

Chapter Three



Mia's feet ached. Not only from those ridiculous high heels, but from pacing back and forth in some room. No—suite. *Her* suite. A *royal* suite.

A royal bedroom she didn't deserve or want. She wanted to celebrate at her sister's wedding reception, not to be stuck in a castle, pretending to be a princess—an engaged princess at that.

How did she go from her sister's wedding only hours ago to standing in a castle bedroom? How would she get out of this mess? Obviously, there was the truth. She should come clean and just tell them what happened. But each time someone entered the room, and she opened her mouth, she was at a loss for words.

Because what happened sounded more like a fairy tale than the actual truth. And who would believe her?

No one.

Because never in a million years would she believe such a story. If someone had approached her at her sister's wedding and said they were from another time, she would have them escorted out of the building.

And so would the lady who brought her to the castle. Or worse—would they throw her in a dungeon? A nervous laugh worked its way from her lips. *Ugh*. She was making herself crazy. Because who

would believe that she fell through a window—a stained-glass window—that didn't even exist wherever it was she had landed?

No, her only course of action was to play along until she could come up with some sort of escape plan. Mia inhaled and exhaled slowly until her nerves calmed.

You can do this, Mia. You can pretend to be someone who you're not. She'd been in school plays, although she'd never had a speaking part. But still—how hard could it be?

She paused in front of a vanity mirror opposite a massive four-poster bed. The worried expression on her face caught her attention. *It would all be a lie.* Mia hated lying. And she was terrible at it. So, how was she supposed to pretend to be a princess?

Mia pulled the stool out and sat in front of the mirror. A crystal vase filled with a mixture of wildflowers graced the right side of the vanity—a simple but touching gesture.

One meant for a princess. An *engaged* princess. Pushing a tendril of hair behind her ear, Mia studied her reflection. Wide blue eyes, a nose just a tad too crooked, and not chubby, but round cheeks stared back at her. She didn't consider herself a knockout by any means, but princess material?

Ha!

A rap on the door startled her out of her pondering, and she jumped up, banging her knee in the process and rocking the vase of flowers.

“Are you all right, Your Highness?”

Mia righted the vase and brought her hands down to her sides. “Yes, of course.”

A young lady entered, her expression furrowed. The worried look melted away, but not before Mia noticed her glance at the flowers before averting her gaze. The girl curtsied, then smiled.

“It's nice to see you again, Princess Amelia.”

Again? Mia shuffled back through her very limited conversations since arriving at the palace before a flash of jewelry

came to her mind. The girl in the market. “You’re the jewelry maker from this morning?”

“Yes, Your Highness.” The girl wheeled several cases into the room and shut the door. “I’m Luna, and I was asked to be your attendant until your servants arrive.”

Her words held nothing but respect, but her tone almost begged for an answer. An explanation Mia did not know how to give or had time to even think of. Of course, a princess would arrive with help, and she was all alone.

“Oh. That’s so very kind of you, Luna. But I couldn’t expect you to leave your shop.”

The girl’s face flushed. “Prince Liam requested I serve you.”

Great. Now, she’d just insulted the poor girl. Mia plastered on what she hoped was a sincere smile and one that appeared to understand the girl’s reasoning. “Oh, I see.”

“On accord that I’m also from the Western Sector.” The girl raised an eyebrow. “So you would feel more comfortable.”

Western Sector? What was this girl talking about? Wherever it was, it must be where this Princess Amelia was from. Mia cleared her throat. “Of course. Forgive me, Luna. I didn’t realize you were from there as well.”

The girl’s eyes brightened. “That’s all right, Your Highness. We left the Western Sector when I was a child, and it’s been a while since I’ve been in the palace, but I have some memories of how things work.”

Goosebumps rose on her arms as the maid’s words sank in. Was that a warning? Did the girl already suspect that she was a fake?

Her shoulders tensed, and she straightened her back, trying to stand a little taller. If that was the case, and the girl was on to her, wouldn’t she have sold her out this morning to the Engagement Coordinator lady? And if not, surely she would have once she was beckoned to the castle.

Whatever the case, Mia wanted to flee from the servant’s

scrutinizing gaze but instead cleared her throat and gestured to the cart. “What do you have in there?”

“Oh!” The girl beamed. “The queen’s maid found a few dresses and essentials that the queen had grown tired of. I believe they should all fit. If not, we can adjust them until we can get new garments made for you.”

“Thank you, Luna. That’s so very kind of you.”

“I’ll get you all unpacked.”

“I can help.”

The girl’s hand froze on the case’s zipper. “That’s unnecessary, Your Highness.”

“Please, Luna.” Unbidden tears pricked her eyes. She needed something to take her mind off of everything. “I’m extremely nervous, and I would appreciate the distraction.”

The servant studied her for a moment before finally sighing. “Just please don’t tell anyone I made you help me.”

Uh-oh. She didn’t think such a tiny request could reflect poorly on the maid. The last thing she wanted was to cause trouble for Luna. “Of course not.”

Luna handed gown after gown to Mia to place into the fancy wardrobe that matched the vanity and bed. Silk, velvet, and tulle tickled her fingers, and she had to refrain from running her hand across each and every dress. She had never seen anything like them. Each design was made for a queen, but each shade mimicked the ones she saw in the square earlier. Different varieties of blue, green, and gray, but almost dim, somehow. No bright and vibrant hues were among them. Nothing like her lavender bridesmaid dress. What would people think when they saw her? Was her dress too fancy for this Western Sector?

When Mia didn’t think the wardrobe could possibly hold anything else, Luna pulled out corsets, slips, and stockings to fill the drawers of a nearby dresser. Then, they made quick work of filling the vanity with makeup and hair supplies.

“Look at the shoes!” Mia couldn’t hide her excitement at

finding all the flats and ballet-type slippers in the bottom of the trunk. Thankfully, there weren't any heels.

"I'm sorry, Your Highness, but here in the Southern Sector, women do not often wear heels." The girl's eyes flickered to the silver heels that Mia kicked off as soon as she entered the bedroom.

"I can assure you, Luna, that will be a welcome change." Mia helped stack the shoes in the bottom of the wardrobe and tucked the knowledge that she was in the Southern Sector to think about later.

"You're all unpacked, and your hair still looks great from your trip. I believe you are ready for your Engagement Party."

The power of a full bottle of hair spray and a gifted hairdresser. Mia stood and walked over to where she discarded her shoes earlier. Her hands shook as her heart rate picked up its pace.

Was there a way she could get out of this Engagement party? Perhaps she could feign some type of sickness? It wouldn't be such a far-fetched excuse, given the fact she arrived alone. But that would bring up a whole slew of issues. Including questions about what happened to her, and she hadn't had the time to come up with a plan yet.

Could she just refuse to leave her room?

"Your Highness?"

Concern lined Luna's tone, which only heightened Mia's anxiety, bringing on a new wave of tears to form in the corners of her eyes.

The tension in her shoulders intensified, and a dull ache worked its way up her neck and settled behind her eyes. She would never pull this off, especially with a migraine setting in.

She had to at least make it a few days—to buy some time to come up with a plan. There had to be a way to get back home. Mia just had to find it. She could fake an engagement for a few days.

Right?

“I’m fine. I was just thinking I wouldn’t mind trying a pair of those new shoes for the party.”

A smile spread across Luna’s face as she reached into the wardrobe and handed Mia a pair of gray flats. “How about these, Your Highness?”

“Perfect. If they will fit.” They slid on with ease, and Mia bit back a smile. One minor obstacle out of the way—only a few hundred more to go.