of my big sister in her. She also had a calm, cool and collected personality. She always protected me when the boys were trying to play silly pranks on us. She was also really strong so the boys kind of feared her, but they never really admitted it. We did almost everything together and basically knew everything about each other. It was like we had known each other for ages. I told everyone my name was Alya, but Noah kept calling me fairy anyway.

One night it finally happened. I was caught sneaking out! My father and mother were furious! I tried to lie about it but in the end I just confessed all of it.

They doubled the number of guards in front of my room and in the garden. I could no longer get out, and I was officially grounded. I later found out that I wasn't the only one sneaking out. A lot of my older siblings were doing it too but when our parents tightened the security, I ruined their opportunities to escape, too. I was devastated and it didn't seem like we were going to be let out anytime soon.

That night I could only recall the fun memories we'd made in all these weeks. My sadness went away the moment I recalled a hilarious pee disaster. It happened one day when we were playing a game Filip taught us, called "Truth or dare". We sat in a circle, spun the bottle a few times and did some pretty funny dares, but then the bottle pointed at Sarah and Noah. Sarah was in the position of telling the truth or doing a dare and like always she chose dare. Noah dared her to kiss Filip on the cheek, because he knew that Filip had a crush on her. Filip was always so cool and fun but he suddenly looked embarrassed. Sarah stood up, sat next to Filip and almost kissed him when he suddenly fainted. He was really red when Sarah stood up, but I never thought he'd pass out. Noah started laughing so hard he almost hit his head. Then he suddenly looked like he'd seen a ghost, stood up and ran out. Sarah noticed the place he was sitting on earlier was a little wet. I didn't

know whether to laugh or be concerned. Sarah took care of Filip, while I ran after Noah to see if he was okay.

Noah slid the door back and leapt onto the grass, battling to stay upright as his foot slid off a grassy mound and into some mud. He flailed about, looking for a suitably dense bush that he could pee behind without being seen. *Damn it, why did it have to be winter and nothing have any leaves on?*

I started laughing so hard that I almost had to pee, too...

Later that day, mother came into my room. She asked me how I was doing. I didn't really want to talk to her, but I simply couldn't stay quiet. I started shouting at her. She just stood there and after I finished, calmly answered that it was for our own safety. I hated when they gave us such pat answers. After that she only said, that we are going to attend a ball in the evening and to get ready. I really didn't want to go but when I heard that it was held at the Moon kingdom, I thought to myself *this will be the perfect opportunity see Noah again*. I hadn't seen him for more than a week already and I really missed him, so I went.

There were only people of high status or royalty at the ball, which bummed me out. Almost the whole evening went by and I still couldn't get out. I wanted to give up when I spotted a familiar face in the crowd. I battled my way there and my heart was doing flips! Noah was so formally dressed that I had to look twice to recognise him. Our eyes met and we were both shocked. We met in the garden and simultaneously asked *You are royalty!?* He told me that after the night I didn't show up, all of them went looking for me but couldn't find me.

After the ball we came home and were officially allowed to go outside again. We were ecstatic. And that meant I could see them everyday again and again with no worries. No one ever told me what all the fuss with security had been though... but I didn't care, as long as I was with my group again!