

## The Unexpected Princess – Chapter 2

By TheSpiralledEye

Hale's stomach churned as he watched the castle slowly disappearing from sight as the carriage entered the forest. After three days of awkwardness, snickering and teasing in various amounts from his brothers, it was almost a relief to finally be on his way to Hytheria. And while it was nice to have some peace, he was very aware that with every turn of the carriage wheels he was getting that much closer to his future husband and fate. His mother was acting as he had always been her daughter; calling him Haylyn and pretending that his lack of ladylike behaviour was a shock. In the days leading up to their departure she had forced him into a crash course in female etiquette. How to sit, speak, eat, play the harp, curtsy and even dance. Each time he went to take the lead out of habit she would stamp on his foot so hard his toes had turned purple.

Hale realised he felt homesick for a home that no longer existed, never again would he be a prince of the kingdom, even after he escaped and found a magical cure for this change. He'd have to be content with being a man of the land; once he learned how of course, farming wasn't exactly something his tutors had covered when he was a child. His fingers bunched into his dresses skirt, kneading the cloth nervously until his mother gave them a gentle slap.

"You're creasing your skirt." She chided, "We have a full three days journey with only these outfits, don't you want to be presentable for Prince Aldric?"

"No." he mumbled under his breath and his mother tsked at him.

"Muttering is unbecoming." She scolded, "Head up, clear voice."

Hale only barely resisted the urge to roll his eyes. It wasn't as if this dress was anything special anyway; showing off a lot of finery on the road was a poor decision with bandits always a risk. His mother had instead picked out a fetching but simple green dress with a laced bodice to help show off his new curves. He looked nice, he had to admit, especially with his hair carefully braided but still, he refused to give her the satisfaction. Maybe, if he was really lucky, Prince Aldric wouldn't find him attractive and would suggest they sleep in separate chambers. Hale could always dream.

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The longer the journey went on, the more nervous Hale became. Each night he would lie awake, dreading the coming sunrise, each hour felt like a weight upon his shoulders. He watched from the carriage window as the sun slowly peaked over the horizon on the final day; in just a few short hours he would be arriving in Hytheria's capital, ready to be presented to a prince and a few days after

that, married to him. The cracks in his plan were beginning to feel larger and larger; what if the court magician couldn't help him? What if they didn't want to? What if they refused and then told King Leopold and his son what he truly was and a full of war began when they felt slighted? He looked to his mother, laying on the other cushioned seat across from him, in an hour or so the driver would hitch up the horses and they'd be on their way and he'd have lost his last chance at freedom.

Panic began to rise up within him and before he could fully think it through, he was opening the door and stepping out into the forest. They were not far from the capital, there had to be villages close by. With one final look back at his mother, Hale ran. He felt bad, truly he did, but after everything she had done to him, he'd be lying if his actions weren't at least partly motivated by spite. Their guards didn't spot him and within seconds he was in the tree line, dashing off into the unknown, fuelled by relief and panic in equal measure. After a few minutes a nervous laugh burst from his chest, he was free! A woman, but free. However, his elation didn't last long, after nearly an hour on the move his feet were aching and there was no sign of civilisation. He knew moving parallel to the main road would have been the smarter option, but there was no way his mother's magic and her guards wouldn't have found him. He just had to keep walking, he'd find shelter and food soon enough he was sure of it.

As the day went on though, he began to realise just how stupid he had been. Despite the thick canopy of trees, the summer sun was slowly baking him. His feet were a mess of blisters and his throat was parched. He felt lightheaded and dehydrated but no matter how many times he stopped to listen, he couldn't hear any babbling brooks or rivers. It was only when it started to grow cooler that Hale realised, he had spent the entire day walking and was still no less lost that he had been that morning. Tired and weak he slumped against a tree, curling his body into a small ball.

What felt like only a moment later Hale started, the sky was dark and the air cool, he must have fallen asleep. What was more concerning however were the voices and figures standing over him. Blearily he blinked, trying to clear his vision but a torch was waved before his eyes, bright firelight blinding him temporarily and leaving strange green lights dancing across his vision.

"Well, what do we have here?" The voice was gruff, and even from a distance Hale could smell the rot of his teeth.

Bandits.

Hale's heart began to beat wildly in his chest; this would be a bad situation even if he did have his sword and armour; without either he was a sitting duck. The man snatched up his thin wrist and yanked him to his feet; for the first time Hale truly realised just how vulnerable he was, this body was smaller and weaker than he had been before and he hadn't been the strongest guy to begin with.

"You lost, sweetheart?"

“Um, no.” Hale didn’t sound remotely convincing, “I was just out for a walk, I live close by and my friends will be waiting.”

His palms were sweaty, no matter how much he tugged he couldn’t get free of the bandit’s iron grip. Even if he could, one of his two compatriots would have him in an instant. It was clear from the cocky smiles on their faces that they didn’t believe his lie for one second.

“Tell you what, why don’t you come back to our camp.” Despite his words the tone of the leader’s words did not imply he had much of a choice, “we’ll take real good care of you.”

Hale swallowed, damn his pride, he wasn’t going out like this, not without a fight. Taking a deep breath, he screamed. The sound pierced the air and sent several birds in the surrounding trees flying, one of the bandits even covered his ears.

“Help! Help me!” Hale yelled, desperately tugging at his arm; his only hope was if somebody heard him, his masculine pride winced at such a display but what choice did he have?

A glint from the torch’s firelight caught his eye; there was a crude dagger in the leader’s belt, Hale saw his chance and took it. The bandit had been pulled him back, so when Hale suddenly changed tactics and dove toward him, he was temporarily knocked off balance, giving him the second he needed to grab the weapon. Without hesitation Hale plunged the sharp edge into the bandit’s arm, causing him to howl of pain, finally letting go.

He made a mad dash for the trees only for his now stupid, long hair to be caught in another’s grasp. Without a moment’s hesitation Hale brought the dagger to his head, slicing a chunk of hair off, allowing him to continue his flight. For a moment or two, he thought he was going to make it, only for that hope to be dashed as the third man tackled him to the ground. Hale struggled, trying to stab the dagger into his captor’s side despite the odd angle but only managed to cut uselessly at his belt.

He tried to cry out again but a stinking palm covered his mouth and nose, blocking off his air supply while he twisted and writhed uselessly. So, this was it, he was going to die out here in the woods as a nameless peasant woman. Just as black spots began to dance across his vision the hand was suddenly ripped away and he gasped for air, scrambling across the ground to get away from his captor.

Steel clanged and he looked up in surprise to see a well armoured knight running his great sword across the leader’s throat while his two lackeys disappeared into the trees with a cry. Still breathing heavily Hale clutched the dagger in both hands, watching as the knight made a quick inspection of the area. Their armour was plain, but of incredibly high quality, this could only be one of the royal guards of Hytheria. After concluding the threat was gone said knight removed their helmet and walked over to where Hale was sat, stunned on the ground.

“Are you alright, miss?”

The man held out a gauntleted hand to help him to his feet and Hale found himself blushing in embarrassment. At least this knight didn't know he was really a man under all this magic or he may have died right then and there from wounded pride.

“Fine, thank you.” Hale replied eventually, “Were you patrolling nearby?”

“Something like that,” He gave her a roguish grin, his warm brown hair had a natural wave to it that he knew ladies would probably fawn over, “I was heading to The Last Stop after a bit of hunting, shall I escort you there?”

Hale nodded, not wanting to admit he had no idea what The Last Stop was. The man whistled and his horse sidled up beside them, without thinking Hale hoisted himself up and was met with an impressed look from his rescuer.

“You ride? Not many peasant women learn how to mount a horse with such precision.”

Fuck, he was right!

“I grew up near a stable.” Hale said quickly, well, technically it wasn't even a lie.

“Fair enough,” The man joined him up on the horse, “I am Aden, by the way.”

Hale could feel Aden's solid armour against his back, he couldn't help but relax as those strong arms encircled him to take the reins. Perhaps it was because he missed the protection of his own armour but Hale found himself feeling safe and even more surprisingly, comfortable, for the first time in days.

“Ha-Hailey.” He replied with a stammer.

No doubt his mother would have reported her 'daughter' missing by now, he couldn't use either of his names.

“Well, Hailey, what brings you out here all by yourself so late in the evening.”

“I could ask you the same question. It’s a bit late for hunting.”

“You got me.” He chuckled, “I was playing hooky, planned on telling my...regiment that my horse lost a shoe and I had to spend a few hours fixing it.”

Hale smiled softly, he and his brothers had used such an excuse to get out of drilling duties at least half a dozen times.

The forest lost its malicious edge as they rode, Aden’s warm conversation turned the twisted roots and dark branches into a safe, dark blanket; protecting them from the dangers of the world. After a few minutes, laughter and voices reached Hale’s ears and a small Tavern appeared over the hillside. A few miles further he could see the lights and castle that signalled the capitol city.

“The Last Stop is the perfect plaser to be invisible.” Aden told him, “All sorts pass through on their way past the crossroads, it’s a lot more fun that the taverns in town.”

The rode up to the building and Aden dismounted, holding out a hand to help his maiden down. Hale hoped the man didn’t mistake his flush of embarrassment for any other emotion. Even so, he couldn’t help the tiny squeak of shock that escaped when Aden’s hands grabbed his hips and lowered him to the ground. If his brothers saw that they’d be in hysterics.

“Shall we?”

Aden offered his arm and Hale reluctantly threaded his own through it; Aden had no idea who he really was and he had just saved his life. The least he could do was act the part of the grateful damsel, he deserved that much at least.

Inside the tavern was noisy and bustling but thanks to his escort’s solid frame they made their way through the crowd with ease. He ordered for them and then turned, curious look in his eyes.

“You never told me what you were doing out there.” Aden said, “The woods at night is no place for a woman alone.”

“I was...coming here.” Hale replied, mind whirring, “I...wanted to get a job.”

“A job?”

“Yes, I need to buy something very expensive soon and I don’t have any money and taverns are a good place to pick up work so...”

It had been a spur of the moment lie but now that he thought about it, the plan wasn’t half bad. Magic users were rare and their services expensive; before he could even think of finding one, he’d have to save up enough gold to afford it.

“You know, I do believe you’re a very lucky lady.” Aden smiled as two tankards were placed down before them, “I happen to know the owner, don’t I, Marcy?”

A buxom woman in a corset far too tight grinned at them, wiping back her curly red hair to reveal a heart shape face full of freckles.

“Indeed, you do. Now, what awful favour are you about to ask?”

Hale almost choked on his first sip of ale and it was only partly because of the taste. Never in his life had heard a woman speak so candidly to a man. If a woman of the court spoke that way she’d be shunned and looked down upon by all. Yet here was this woman who apparently, owned a business and was *teasing* a knight.

Hale did his best not to blush, Marcy's cleavage was practically hanging out her dress. The bodice was so tight and low cut it was a miracle they contained her at all really. Hale averted his eyes, maintaining eye contact with the fiery red head was too much to ask. The feeling wasn't mutual though, on the contrary Marcy gave Hale a cheeky grin, bending over further so that he had no choice but to look at her.

"I dunno, don't got much use for the shy ones."

"Be nice, she's had a rough evening." Aden replied, taking a swig from his tankard before launching into a very detailed, grandiose retelling of his daring rescue.

Hale felt his cheeks beginning to burn as Aden described him as a 'fair maid', even going so far as to wink at him. So forward, he'd seen people act this way in the brothels his brothers had dragged him to in the past but he had no idea regular commoners could be so vulgar. In the noble classes flirting was done subtly, words dripping in subtext until one member pulled another behind closed doors. Here he couldn't help but wonder if they kept the doors open.

"Look at you, blushing like a bride." Marcy teased, "is our fair maid smitten with the handsome knight?"

"No!" Hale placed his palms over his red cheeks in an effort to hide them, "I was just...embarrassed being caught off guard."

"Sure." Marcy smiled, "was he telling the truth then? 'Bout you wanting a job?"

"Needing one more like. I don't have anywhere to go tonight and no money."

Marcy's teasing face turned serious, her eyes narrowing, clearly searching this new stranger's face for deception. Being a bartender Hale was sure Marcy was no stranger to sob stories, both real and fake.

"Alright, there's some space in the storeroom. I guess I can lay down a few potato sacks and you can sleep in there."

Hale bit his tongue before he could say something foolish; horrid as that sounded it was better than sleeping outside or sneaking into a stable.

"But you're working first thing tomorrow." She waved a finger in his face, "and if I so much as find a single copper coin missing, you're out, got it?"

"Yes, ma'am."

She threw back her head in laughter.

"Ma'am? Well, ain't you a polite little thing?"

Hale gave his new employer an uneasy smile; something told him he had a lot to learn about living outside the palace.

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To say that Hale slept poorly was the understatement of the century. After a lifetime of filling means, soft cotton sheets and rooms warmed by fireplaces; a dinner of bread, ale and a potato sack mattress was a bit of an adjustment. It didn't help that he still hadn't gotten used to his new breasts, before his change he'd always slept on his chest but now that was very much not an option. Each time he nodded off and rolled over, he'd wake with an aching chest a few hours later. The 'mattress'

was so lumpy it wouldn't surprising him if he ended up with bruises on the sensitive skin there. After a night of tossing and turning Marcy flew open the door at the break of dawn, making him jump so high he hit his head on one of the shelves.

"Hey!" She said surprised, looking around the parlour, "You didn't nick and any food?"

"Was I supposed to?"

Marcy burst into giggles.

"I like you, Hailey." She shook her head, "You're like a little lost lamb. Where on earth did you come from to say something like that?"

Hale just blushed in embarrassment.

"Well, where I'm from stealing is wrong."

"Stealing is-Oh my God," Marcy kept shaking her head like she didn't believe it, "I half expected you to have tried to rob me blind but you weren't kidding last night, were you? You really do want a job."

"If you thought I was going to rob you, why give the offer?" Hale took the outstretched hand she offered, getting to his feet and following her into the humble tavern kitchen.

"Because I wasn't going to take the chance that you really were in trouble." She shrugged, "I'd rather lose a few coins than take the risk you really did need help. Seems it paid off for both of us. You get your job and shelter and I get an extra pair of hands."

Hale felt his heart stutter, he wondered how many people had wronged this woman's kindness before for her to speak so nonchalantly about it. Marcy made them breakfast, rough wheat bread with some yellowed, aged butter. All the while explaining the rules of her little tavern.

"Cook comes in the afternoon and whips up a stew and a bit of this and that depending on what he gets at market." She said, mouth half full, "I pay him at the end of the week, you too. You and me, we'll work the floor, serving ale and beer, chatting with the customers, you know, normal stuff."

Hale nodded like he knew exactly what she was talking about, vowing to follow her lead.

“Now, let’s get a look at you.” She said, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand and gesturing for him to stand.

Hale did his best not to blush under her scrutiny.

“Pretty, I’ll give ya that. I’ll make a proper tavern wench out of you yet!”

For a minute she disappeared, reappearing with a bundle of cloth, clinking with tiny items.

“Right, off with your bodice.”

“What!?” Hale balked.

“You want to work here? We need to get those tits out. You got ‘em, flaunt ‘em. Sells ale like nothing else.”

Did women often undress in front of one another? He supposed nudity among men wasn’t that uncommon, it must be the same for the fairer sex. Still, as he slipped off his dress and bodice, he couldn’t help but feel sinful, undressing in front of a lady...well, a woman at least. His breasts sagged, still slightly sore from his uncomfortable sleep and Marcy reached out, long strip of cloth in her hand and began to wind it around them. Each loop forcing the flesh up until his cleavage had almost doubled in size.

“There, now, when you see men with low drinks you take a cloth and go over to ‘clean the table’, see?” Marcy winked, “Lean over and they’ll be under your control and ordering in no time.”

“Is that what you did to me-I mean Aden, last night?”

“Him, nah, Aden never did fall for my charms.” She sighed, “Such a shame, handsome lad, I might not have even charged him for a roll in the hay like I do others.”

Hale felt the blood drain from his face and Marcy helped him back into his dress.

“Do I...Do I have to...?”

Marcy gave him a pitying smile, placing a palm rough from years of work on his cheek.

“No, silly girl. You do what you’re comfortable with.” She patted his cheek softly, “I happen to enjoy the loving of a good man and the gold well, that’s just extra. You just serve drinks.”

Hale swallowed nervously and nodded. He needed a lot of gold to afford a spell as transformative as his mothers’ potion. If he relied on a small pay packet each week it could take years but that was okay, better than the alternative. For now, he’d let himself fall into the role of Hailey the Tavern Maid; the bed may be hard and the food stale, but at least he didn’t have the echoing sound of wedding bells hanging over him.

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Hale had never worked so hard in his life. He thought after years training in the yard with his brothers and their knights walking a tavern floor, serving drinks and talking to patrons would be a breeze. How wrong he was. His feet ached, the first few nights he’d gone to bed, removed his shoes and been met with a smattering of blisters, all of which were getting rubbed raw the next day. Marcy had been in disbelief, helping him down to the river to wash and wrap them in some spare cloth.

“You’d think you’d never worked a day in your life.” She’d sighed, Hale just bit his lip.

He was surprised how quickly he’d gotten used to the leers, the men ogling his prominent chest and ass, some even going to far as to try and cop a feel once in a while. What’s more though, Hale found, much to his shame, that he was beginning to like it. Not the grabbing, that was annoying but the looks, they were quite nice. Nobody had ever noticed him before, even though he was a prince. They had four other, older and more handsome princes to lay their affections on but as Hailey, he was an object of desire.

The first man to corner him with a proposition had made him so flustered he could barely get a word out. He’d sent Marcy to apologise, she’d mistaken his red face for humiliation, the truth was it was arousal. He’d not touched himself since his transformation and it was beginning to become a problem. Now all it took was a handsome man giving him a smile, or Marcy leaning over a table within sight to send his stomach churning and loins warming. Ever since Marcy had brought up her little side hustle Hale had been unable to put it out of his mind. What would it feel like, to be on the other side in the bedroom? Moisture would gather between his legs each night as he tried to

sleep and his dreams were haunted with dreams of sex. Sometimes he was himself again, thrusting into Marcy in a field of flowers, others, he was Hailey, so grateful for rescue that she thanked Aden with her body. Each time, Hale would wake, sweating and hot, having no choice but to walk to the nearby river to splash his face with cold water.

Most concerning of all though, Hale found himself glancing to the door each time it opened in the hopes of seeing Aden. Why, he couldn't say, but despite their short meeting Hale found himself thinking of the man often and wishing he'd visit.

"Wench! More beer!"

"Coming!"

He snapped himself out of his daydreams, the tavern was packed to bursting and he didn't have time to be off with the fairies. Marcy shoved three tankards across the bar which he deftly grabbed, hefting them up and pushing through the crowd. He was yet to master the ability to make a crowd part for him in the same way Marcy did, which often resulted in ale spilling on his hands, dress and bosom. Frankly, he had so much skin exposed it was a wonder he didn't even every night covered in dry ale. After helping him plump up his bust Marcy had also insisted on bringing his hem up to show a little leg.

"Here you go." Hale smiled sweetly, placing down the tankards, making sure to bend over just that little bit extra. He felt a wave of gratification pass through him as the men's eyes all lowered with him.

"Thanks darlin'."

The comment was meant to butter him up, Hale blushed accordingly, mentally chastising himself for falling for such a thing but also how the compliment made him feel all warm and fuzzy inside.

"Aden! Where have you been you old bucket of irons?"

Hale spun round, there was his knight, in his casual clothes, making his way to the bar and waving at Marcy. Hale was suddenly hyperaware of his appearance; the large bust, the beer stains, all the imperfections in his long brown hair. His mouth was going dry and he felt like running both to and away from the object of his many daydreams. This behaviour was absurd, he may look it but he refused to turn into a blush maiden! Fixing his apron he strode over, with what he hoped was a look of mild interest and nothing else.

"She's an innocent thing." Marcy whispered as he approached, "Good girl but odd. Doesn't seem to know much at all, maybe she's the one you're looking for?"

"Excuse me?"

Both Aden and Marcy jumped.

"A princess has gone missing." Aden shrugged, "Prince Aldric's fiancée, got carted off by bandits apparently, the king has had us all scouring the forest looking for her."

A cold sweat broke out on Hale's back as the two gave him the side eye, Aden took a swig from his drink.

"Went missing the same night I found you in fact." He added slowly, "Funny that."

"A coincidence, I am sure." Hale stammered, fuck he hadn't even been gone a week and his story was falling apart.

"Where are you from anyway, Hailey?" Marcy mused.

"Oh, just a little nowhere village." Hale waved them off, grabbing a tankard and refilling it hastily, "I'd uh, better get back to work! Working men drink ale like a dying man does water!"

Hale avoided them both as much as he could over the next few hours, keeping busy chatting with as many customers as possible. He was in the parlour, getting ready to roll out another barrel of ale when a shadow fell across him from behind.

"Bit far from home, aren't you *Haylyn*."

"That's not my name." He whispered, honestly.

"I think it is, princess." Aden stood in the doorway as Hale stood, arms crossed. "I'm not stupid."

“Please.” Hale implored, “I can’t marry Prince Aldric, I’m sure he’s very nice but I just...can’t. For personal reasons.”

Aden looked at him with an unreadable expression, still blocking the exit.

“Nobles do arranged marriages all the time, what’s the big deal? You’ve got a lot of people up in arms you know, the king even thinks it might be some sort of trick of King Aston to have an excuse to send his army into Hytheria.”

A lowly trick, something his father would never do. But Hale couldn’t blame the Hytherian king for his suspicion.

“I never wanted to cause trouble.” Hale said honestly, “I just...my family has never respected me, sometimes I don’t think they even like me. When they forced me into this they did so very cruelly. I just need to work up enough gold, find a magician or sorcerer and I’ll be out of everybody’s hair. I swear, please don’t tell the rest of the guard where I am.”

He hadn’t meant to confess so much but once the words started, he’d not been able to stop them.

“Why do you need a magician?” Aden asked, his intimidating demeanour slowly melting, Hale chewed on his bottom lip.

“My family used magic to...make sure I would marry the prince. A curse really, I need to get it reversed.”

“What does it do?”

Hale looked to the ground, brunching his fingers into his apron and skirt. What lie could he possibly give now that he’d spilled the beans about there being a spell? What other possible effect could he say he was under? There was no way he was admitting to Aden he was actually a man, not after that display in the woods.

“I can’t say.” Hale shook his head, “please just, let me be?”

Aden observed him for a moment, face unreadable. Then, much to Hale’s relief, he stepped aside.

“I won’t tell anybody; I’ll tell Marcy to keep her mouth shut too.”

“Really?” Hale felt a genuine smile spread across his face, “Oh, thank you Aden, you have no idea how much this means to me!”

“Yeah well,” The man blushed slightly, “I know Prince Aldric, he’s a bit of a dick really. Not the most responsible guy around. Just in the future, if anybody asks where you come from just say Gunston.”

“Where’s Gunston?”

“Exactly.” Aden smirked, “Middle of nowhere village, barely anybody goes there and no one ever leaves. Perfect origin for a mysterious beauty.”

“You think I’m a beauty?” Hale demurred, batting his eyelids before he could stop himself. Enjoying the deepening blush on Aden’s face.

“Hailey! Where the hell is that ale?” Marcy’s voice yelled from the other room.

“I’d better go.”

“Yeah...”

Hale shot Aden a grateful smile before rolling the barrel out and heading straight into the fray of thirsty customers. He was thankful for the work, it helped distract him from the dampness that had gathered in his underclothes watching Aden’s blush.

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The next few days felt like walking on eggshells for Hale. Each time the tavern door swung open his eyes would race to it; expecting to see the royal guard or worse, his mother, enter and drag him off to the castle. But even once his fear began to lessen, he was still left with his other most prominent problem. He’d been a woman for several weeks now and not once had he relieved any of the sexual tension building inside. As a man, he’d been with his brothers to the occasional brothel under cover

of night but more often than not he relieved himself. Woman or no, his body was used to being gratified every few days and now he'd unwillingly gone cold turkey.

It was tempting, very tempting to touch himself. He'd even started a few times over the last few nights; hands roaming across his chest and now into his undergarments. But each time fear and tension overwhelmed him. Touching those soft folds, even lightly had caused such a strong reaction it almost scared him. He knew it was foolish but some secret part of him felt that if he got too comfortable in this body something bad might happen; he might start to lose his sense of self and actually turn into Haylyn. Whoever she was.

He was stuck, horny as hell and too much of a wimp to do anything about it. He could just imagine the mockery his brothers would give if they knew; the twins would never let him live it down. It was getting harder and harder to resist the temptation of going up to one of the tavern rooms with a patron. He'd had offers, of course he had; in this tightly laced corset his hips were inviting and his bosom was practically falling out. But Hale told himself he was in control; he wouldn't give in; tempting as gratification and gold were he refused to become a whore. Even if it would cut down the amount of time, he had to spend saving for the spell to fix this whole mess.

He had just finished working for another night and was walking down the well worn path to the river. His skin was sweaty from both work and arousal; it seemed as though half the tavern had been conspiring to grab his ass tonight. While the touches were uninvited, after a while he couldn't be blamed if his body started to respond. Already preparing for another night of tossing and turning Hale reached into the cool stream to clean up when he heard a twig snap.

A moment later he was on his feet, whirling round to see what caused the sound and finding a sheepish looking Aden standing there, cheeks flush with drink. Gone was his armour, instead he was in simple britches and a tunic. While the design was plain Hale couldn't help but notice the fine make, they couldn't have been cheap.

"You shouldn't sneak up on a lady like that." Hale scolded, "People might get the wrong idea."

"Ah, I didn't mean to." He smiled, "I just...well I wanted to come see you after our little chat the other day."

Ice filled Hale's veins only to melt a moment later as Aden continued.

"I wanted to apologise. I know what it's like to be forced into something. I can't imagine how awful it must be to magically compelled as well. I shouldn't have come at you so...adversarially."

"Wow, that's a five gold word right there." Hale felt his eyebrow raise, "You're a lord's young son then? Must have been awkward, joining the guards below your station."

Aden made a strange face, something frozen halfway between looking fearful, impressed and shocked all at once.

“Yeah. Something like that.”

The wind stirred and Hale suddenly felt awkward, he was forced to bunch his hands into his skirt to stop the sweating.

“Well,” He licked his lips, “Apology accepted, I’d better go...it’s late.”

Hale pushed past, trying to ignore the way his stomach was filling with butterflies the same way it always did when Aden showed up. Then a hand reached out, grabbing him gently but firmly around the forearm forcing him to spin around to face the knight. Their eyes immediately locking on one another and Hale felt his breath hitch; nobody had ever looked at him like that before. With so much fire and passion, so much desire. For a moment, his mouth went dry but that didn’t last because a second later Aden’s lips were on his. Hale couldn’t tell which of them moved first, it could well have been him; but really it didn’t matter. The flood levies burst open inside him and after being deprived of such intimacy for so long he was in no position to fight back.

His thin arms wrapped around the knights’ broad shoulders, pulling him closer and deepening their kiss. His raised breasts pressing against Aden’s firm chest; he could feel the warmth of his skin through the material and a moan escaped his throat only to be swallowed up. Aden’s hands roamed across his body, one finding purchase on his ass while the other his breast. Hale gasped as each hand squeezed the sensitive skin. Wetness was gathering at a rapid pace between his legs and he was very aware of just how little distance was between one of those hands and his aching pussy.

Part of him was humiliated at his actions but Hale ignored it. He was so turned on he didn’t care, he raked his fingers down Aden’s back and then back up, lifting the shirt free of his belt and revelling in the feel of hot skin under his fingers. Aden wasn’t like the tavern patrons who flirted with him while he worked; there was something special about him. Something that made Hale’s heart race in ways he knew it shouldn’t. No matter what body he was in, he should never want another man this way but as Aden slowly lowered him back into the soft grass Hale couldn’t bring himself to care. Aden could do whatever he wanted with his body, anything he liked, so long as he didn’t stop.

The knight finally broke their kiss, leaving Hale’s lips swollen and drenched with his taste; he couldn’t resist flicking his tongue out to savour it further. In a flash Aden was between his legs, gently spreading them apart and running his hands up and down the smooth skin as he pushed up Hale’s long skirt. Obediently Hale raised his hips, allowing Aden to remove his underclothes before returning to stroke a single finger along his inner thigh. Hale shuddered, flopping back into the grass and stared up at the stars, watching the him was too much. When the tickling sensation vanished, he expected the hand to return to part his aching folds but it didn’t, instead he felt something entirely unexpected.

A soft, wet tongue slowly pressed against his hole before licking upwards to his clit. The pleasure was indescribable and Hale couldn't help but moan loudly despite knowing there were likely people awake in the nearby houses. Aden's tongue began to lap up his juices almost lazily, each stripe causing Hale's legs to quiver and shake. It was wonderful, yet overwhelming. The pleasure felt almost so good it hurt and Hale found himself reaching a hand down to fist into Aden's hair in an attempt to ground himself. He could feel Aden's head bobbing, moving to angle his tongue so as best to pleasure him. Hale could only moan, whispering Aden's name under his breath as his insides began to clench. That tongue pressed and curled around his clit, teasing and drawing out even more wetness before dipping down to the source. The first time it slipped inside Hale wailed. It was too good; he wasn't going to last much longer.

A moment later a wave of ecstasy passed through his entire body. His legs spasmed and tightened around Aden's shoulders, pulling him in closer as his tongue continued to thrust in and out of his wet hole. Hale felt his eyes roll back and his back arch as the pleasure overwhelmed him before finally fading, leaving him drained and his pussy pulsing. After taking a moment to catch his breath he opened his eyes, spying Aden kneeling between his legs; pupils blown wide with arousal and pants tenting in a way that must have been painful. A realisation struck Hale like a bolt of lightning; he still wanted Aden. All of him, cock and all. This wasn't a simple case of pent-up emotion, he wanted to be fucked and he wanted Aden to do it. Hale reached out, pride be damned only to be shocked as Aden rose to his feet and took a step back.

"I...this was a mistake." He said thickly, "I shouldn't have...I think it's best I go."

"What?" Hale felt humiliation beginning to well up inside him, hastily grabbing his underclothes and standing as well. "You can't just-You can't start something like that and then just leave me here!"

"I know but it would be worse if we went further." Aden refused to look at him, "Others may not know it but you're a princess and I almost-"

"I'm not a virgin if that is what you're hung up on." Hale huffed.

"You're not?" Aden blinked and Hale realised his mistake.

It was fine for men to sleep around, that was in their nature but women, women were supposed to wait for marriage. At least noble women were and especially princesses. Hale felt his cheeks redden at making such a stupid mistake.

"Well then." Aden's voice was curt, "Perhaps it is a good thing you're not marrying the prince then."

“My virginity or lack thereof wouldn’t change the treaty.” Hale felt his temper rising, “It’s a stupid double standard and besides, I am a person, not some game or bargaining chip to be pushed around by kings and queens to win their silly political game.”

He’d never put it into so many words for another before but now that he had, Hale felt as though a weight had been lifted.

“All my life,” he hissed, “I have tried to make myself useful and for what? So, I can be part of a matching set? Why should my life be defined by what and I can or can’t do for the kingdom? Why can’t I just be me? Isn’t that enough?”

He swiped at his burning eyes in frustration.

“Why can’t I ever be enough...”

This had started to wonderfully; he’d finally let go and look what it had got him, used and humiliated. Hale wanted to scream but then, a soft hand cupped his cheek. Gently lifting his face-to-face Aden, eyes wide with unspoken apology.

“You *are* good enough, Hailey.” He whispered, “I’m the one who’s wronged you.”

Hale wanted to ask what he meant but before he could Aden snatched his hand away, looking guilty and conflicted.

“I need to go. Good night, Hailey.”

He turned on his heels and walked away, Hale called out but that only made his knight speed up. He knew there was no chance he could catch up, not if Aden broke into a full on run as his gait suggested he was about to do, so Hale let him go. Leaving him alone and humiliated in the moonlight.