

STARGAZING

Hannah Edwards

I sigh as the door to the tower room bursts open, and a boy wearing a deep red cape and expensive-looking armour strolls in.

“It is I, Prince Maximillian of Legionvillia, here to save you,” he declares, raising his sword.

“Well, get on with it then,” I reply.

His arm drops, and he stares at me.

“What? Were you expecting me to fall in love with you or something?”

“Well, kind of, yeah.”

“You’re the fourth prince that’s tried to save me this week.” I glare at him.

“Just because I’m a princess with a pretty face.”

“Don’t you want to be saved?”

“Well, you’re here now, so let’s go.”

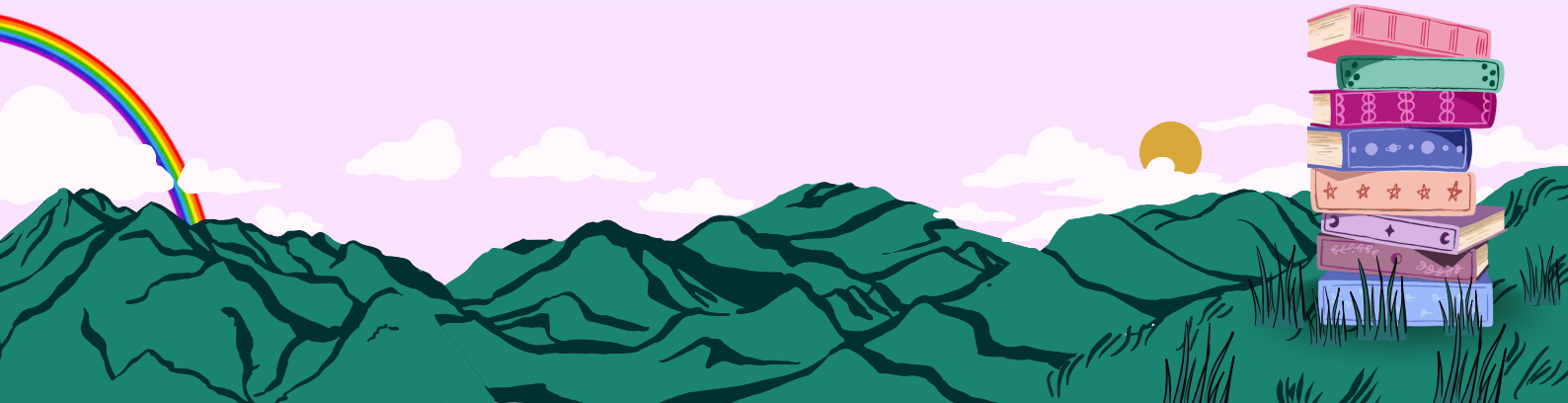
He produces a key from his pocket and unlocks the shackles bounding my ankle to the wall. I walk past him out of the room while he fiddles with his sword.

“Hurry up!”

At the bottom of the tower, I stop to take off my ballet flats and pull on a pair of black boots belonging to Emilian the Evil, my captor. They fit me, as I am super tall and therefore have enormous feet. I open the door, and Lava, the dragon supposed to protect me while Emilian is out, tries to nuzzle me with his head, almost knocking me over. I pat his side gently.

“Bye, Lava. I’ll miss you.”

Maximilian stands off to the side, as far away from Lava as possible without falling off the cliff. I leave them both and start walking down the narrow path on the cliffside. Maximillian rushes to catch up with me.



“So, Princess, um... What's your name again?”

“Really?” I reply. “You came to rescue me and don't even know my name? Typical.”

“No, no, I know it. It's... Marigold.”

“No. It's Ceryn.”

Of course, he forgot my name. He probably saw a notice about a missing princess and decided I was pretty enough to marry, with no thoughts whatsoever about who I really am.

We reach the bottom of the cliff, where two people in armour are waiting for us.

“Do you know them?” I ask.

“Oh, uh, yes. They're my guards.”

One of them pulls out a map.

“Go right,” she says.

The other guard starts walking, and Maximillian follows him. I sidle up to the female as she puts the map away.

“Hi. I'm Ceryn.”

She turns to me. “Alistor Fielin.”

Alistor has light skin and wavy brown hair that stops at her shoulders. She is shorter than me, which is not surprising. When she smiles, her teeth are almost as bright as the sunlight glinting off her armour.

Suddenly I feel self-conscious of my long, long hair full of knots, impractical amber dress and Emilian's boots. I must look like a mess. At least with my dark skin, Alistor can't tell I'm blushing. Wait, I'm blushing? This is weird. I never get self-conscious. I never blush. I'm not that type of person. I don't care what people think. But if Alistor doesn't like me, I'll-

“Hey, you okay?” Alistor asks.

“I'm fine,” I reply and start walking.



It's night, and I'm sick of listening to Gunther, the other guard, snoring, so I sit on a large rock to watch the stars. I almost fall asleep when I feel someone sit down beside me.

"They're beautiful, aren't they," I say.

"They are."

I turn to see Alistor staring into my eyes.

"They're so beautiful," she says, and I don't think she's talking about the stars. Suddenly I have the urge to kiss her. Our faces are only centimetres apart, and I can feel her breath on mine. I almost press my lips onto hers when a rustle from the grass below interrupts. We jump apart to see a hare running into the bushes.

I start giggling, and Alistor joins me. The giggles quickly turn into laughter, and when our laughter finally dies out, I lie down and look up at the stars again. Alistor slips her hand into mine. Her skin is rough and worn, but I still find it soft. I sit up and face her. She cups my chin in her hand, and somehow my lips find hers.

We reach my castle after a few days full of stolen kisses and hidden hand-holding. I burst through the door to the dining hall, where lunch is being held.

"Mother, Father, I'm home."

My mother is the only one in the room, and she sits in her moving chair at the head of the table.

"Ceryn!" She starts crying as I run over to hug her. When we both stop crying and hugging, she wheels over to Maximillian, who's standing by the door.

"How can I possibly repay you?"

"Well," he says, "I would love your daughter's hand in marriage."

My jaw drops.

"Of course, of course," my mother says. "I will arrange it with my husband." Maximillian grins at me, and I stare back at him, horrified. Alistor looks like she wants to stab Maximillian with the sword her fingers are curled around.



“This is so exciting,” my mother says. “I always dreamed of your wedding, Ceryn.”

She wheels out of the room, and Maximillian takes my hand.

“You’re so beautiful,” he says.

I drop his hand. “I need to use the toilet.”

That night, I lie on my bed and cry silently until I hear footsteps echo on the wooden floor of my room.

“Hey,” a deep voice says gently.

I look up to see Gunther standing beside me.

“Gunther?” I wipe away my tears. “What are you doing here?”

“I need to talk to you about something,” he sits on the edge of my bed. “I saw you and Alistor kissing that first night.”

“Oh,” I say. “We, um-”

“It’s okay. I’m fine with it. Anyway, the thing I wanted to talk to you about is Maximillian. I don’t want you to marry him because, well, you like Alistor, and I, um,” he blushes.

“Oh!” I exclaim. “You’re in love with Maximillian!”

He nods, his long hair falling over his blushing cheeks. “I think he loves me back, but he’s too afraid to admit it, so he convinced himself he’s in love with you.”

“What an absolute badonkadonk!”

When Gunther laughs, it’s so contagious I can’t help joining in. We laugh until we can’t breathe, and then I start to cry, and he starts to cry, and we’re laughing and crying until everything turns dark.

I wake up to see that Gunther is gone, and Alistor has replaced him.

“Hey, sleepyhead,” she says softly.

I sit up slowly and put my arms around her.

“Hi, Ali,” I mumble groggily into her shoulder.



“Gunther told me everything.”

“What are we going to do?” I start sobbing.

“Hey, hey, it’ll be okay. We’ll work something out,” she pats my back. “But for now, it’s breakfast time,” she gets up and walks out of the room, closing the door behind her.

I enter the dining hall, where my parents and Maximillian are waiting to start breakfast. My mother gestures for me to sit next to Maximillian. I do so and reach for some sausages, but she stops me.

“You don’t want to look fat for your wedding, darling.”

“It doesn’t matter, because I’m not having a wedding,” I mutter.

“What was that, darling?”

I take a deep breath. “I don’t want to marry Maximillian.”

My mother looks shocked. “What, why?”

“Because... I’m in love with someone else.”

“Someone else?” Maximillian asks quietly. He sounds like he could burst into tears at any moment.

“Who?” my mother inquires.

I feel a hand rest on my shoulder.

“Me,” Alistor says.

My mother gasps and looks at my father for help. “Limean! Do something about this! It’s unacceptable!”

My father, who hasn’t said one word, stands up silently and clears his throat.

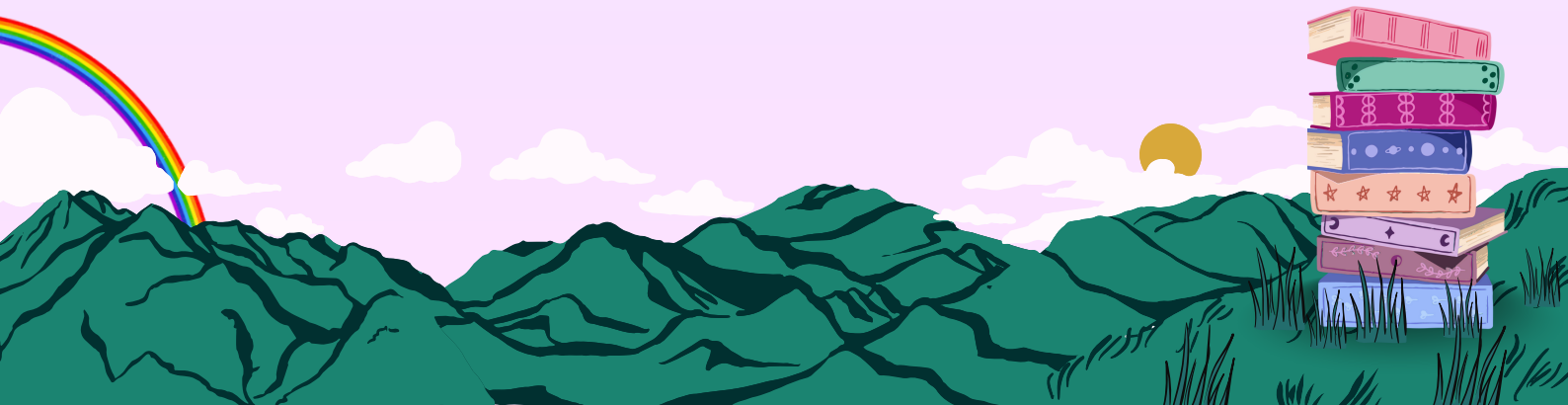
“Do you love her, Ceryn?”

I nod meekly.

“What is the problem then, Elinia?” he asks quietly. “Surely the queen should be happy that her daughter is in love?”

“My problem is who she’s in love with,” my mother says.

“What’s so wrong with Alistor?” I exclaim.



“Everything!” she yells. “You don’t know what she did to me! I got kicked out of my kingdom! I had all my rights stripped of me! She’s a monster!” I look at Alistor questioningly. Her face looks as confused as I feel.

“Her name was Sailenta Fielin. We were young and in love. She wanted to tell her parents about us, but I refused. I knew they’d tell my parents, and I would get disowned. One night she snuck into my room. ‘I told them,’ she said. I told her I never wanted to see her again, and the next day, my parents kicked me out. I was forced to go into the forest, where I walked for three days, with no food or water, until Limean found me half dead under a Ceryn Elm.” She smiles at my father, then focuses her gaze on Alistor. “As soon as I saw you, I knew you were Sailenta’s daughter.”

“My mother was a horrible woman,” Alistor responds bitterly. “I’d hate for you to think I’m anything like her.”

“I’m sorry,” my mother responds. “I shouldn’t let my past get in the way of your relationship. I just thought Prince Maximillian would have asked you before proposing.”

“Maximillian, I think you owe Ceryn an apology,” my father says. Maximilian turns to me.

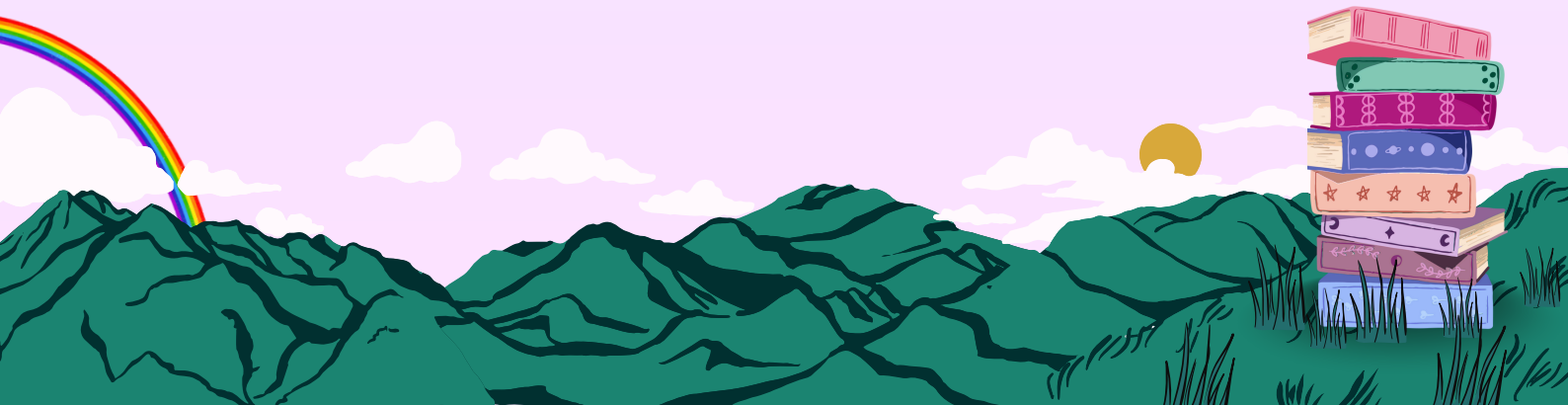
“Ceryn, I’m sorry. My father said if I didn’t marry someone within the next month, he would give the throne to my younger brother instead of me. So I rescued you with the hope that you would fall in love with me, and I would fall in love with you. But that didn’t happen to either of us because I’m still in love with Gunther,” He whispers the last line so quietly only I can hear it.

“Oh, Maximillian, why didn’t you say so?” exclaims Alistor. “I know the perfect person to be your prince!”

“My prince?”

“Gunther!” she declares.

Gunther, who is standing in the corner, turns instantly red.



“Gunther, will you marry me, and become Prince Gunther of Legionvillia?” Maximillian asks.

Gunther seems to be in a state of shock, but he still manages to nod.

Alistor and I cheer as Maximillian rushes over to hug Gunther.

“Ah, young love,” Alistor says, and I whack her.

The next morning Maximillian and Gunther leave for Legionvillia. After they are gone Alistor turns to me.

“How do you feel about watching the stars tonight?”

“Always,” I say and kiss her soft lips.

