



# *Two Strangers and a Princess*

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Magic, Mystery

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The watchmen huddled together, forced to keep watch during the fierce blizzard. So thick was the snow that the guards did not see the weary stranger until he walked under them.

“Halt!” the guards cried. The man kept walking.

“Maybe he cannot hear us,” one yelled to his friend. The guards rushed down the tower stairs. By the time they got to the bottom, the man was gone. The guards conferred and decided they must have been seeing things.

The guards returned to their places and waited for the next wave of guards to replace them.

Meanwhile, the man continued to the great castle looming in the distance. Though he did not cause the blizzard, it could not have been timed better. He was going to make the royals pay for the land they stole from his father. And the blizzard acted as the perfect cover. If anyone had been looking out their windows, they would have noticed the man was not wearing a coat, for this man’s powers kept the cold from affecting him. He had to warn the royal family. A man was going to try to kill them, and he had to do something. The closer he traveled to the castle, the more the snow blew. His wet brown hair froze him. The frozen roads threatened to lame his horse, but still he pushed forward.

The princess stared out the window of her father’s study and watched as the snow blew past. Her father was sitting at his desk shuffling through papers looking for something. “Millicent, where did my history book go?”

“I put it back on your desk last week.”

“Are you positive you put it back?”

“Yes. Are you positive you did not move it?” Millicent teased.

“No.” The king went back to shuffling papers. A few minutes later, the two heard a call from down the hall.

“You should go see what your mother wants.”

“She most likely wants to give me another lesson on how to entertain royalty,” Millicent said with an over-proper air.

“You are seventeen and will someday be performing this without the aid of you loving mother. Go see what she needs.” Millicent stood from her seat, kissed her father’s cheek, and walked out of the peaceful study not knowing that would be the last peace for a long while.

The queen met Millicent halfway down the hall. “Hurry. We have a visitor, and he wants your help.” Millicent stopped walking and looked at her mother. “My help? How can I help him?” her mother would never allow her to help a stranger, especially a male stranger.

“He is injured and has heard of your healing abilities.”

“Has he been informed that it may take a while?”

“Yes, but you should be able to heal him in a few days. He has only a broken leg.”

“If it is merely broken, are not my powers a bit wasted? Who is he?”

“He is the son of a very powerful lord.” The queen grasped Millicent’s arm and pulled her down the hallway. “It would be wise to heal him. He would make a strong match for you.”

“Mother!”

“It is not entirely out of the question, young lady. Keep it in mind.” They hurried to the kitchen, where a dark headed young man sat in a chair pain etched on face. When she got closer, Millicent saw that the man’s hair was brown, a lovely shade for a man. “Sir, I am Millicent. What is your name?”

“Jacob.”

“I am going to look at your leg now. Could you tell me what happened.” She approached the man as if he was an injured wild animal.

“Man tried to kill me. Horse slipped and threw me,” he grunted. The princess nodded and examined his leg.

“We need to get Jacob to a room.” Guards lifted him from the chair and carried him to a room. For the next several hours, Millicent worked on his leg and other superficial cuts. Finally, Jacob fell asleep, and a weary Millicent exited the room. As she was headed to her father’s study, a page sprinted her direction. “My lady, the king and queen request your presence in the great hall.” Millicent nodded and followed the young page to the hall where she saw a stranger locked in chains standing before her parents. This man was standing tall and strong – and looked like Jacob. Identically.

“Father?”

“Come here, child. This man has been identified by Lord Jacob as the man who tried to kill him.” The man cringed and dropped his head.

“Sir, you look ashamed.”

“I have been accused of a crime I did not commit.” When the man met her eyes, she read honesty, but there was also a darkness in his eyes. “Father, how can we be sure Lord Jacob is telling the truth?”

“How can we be sure this man is telling the truth? Jacob is the one who is injured, why would he lie?”

“Dear, trust your father; he knows how to handle these situations,” her mother reprimanded gently.

“Yes ma’am.”

“Guards, please escort this man to the dungeons.”

“Wait.” All stopped and looked at Millicent. “What is your name?”

“Wilhelm.” The guards led him to the dungeon. Exhaustion like a wave crashed over Millicent. “I am going to bed.”

“Sleep well,” the king and queen returned for they knew the affects her magic had on her.

The next morning, after working some more on Jacob’s leg, Millicent fell asleep in a hidden corner of the library. When she awoke, she heard hushed voices discussing something.

“He wants everyone ready. When she finishes healing his leg, he wants an attack,” a gruff voice ordered.

“What do we do with his brother?” the second voice sounded familiar, but Millicent could not place it.

“Quiet him or something. You’re in charge of this.” The voices trailed off as they left the study. Were they speaking of Jacob? Why would he want to attack them? Millicent snuck out of the library and down to the great hall.

“Oh, there you are,” her mother said as she entered the hall for lunch. “The man in the dungeon has a leg injury that we want you to look at. You do not have to heal him, but your father would like you to look at it.”

“I will.” Millicent was puzzled even more. Both men had leg injuries? The men in the library were probably speaking of Wilhelm. She would have to use caution. After lunch, she changed into her oldest, simplest (favorite) dress, grabbed an old blanket, and allowed Sir Gill to lead her down to the dungeon and down a long passageway. A man was huddled in a corner. Sir Gill rattled the door. “You have a royal visitor.” Then aside he said, “I will be just down the hall when you are finished.” He unlocked the door and locked it back behind her. When his echoing steps disappeared down the hallway, Millicent carefully approached the man.

“May I see your leg?” Wilhelm shifted and slowly stretched his leg in front of him. “My name is Millicent,” she said as she examined his leg.

“I know,” he said gruffly.

“Do you think it is broken or is it cut?” Wilhelm rotated his leg a bit more to expose a bloody gash. Millicent moved the candle closer to survey the damage. She groaned, thinking of all the pain the man was in. She peered

into his eyes and saw honesty and pain. Could this man truly be the leader? She touched his forehead and felt he had a fever. Great infection.

“You can’t heal me, can you?” Wilhelm asked his face carved in frustration and anger.

“I can heal you.”

“How long will it take?”

“I do not know. A few days, maybe a week. Why? Are you in a hurry to get out? Because being healed will not get you out.”

“I just need to be healed,” he snapped. Millicent froze. This man was the leader.

“This, might hurt,” she said as she continued secretly praying it would. She slowly sent her magic into his leg willing the muscles to knit back together. She worked until she grew tired. Then suddenly, the rest of her energy was sucked from her body, and she was falling. Blackness set in and she drifted to sleep.

Wilhelm caught the princess as she fell. He didn’t mean for his magic to steal hers, but at least his leg was healed. All he had to do now was convince Millicent that he was innocent – and that Jacob was evil. Which meant he had to gain her trust. He had seen the compassion on her face when she thought of him in pain. This would be too easy.

Wilhelm gently put his hand on the back of her neck and sent some power into her. Millicent sleepily blinked her eyes open. “What happened?”

“I know not. Are you well?” Wilhelm brushed hair out of her eyes.

“Yes. No.” She shrugged. “I am tired.” Her eyes drifted shut and he sent a little more power into her. Millicent bolted from his arms and across the cell. “What did you do to me?” she whisper-yelled.

“Nothing. You just collapsed.” Wilhelm gingerly stood and tested his leg. “It’s completely healed,” he marveled.

“You still have a fever,” Millicent muttered. Then louder she said, “Sir Gill, I am finished.” They heard the guard’s feet echo down the hallway.

“Millicent, you have to believe I did not injure Sir Jacob, nor did I mean him any harm,” Wilhelm begged. He took a step forward, but Millicent took one back. Maybe this would be harder than he thought.

Millicent remained quiet. She was escorted from the dungeon but did not look back.

Jacob lay in his guest room waiting for Millicent to return. She promised she would, but he was not sure when. He was but a lowly lord, of no real importance. She might not return at all. He needed to get better, for he had a feeling something bad would happen to him.

Conflicted, Millicent stared at the wall of her bedroom sorting out facts. Wilhelm desired to be healed and now was, even though she meant to take a very long time doing it.

But Jacob, also direly wished to be healed, even more than Wilhelm. Why did these two men need to be healed so bad?

Maybe it was time to tell her father what was going on.

The king always returned to his study after dinner to get some last-minute paperwork done. Most evenings, Millicent sat with him reading by the fire. This night was no different. The man hiding listened to every word passed between the father and daughter.

After they were finished, Millicent left claiming to be tired after a long day of healing. Shortly after, the king cleaned up and headed to bed.

The spy snuck out of his hiding place. When he was halfway down the corridor, he heard his name. when he turned around, he saw the king.

“How are you?” the king asked.

“Fine, my king,” the man bowed.

“Well, good night,” the kind said at a loss for words. The spy turned his back and continued down the hall.

When he told his master the suspicions of royals, the master set to work making a plan to bring them down. Millicent, instructed by her father, worked hard all the next day healing Jacob. By late afternoon, he could walk. Millicent slept through dinner and woke late at night fully energized. She dressed and wandered to the library to retrieve a book. On her way down, she passed a window. The snow had built up and it still blizzarded. This was the worst snow the kingdom had ever experienced. The tumultuous winds reflected those inside the castle more than any of them realized.

“It has to be tonight.” Millicent heard from down the hall. She ducked behind a column and listened. “They think he did it, so no one is watching us. They even doubled the guards down there,” he guffawed. The man’s words sunk in: they had been wrong. And now everyone was going to pay.

“Excellent work, Sir Gill.” Millicent’s jaw dropped. How could he? The men turned the corner, and Millicent recognized the leader of the group – it was none other than Sir Jacob. “Have you taken care of my brother?”

“Of course, my lord.” Millicent slid to the other side of the column to keep out of the way and was suddenly face-to-face with Sir Gill. “What would you like me to do with her, my lord?”

“Toss her in with Wilhelm for company. Thanks, princess, for healing me. You made this a whole lot easier. Jacob continued down the hallway while Sir Gill dragged Millicent down to the dungeon.

Dully, Wilhelm heard approaching steps. The last time that happened, he ended up bloody. “Brought you some company,” the knight called. The door opened and slammed shut. His steps receded down the hallway as Millicent crawled closer. She smelled of flowers today just as she had yesterday.

“Wilhelm,” her worried voice called. He could only moan in response. “I am so sorry. I overheard a conversation and after seeing you freak out yesterday, I thought for sure you were the one they were talking about, but it turns out Jacob was the one who was leading the attack,” Millicent babbled on apologizing for something. Wilhelm tried to reach out and comfort her, but she cried, “Don’t move!”

Millicent tenderly touched his forehead with her hand. Relief instantly hit, and Wilhelm relaxed. She willed his skin to knit back together and then watched it happen. Once again, her energy was sucked from her body. She collapsed onto Wilhelm.

It took Wilhelm a moment to realize what he had done. He sent energy back into Millicent and she jerked awake. “What did you do?!”

“I think I accidentally drained your powers,” Wilhelm stated.

“How?” After a pause she added, “Do you have powers too?”

“Yes.”

“Then why didn’t you escape from here? Can you get us out?” She stared in awe at this man she once thought a villain.

“I did not escape because none of you would believe me if I escaped. And yes, I can get us out. But my brother will be able to tell the second we do.”

“Why?”

“I do not know, but it has always been like this. Now, if you don’t mind, I can get us out.”

“Just one more question: why does your brother hate my family?”

“When we were younger, the king, your father, took a portion of my father’s property because my father was heavily in debt. The piece he took was only a small portion of the debt, but your father canceled the rest of the it. Both my brother and father think yours wronged them by taking the land.”

“What is your brother’s plan for my family?”

“I know not. Do you know of any loyal guards?”

“Yes.”

“Find them. I will find your family. Now step back.” Wilhelm put himself between Millicent and the door, focused on making the door unlock, and watched it open.

Millicent sprinted down the hall, but Wilhelm marched to find his brother. This fight was between the two of them. As he predicted, Jacob was waiting for him at the top of the steps. “Hello, brother,” Jacob said. “Did you get rid of the princess? Have you finally joined my side?”

“Never; your side is foolish.” Wilhelm saw movement over Jacob’s shoulder. It was the queen. Her jaw dropped

when she saw both men walking about freely. “How...What is going on? Sir Gill, how could you allow this man to escape?”

“My queen, I am loyal to sir Jacob.” After looking at Jacob, he continued, “I am sorry this has to end like this, but-” his voice faltered.

“Oh man up.” Jacob backed toward the queen refusing to turn his back on Wilhelm. “Your highness, I seek one simple thing: revenge.”

“What for?” the queen puzzled; she had never hurt someone so bad they sought revenge. Or had she? Great, she was starting to sound like her daughter.

“Your gracious husband stole my father’s lands. My father died penniless because the rest of his village revolted against him.”

Wilhelm listened to the convoluted story of his family. Their father was a worthless scoundrel who had an insatiable gambling addiction. He deserved no pity and was not worth the effort it took to plan revenge. As Wilhelm was opening his mouth to say so, Jacob’s arm struck out and grabbed the queen’s arm to pull her in front of him as a coward. The brothers stared at each other daring the other to move.

Minutes passed, but no one moved. Then suddenly, a dozen soldiers leapt from all sides surrounding the group prepared to die for their queen. The shocking part was the leader – Millicent.

“Release my mother,” she demanded.

“Why would I hand over my shield?”

“Because I said so.” As they spoke, a brave knight snuck behind Jacob and in one, lightning move, captured him.

“You have committed treason against the queen. You will be banished from this country.”

“I have something even better,” Wilhelm countered. “The loss of his powers.”

“You can’t do that!” Jacob struggled against his captor.

“Permission granted,” the queen stated. Wilhelm approached Jacob and touched his forehead. Seconds later, Jacob sagged to the floor while Wilhelm stood taller.

“How will we ever thank you for this?” the queen asked.

“I would like to marry your daughter, for she is fair – and beautiful.”

“Permission granted,” the queen repeated.

“What are we granting permission to?” the king asked waling to the center of the group.

“I’ll explain later.”

Had any of the occupants looked outside, they would have seen that the blizzard had dissipated, leaving behind

a winter-wonderland.

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