

Chapter 2

Angelica's father was actually waiting just inside the outer gates when they finally arrived back at the castle. Penelope was waiting with him, still in the same dress as earlier, but she had added a matching ribbon in her hair. She smiled when Kenneth came into view, but her smile faded when she saw the state of the guard's clothes.

There was chaos for several moments as the King called for the medics to come and tend to the wounded, and Elder Gareth explained what had happened. Angelica saw her father look at her in obvious disapproval when it was mentioned how she slid down the hill into the midst of the battle.

"I am glad you and your son were able to arrive safely, Your Justice. I trust my daughter was not too much of an inconvenience?" The king said quickly.

"On the contrary, Your Majesty, she was most helpful in the dispatching of the demon," Kenneth inserted.

The Elder cast a disapproving look at her. Angelica decided it was about time for her to make her exit. She avoided looking at her father, and started leading Tricky toward the stable.

"Elder Hethal, Young Elder Kenneth, this is my eldest daughter, Princess Penelope." She heard her father making formal introductions.

"It is an honor," Elder Hethal said.

Angelica quickly turned the corner into the stables. Tricky pulled back against the sudden pressure on his reins and shook his head. The princess patted him on the neck. "Come on, let's get you bedded down."

The Elder's servants were bringing in his horses now, putting them into the visitor stalls, and talking loudly as they did.

"Did you see her come sliding down the cliff like that? I thought she was a demon myself at first," one of them said.

"I was a little too busy trying to not get eaten," another replied.

"And wearing boy's clothes like she was. Can hardly believe she's a princess."

"What do you expect from the Renegade Princess? Her sister was quite the looker. Master Kenneth sure is a lucky man."

"Tell me something I don't know."

"Don't pay them any mind," a voice said from right outside the stall.

Angelica looked up from grooming Tricky to see Jasper standing in the doorway.

"Shouldn't you be guarding my sister?" she replied with a smile.

"There are plenty of guards any time the royal family steps outside the castle."

"Ah, but Nell prefers you."

Jasper coughed uncomfortably. "So what were you doing by the path anyway?"

"I wanted to get a glimpse of my sister's future husband."

"He's quite handsome isn't he?"

"If the pretty-boy look is what you're going for." Angelica smiled, patting Tricky's neck before moving to the stall door. "Did you know he's a mage?"

"Well I guess for him it only adds to his repertoire," Jasper commented.

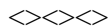
"If you're not careful, he'll steal Nell right out from under your nose."

"I do not know what you are talking about, Princess," Jasper said, his cheeks coloring notably.

"I am talking about the fact that a rival has appeared."

Jasper's eyes clouded for a moment. "I am sure Princess Penelope will be very happy with Master Kenneth." He turned and walked away.

"So serious all the time," Angelica murmured as she let herself out of the stall.



Angelica looked over her shoulder at her hair in her mirror. She had requested her maids' services for the first time in many months to braid her hair in a fancy fashion that looked like it had taken hours. And in fact, it practically had, even with both Janna and Beth working on it. Her request had surprised them, but they launched into it without complaint, and even seemed to be enjoying themselves when they were able to convince her to allow them to apply some hints of makeup to her face.

An elegant royal blue dress hung on the door of her wardrobe. Once her hair was done, she had Janna and Beth help her into the dress. As they tightened and tied, Angelica's thoughts drifted back to her father's visit two hours ago.

"I am expecting your presence at the dinner tonight," he had said.

"Of course, Father," Angelica replied with a charming smile.

She knew the look in his eye as he nodded his approval and left her room. He thought he had her figured out. He assumed that she always did the opposite of what he wanted her to do, but were that always the case, it would make her just as predictable as Penelope. Her father had assumed that by telling her that he wanted her to be there, that she would disappear into the

stables or the forest for the remainder of the night, unseen to his distinguished guests. But Angelica wanted to see Kenneth again.

The dining hall fell silent as Angelica floated in. There had been no announcement for her entrance, but every eye was on her. She smiled at her father, as she approached the table, curtsying as was customary, and then nodded to her mother, who was looking both beautiful and murderous.

Kenneth caught her eyes as she moved around the table, and sat in the seat that was always left vacant for her next to her sister. Penelope smiled as Angelica sat down. She was served her meal, and she sat eating, talking happily with her sister.

She ignored the eyes staring at her; all except for Kenneth's. Every time she looked at him, she was greeted with a smile. Angelica was used to attention, and to the stares she received, but it was the first time she could remember having positive attention from a man. The princess figured she should enjoy his presence as much as possible.

The ball after dinner was pleasant enough. Angelica stood out of the way, but in a place where she could still see the activity on the floor. She accepted a drink from one of the servants, and had just sipped it when her mother floated up. Her blonde hair was piled tall on her head, and a low cut green dress spilled out over her body, just barely brushing the floor. It had probably taken her hours to be laced tight enough for it to fit.

"I suppose even the lowest mutt can be dressed up for occasion." Her voice was low, but carried all of the venom Angelica had come to expect from the queen.

"Your visage would prove otherwise." She responded smoothly.

Her mother colored, though it was barely noticeable under the makeup caked on her face. With a sound of annoyance, she turned and glided away.

"Quite a splendid evening." Angelica glanced at the man who move up beside her.

"Good evening, Jeffery." The princess said with a smile, curtsying.

The king's advisor bowed in response. "Princess Angelica."

"It is indeed, and my sister seems to be enjoying herself."

"As she should be. They make such a fine pair, and it will do well to bring Houses Millian and Hethal together."

Penelope and Kenneth were the main attraction of the night. Angelica had to admit her sister looked stunning, a purely happy look on her face.

"Is that your professional opinion?"

"As much of one as I can give with such an odd monarchy," Jeffery replied. "People are starting to make decisions based on your father, the Elder of House Millian, as the King for an

indefinite period. Long enough that your sister could very well inherit the throne. The fact that an Elder has never held the monarchy for more than a year or two in the past has quite a few people confused."

"You can hardly blame them. Everyone expected another Heir to be born by now, but I suppose Lucinia works in mysterious ways."

The song picked up tempo, and Angelica saw that her sister was looking quite tired. She had danced quite a few dances already, but of course the ball was just starting.

"If you would excuse me." Angelica handed her drink to Jeffery, who nodded. She crossed the floor, weaving in and out of the other dancers, to where Penelope and Kenneth were dancing. "May I cut in?" Penelope studied her sister for a moment, and then nodded. Angelica took Kenneth's hand, and continued with the dance. She floated across the dance floor, matching her movements perfectly in time with the music.

"You are an excellent dancer," Kenneth commented after a moment.

"You could use some work," Angelica replied.

That earned a chuckle from the Elder's son. "I suppose I shouldn't have forgotten who it was I was talking to underneath all of that finery; though I have to admit you look as comfortable in that dress as you did in your tunic earlier today."

"They're only clothes." Angelica spun, her dress flaring out beautifully, in time with the song's ending crescendo.

Kenneth clapped along with the other guests until the band struck up the next song. The young man then offered his hand to her and Angelica took it with a smile and they began to dance again.

"So what are your plans for tomorrow?"

"Doing what I normally do, not that you care. You will be spending the day with my sister, preparing for your wedding."

"The wedding has not yet been decided upon."

"You know well enough that this is all just fluff." Angelica smirked.

"I suppose." Kenneth smiled.

Angelica launched into the next song with just as much fervor as the first. Kenneth did his best to keep up with her quick steps, and she watched him with mild amusement. After the next song had ended, she excused herself. She gave her sister a quick kiss on the cheek before leaving the ballroom and heading back to her room.

As soon as she arrived back in her own quarters, Angelica flicked on her radio. A quintet was playing a famous piece by Mayer entitled 'Moonlight Secrets'. She called in Janna to help her out of the dress, and then dismissed her for the night.

Angelica turned the dial, honing in on another station, and a man's voice came through the radio almost immediately. "Earlier today the esteemed Elder Gareth Hethal arrived at Skywall Castle with his son, Young Elder Kenneth. Their trip was not without incident, and it is reported that their escort party was attacked by a beast demon. It managed to kill several of the Elder's guards before Princess Angelica, the famed Renegade Princess, arrived in the fray. Luckily the Elder and his son are both unhurt, and the country continues to wait on bated breath for the announcement of our beloved Princess Penelope's engagement to Young Elder Kenneth. This announcement is expected any day now."

Angelica caught herself smiling at the thought of the handsome young man. He had not been the best dancer she had ever seen, but he had tried his hardest to impress her.

"Reports of the humanoid demon, Naresrom the Terrible, are becoming more frequent in the Province of Millian."

Angelica paused, putting her full attention on the radio.

"The Choir has been called in to investigate but have not released any information on their findings but assure us that they are doing everything in their power to quell this uprising as soon as possible. It is known that Naresrom uses highly destructive fire magic, so if there are any odd outbreaks of fire, or if anyone happens to see Naresrom, or any other humanoid demon for that matter, we would like to remind you to run as far and fast as possible before reporting the incident."

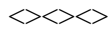
The princess nodded at that. Ever since she had been young, every tutor had been adamant that if she ever met a humanoid demon, she does just as the announcer had said. It was something that all children were taught as young as possible. Humanoid demons, though rare, were extremely powerful. Even the Choir treated them with caution.

Nothing else nearly as interesting as the humanoid demon rampage was mentioned, and as Angelica picked up her hairbrush, she switched back to the music station. Music floated around her as she lovingly brushed out every knot and tangle from her hair, until it lay down her back in soft waves, shimmering teal in the crystals' light.

Angelica turned off the radio and knelt next to her bed for her nightly prayers. She made the sign of the Heaven. "Thank you for the beautiful and happy day, Great Goddess Lucinia. Your blessings were appreciated and I pray you continue to honor me as such." And then she made the sign of the Earth. "Thank you for your blessings of the earth today, Great God Terranok. It was

thanks to you that I was able to evade my watchers without having to harm them in any way. And thank you for your child who allowed me to meet Kenneth."

The princess climbed to her feet, turning the crystals off before climbing into bed. She could still picture Kenneth's beautiful blue eyes in her mind and his handsome face as she danced with him. It had been a pleasant day to say the least.



The next day, Angelica did not awake until early afternoon. She switched on the radio as she climbed out of bed. She felt extremely refreshed as she pulled open the heavy curtains. Light spilled into the room from a cloudless blue sky.

Angelica danced a few steps to the upbeat tune coming from the radio, twirling happily before kneeling beside the window.

"Thank you for this sun filled day, Lady of Light. May your blessings be many for those deserving. Lord of Dark, if it be your will, allow the people of my father's kingdom to remain safe today."

Angelica picked out a nice tunic from her wardrobe and changing into it. She grabbed breakfast from the kitchen before heading out to the garden. Penelope was sitting on a bench in the middle of the rose garden, reading a book, which was propped open in her lap. A few feet back, Jasper stood at attention.

"Good morning, Nell."

The blond princess looked up from her book. "Angie. Good morning. You haven't seen Kenneth have you?"

"I would think I'd be the one asking you that," Angelica replied. "Isn't he supposed to be spending time with you?"

"No one has seen him all morning."

"Odd. I haven't seen him; I just woke up."

Penelope reached over to stroke one of the just opening rose buds. "I wish...I could be as carefree as you."

"It's not hard." Angelica smelled a fully open rose. "You just care too much about what other people think. It's just a matter of doing what you feel like doing."

"If you had seen the way father was looking at you during dinner last night...and when you were dancing..."

"I wouldn't have cared." Angelica leaned forward and touched her forehead to her sister's. "Don't worry Nell. Soon you'll be married and it won't matter what they all think."

Penelope smiled softly. "I hope you're right."

Angelica mirrored the smile. "If anyone tries to take your happiness away from you, I'll take care of them."

"I love you, Angie."

Angelica kissed her sister on the cheek. "I love you too, Nell. Don't worry; things will work out just fine."

"I hope you're right."

"Of course I am." Angelica stood up. "Now if you'll excuse me, I need to get away before anyone else realizes I'm awake." She cast a glance at Jasper, who was still unmoving in the background and then headed out of the garden.

Only minutes later the princess walked slowly down the familiar path toward the lake. At one point during the castle's construction, the earth under a portion of wall had fallen away due to a shoddy foundation. The whole wall had then slid and tumbled all the way down the slope until it splashed into the lake. The wall still lay in the shallows of the lake, sticking up at an odd angle that was perfect for sunning in the late morning.

Angelica had just reached the slab when she noticed that a figure was already there, laying back and looking up at the sky. As she approached, she realized it was Kenneth, though she did not see any guards nearby.

She moved closer as quietly as she could. He seemed to be asleep, his blue hair wafting in the breeze coming across the lake. Angelica found herself unable to do anything but watch him for several minutes.

What is he doing down here? Penelope doesn't even know where he is. She moved to the shore of the lake and scooped up some water in her hands, carrying it back over to where he lay. *Could he be waiting for me...?*

Kenneth sat up sputtering, wiping lake water from his eyes. "Who dares to...?" He stopped when he saw her standing over him. "Ah, Princess. It's good to see you."

"You as well, Master Kenneth." She curtsied. "What are you doing out here on your own? It is most dangerous for one such as yourself to be..."

Kenneth put his finger to her lips, cutting off the flow of words. "Don't talk like that. It feels wrong somehow."

Angelica smirked. "Penelope is looking for you."

"And I've been looking for you. You are good at making yourself scarce."

"It is one of my most well guarded secrets. It's called sleeping in late."

Kenneth chuckled lightly. Angelica found the sound to be most pleasant. *But out looking for me when he should be spending time with my sister...* Angelica moved away from the fallen wall, and looked out over the lake.

"Do you want to fight?"

"Fight?" Kenneth's voice was laced with confusion.

"Well spar. I have to order the guards when I want to, and it's not very good practice when they are scared to try and land a real blow." Angelica turned around, laying her hand on her sword's hilt.

"I'm afraid I would be scared to try and land a real blow as well."

"Oh come on, would you say that if I were a man?"

"Yes, after seeing the way you handled that demon I am doubtful of my own skills."

The teal haired princess burst out laughing.

"I am glad that amuses you."

Angelica pulled her sword free. "Now I really want to fight you. Anyone who had time to evaluate my skills while protecting his own hide and casting a spell should be worth fighting."

"Alright then, I accept." Kenneth unsheathed his sword.

The princess judged his stance immediately. It was solid, aggressive and she found herself smiling as she lunged forward. He met her attack gracefully, pushing it off to the side. Angelica countered the move immediately and her sword sliced through the fabric on his right sleeve.

"Aw, and I expected to draw blood," Angelica said playfully.

"Either way, I can't forgive you for ruining my favorite tunic." Kenneth closed the gap between them, and Angelica only had time to stumble to the side. He was fighting her seriously. Her excitement soared. No one had ever treated her so much like a person before, mostly because no one had ever bothered. All the attention she had ever received before was negative, someone disproving of her actions. But she liked the attention he was giving her. Like she was the only one he could see at times, like she was the only one that mattered...

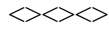
Kenneth's sword bit into her arm, and she cried out in surprise. "You're slowing down," he commented.

He is spending time with me when he should be with Penelope. Angelica dodged the next blow, but her thoughts were elsewhere. Penelope had looked worried when she asked where Kenneth was, and had she looked relieved when Angelica admitted to not knowing where he was? Could she possibly think that Kenneth might like Angelica better? Was that even possible?

I like him don't I? Angelica stopped moving. Really like him.

His sword hummed forward and stopped just beside her throat. "Looks like I win." He smiled.

"You are marrying my sister," Angelica said flatly, ignoring the look of surprise on the man's face. And she turned and disappeared into the forest.



Angelica made her way to Penelope's room slowly. She had wandered in the forest for the last part of the day, only turning back to the castle as the last rays of light faded from the sky. Jasper stood just outside the door, and smiled as the princess approached. She avoided his gaze, and knocked on the door.

"Come in," a voice said from inside.

Angelica pushed the door open, and entered the room. Penelope sat in front of her mirror, one of her maids brushing her hair.

"Oh, Angelica. What a pleasant surprise."

"I was wondering if I could talk to you," Angelica said carefully.

"Of course. Marissa, if you don't mind?"

"Yes, Miss." The servant set down the brush and moved from the room, shutting the door after her.

Angelica moved over to the bed and sat down.

"Is something a matter?"

"Did you see Kenneth today?"

"Yes, he came just after midday and apologized for being so scarce. He is really very nice."

"Listen Nell, I'm sorry. It was my fault that he was scarce this morning."

"You said you didn't know where he was."

"I didn't, but when I got down to the lake...he was apparently there waiting for me."

"He was...waiting for you?"

"Yeah. I admit that I liked his attention. I mean it was the first time anyone's actually been interested in me. I don't even know how things got that far, and so I told him that he was marrying you, and so he should spend time with you."

"Oh, you did?"

"Yes, I'm so sorry Nell. It was just the first time anyone showed interest in me, and I lost my head. I know silly thing for me to-"

"Please leave."

"Nell?"

"I request that you leave now."

"What do you mean?" Angelica stood up.

"You came here to tell me that my future husband is interested in you, and would rather spend time with you, but you felt sorry for me, so you tossed him my way when you were done with him?"

"No...that's not what I-"

"And last night you could not help but draw his attention to you. Taking him and dancing the night away while I was left on the sidelines."

"Nell, that is not what I was trying to do, I just wanted to-"

"Jasper!"

The door opened immediately and Jasper appeared in the doorway.

"Please escort Angelica from my room."

"Nell..."

"Now."

Jasper's hand closed over Angelica's arm and he guided her toward the door. The upset princess went without any resistance. Jasper shut the door after them.

"She didn't understand...how could..." Angelica looked up at Jasper. His eyes were full of questions. The pain of wanting someone you could never have. Jasper knew this pain, and she had teased him. "I'm sorry." She managed, but tears began to spill down her cheeks, so she pulled away from him and hurried to her own room.

The Renegade Princess flung herself down onto her bed, curling up around a pillow. After saying those encouraging things to Penelope just this morning, she was the one who ended up hurting her the most.

Kenneth was the first guy to ever show interest in her, it seemed just her luck that he was already betrothed to her sister. She was perfect after all, and she always got whatever she wanted. And him coming on to her like that when he had Penelope. What was he even thinking?

She pulled the switch to turn off the crystals and rolled over. *Maybe it'd just be better if I weren't around...*

Wind howled through the window in a sudden burst, waking Angelica from the slumber she had not remembered falling into. She groaned in tired annoyance and rolled over, trying to

slip back into unconsciousness. The window shutters clacked against wall, stirring her further from sleep.

She mumbled to herself as she climbed from the warm bed, her feet finding the slippers beside her bed. The wind was biting cold against her skin as she groped for the shutters, which were still dancing around wildly.

An arm slipped around her neck from behind, and another attempted to pin her arms. Her responses were still dulled by the blanket of sleep and she found herself thrown back onto the bed before she could respond.

Now Angelica was beginning to wake up, and her training took over as she landed a strong blow into the figure's stomach. She refused to cry out. She did not need any help. The last thing she needed were the guards rubbing in the fact that she had needed to be saved. There was a grunt in response to her attack, and then whispered words drifted into Angelica's ears. Suddenly a pair of dark wings flared out from the figure's back.

Oh by the powers...it's a demon...

Fear clutched Angelica as realized she was in over her head, and she opened her mouth to scream. But nothing came out. A wave of peacefulness washed over her, and her eyes began to feel heavy.

No, I can't go to sleep now. I can't...