



# *The Chosen One*

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Romance

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“Focus,” he told himself as he drew his delicate arrow back. He stood amongst the tall evergreen trees letting the gentle breeze rustle his hair. The arrow flew past him, whizzing through the air, and lands in the yellow center. A rush of happiness floods through Prince Woo when he sees the arrow hit the target. The birds chirping are the only thing he can hear besides his own breathing. He can escape from everything while he’s up here; the feeling of freedom fills his chest. Archery made the prince feel powerful when there were so many things in his world trying to make him feel weak. As peaceful as he was, he knew he had to return to his duties at the castle. He packs up his arrows, slinging them across his back and starting the horseback ride home. As his steed gallops his way back, Prince Woo takes in the beautiful place he called home.

In the vast mountains of a land called Serilda lies a stone castle that seems to reach the clouds. On its tall walls wind green ivy, it seems to be keeping everything together. The ivy looks as if it is keeping a dark secret. Above the towers flies the flag of the royal family, which gleams in the sun with its gold star marked in the right corner. The castle and its gates lay upon a hill that overlooks the large town of Philomena, whose streets were lined with elegant houses and filled with moving people. Market stalls flood into the rock paved roads and colorful fruits sit outside waiting to be bought.

Philomena is a wealthy town, full of lords and ladies. Inhabitants live elegantly and happily knowing that stability isn’t problem. On the other side of the hill, a town called Milagros lies. The town is marked by filth and poverty. The cracking brick road surrounds the shack-like houses. Thieves and murderers roam the streets. Families go often without food, leading them to steal for survival. Prince Woo is ignorant to the life of half of his future kingdom and doesn’t realize the struggle going on just a few miles away from his elegant castle. He finally approaches the castle, handing his horse to one of the gate keepers. The prince saunters back to his room, only left alone for a minute before there is a knock at the wooden door. It is one of his father’s knights.

“The king requires your presence now,” demanded Knight Rowan. Rowan is the king’s trusted advisor and the most dangerous man in the kingdom. He knows how to kill somebody in more ways than the Prince could count. Whenever Rowan was sent, Woo knew he had no choice but to speak to his father and the conversation would not be a pleasant one. Regretfully, he follows the knight to the King’s chamber and stands before his father.

“My son, how are you this beautiful morning?” He bellows.

“Fine, father, thank you.” Woo knows this unusually nice introduction means something bad is coming. He understands father all too well and is not unaccustomed to his behaviors.

“We need to discuss your upcoming wedding. You have known the time was coming, so I don’t want any excuses. I have decided how you will go about choosing a future queen. I will bring in ten young ladies that I think are eligible to wear the crown. You will spend time with all of them and chose who you want gone. You have three months to make a final decision. It all starts next week. Any questions?”

“No father”, murmurs Woo. He had been expecting this for a long time and knew he had no choice but to go along with it. He prayed that somehow in the midst of all this mess, he could find someone he loved.

“Then you are dismissed,” his father said strongly.

Woo spent the rest of the week preparing for the next three months; picking out a new wardrobe, attending meetings with the king, sword training, and reading about the girls. The castle was also getting ready for the arrival of the ladies. The maids were scurrying from room to room while dusting and making beds. The curtains were drawn up and light flooded into the once dark rooms. The flags of the royal family flew higher and banners were draped across the halls. Everything went under transformation in order to mask all of the underlying secrets.

The trumpets sounded soon enough, and the big day was here. Prince Woo looked in the mirror and took in his image one last time, hoping it would be enough. He adjusted the small crown on his head and forced a smile. This was the start of his journey to becoming king whether he was ready for it or not. He walked to the golden castle gates that glistened like the sun where he awaited his future queen’s arrival.

One by one he helped them step out of a carriage, lending them his hand with a gentle bow. He would ask for their names even though he had already memorized the names with pictures. They introduced themselves along with flattering him with compliments and batting their eyelashes. Their dresses were elegant, and it seemed to be an unspoken competition for who could dress the best. At this point, all of the girls seemed the same; fake and boring. When carriage number eight came through the gates, Woo had given up all hope of meeting his dream girl. Tired of going through the same routine, he lazily helped this girl over the step. She

tripped over the foot of her long dress, accidentally ramming into the Prince. As he caught her, they could hear the other seven girls snickering. She quickly stumbled back onto her feet and looked into the prince's hazel eyes only managing to stutter the words "Sorry, my prince."

Woo offered a smile and felt embarrassment flood his cheeks when she walked away because he knew that this was his fault. Although there was no introduction, he knew this face from the pictures, Lady Solo was her name. She had beautiful blonde hair and big blue eyes that made her face seem so precious. Something was different about this girl, Woo didn't know what it was, but he knew he liked it. She seemed more real, maybe it was the lack of makeup or the fact that her dress was simple, but it was something. "Lady Solo," he repeated the name in his head though he was sure he wouldn't forget about her.

Once all ten girls arrived, the Prince addressed them as a group and welcomed them to the castle. He and five other knights gave them a tour around the castle which ended with showing them their rooms. A dinner in the royal ballroom was going to be held in a few short hours where the girls would formally meet the royal family. The tired Prince could finally return to his chambers for a few hours. He lied in bed trying to escape all of his thoughts and fears about this extravaganza. As he pushed the thoughts out of his head, one thing stuck; Lady Solo.

The dinner was a success and his father seemed pleased with his choices. Woo mingled with all of the girls and got to know them much better. He already had a list in his head of maybe's and definite no's. Nobody had stolen his heart yet, but he was curious about Lady Solo and wanted to apologize for the incident earlier today. As the girls began to leave and retire for the night, Woo made sure he would be able to catch Lady Solo on her way out. He called out her name when she was on her way out, barely crossing the threshold of the door. She turned quickly, unaware of what was happening next.

"Care to take a walk?" questioned the Prince.

"Sure," she responded hesitantly.

"I just wanted to apologize for earlier today. I am sorry that I didn't help you out properly.

"Oh... it's ok. I should have been more careful with my dress being so long." She didn't understand why he was apologizing but was pleasantly surprised. Why was he being so nice, she thought. Shouldn't it be her fault that she tripped; a prince could never be at fault. Her thoughts were interrupted by a question.

"What do you think about the castle so far? Are you settled in well?"

"Yes thank you, it's lovely." She wasn't quite sure as to what she should say. If she spoke to much, she could annoy him. She didn't know if the young prince had a temper liker his father, so she chose few words.

"So, tell me about yourself Lady Solo. What's your story?" He pried, trying to keep the conversation going. He

wasn't going to give up on her just because she was shy.

"Well, I come from a vineyard family in Philomena and am the middle daughter of three. My father and cousins own and work the business, so my sisters and I were able to go to school. I enjoy horseback riding and reading as well as archery." If only he knew, she thought to herself.

Lady Solo was not Lady Solo and she was definitely not from Philomena. She was Catarina Sol from Milagros, the dirty streets. She was the second oldest of six children and her parents were poor merchants. Her mother sewed torn clothing and her father worked in the mines on the opposite side of town. Catarina had never gone to school, only teaching herself to read so she could steal for her family. She learned how to ride a horse, so she could escape from her heists quickly. Her youngest siblings went hungry unless she stole food and her sister who was two years younger than she was forced to sell herself to men for extra money. Her oldest brother taught her how to use a bow and arrow better than all of Serilda. She could hit a target from anywhere and had killed more people than she could count. He fought for the king's military in a useless war around three years ago. His life was lost due to the King's greed for more when he already had enough. Her family had known this competition for the next queen was coming and had been preparing her for it. If, Catarina became queen she could get vengeance for her brother and change Milagros. Milagros was her home and she learned to love the grunge and smell. It was all she knew, but for her younger siblings she needed to fix it. Milagros and Philomena had to become equal and Catarina would do anything to secure her spot in the Prince's heart.

"Archery?" asked Woo very excitedly. This was it, he thought. Maybe this could work, and he wouldn't be miserable his whole life.

They continued to talk and laugh while getting to know each other. It was getting late and he knew the other girls would get very jealous if had spent any more time with her. He walked her back to her chambers, excited for the future.

Weeks went by and girls had come and go. The Prince had started making decisions about who he wanted to keep and who must leave. The King had to approve every decision and sometimes forced Woo to keep girls. As for Lady Solo, she was continuing to enter the young Prince's heart without any suspicion. She even gained the King's favor which would definitely help her. Woo continued to fall in love with Lady Solo when they went on horseback rides through the woods. He knew something was different about her, but he couldn't figure out what.

Almost two months into the contest, Lady Solo received a heartbreaking letter from her parents saying her youngest sibling died due to malnutrition. Her whole world felt like it had suddenly stopped. She had helped her mom deliver this baby, her youngest sister whom she loved to all ends of the world. It was her job to save

their family and she had failed. Something had to happen fast. Money had to be sent somehow, whatever it took she would not let her family down. She had spent some time scoping the castle over the past few weeks and knew there was a vault of coins in the underbelly of the castle. There was no way they would be able to tell if fifty coins were missing, and that would make all the difference in her family's life. She knew that if she was caught, it would mean public execution for treason. The risk was all worth it, if it meant saving another sibling. One day when she knew that Woo would be busy in a meeting with his father, she quietly crept past the maids and made her way to the staircase that led to the tunnels. Walking down the long, dark halls she had shivers go down her spine. Although she was confident in her stealing abilities, this one felt different. She felt that she was betraying Prince Woo, as she became to grow fond of him. He had shown her nothing, but kindness and she felt as if she was stealing from him. She told herself that she was stealing from the King who had put her family through hell and back, not the Prince. Once she reached the vault, she counted fifty coins and stuffed them into her undershorts. On her way out, she rammed into Prince Woo. "Oh no," she thought.

Woo could not believe his eyes, what was Lady Solo doing shoving coins down her pants. He was both disgusted and filled with rage but forced himself to stay calm. Maybe there was a reason, he could not let his anger get the best of him.

"Lady Solo, what brings you down to the coin vault of the royal family?" questioned Woo sternly.

"I'm so sorry," she sobbed. She could not force any more words out and just sat down crying.

Woo looked confused but knew something was wrong. He had learned to care for her, so he sat next to her in silence, rubbing her back. He waited until she could say more and would not rush her. Eventually Lady Solo, gathered herself together and told her story. She told him everything about her name being a lie and her family being from Milagros. She apologized over and over again but she said she needed to save her sibling. Woo was shocked, he had no clue of the terrible things going on in his kingdom. Some part of him loved her ever more after hearing this and he promised to not tell anyone. He gave her two hundred coins to take back to her family and told her that he would still choose her for the winner of the contest. He promised that together they would work to change the kingdom once he was crowned and they would from now on have no secrets. Woo knew that this is who he wanted to spend the rest of his life with and wealth didn't mean anything. The truth set the two lovers free and eventually the rest of the kingdom, including Milagros would follow their footsteps. Happily, ever after.

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