

Chapter 3

“A graceful faint will do more to capture the heart of your prince than any other act.” Chapter one “Protocol for the Princess” from the Princess’ Handbook

“You see,” Princess Sabella beckoned imperiously with her somewhat grimy fingers. “Over here there is a way to get to Galgriffe’s chamber. We can’t go up but we could go through.”

Prince Julian and Princess Violet, both with decidedly unhappy faces, peered past Sabella at the dark narrow passage.

“It would be a tight squeeze for a large man.” Julian’s face became thoughtful as though calculations raced through his brain. “But for one of you or perhaps myself...”

“I already went through. Something to do when the dragon was away.” Sabella impatiently brushed away the dark red hair that kept falling into her face. “The passage leads right into Galgriffe’s lair where he keeps his treasure.”

“Ugh!” Violet shuddered. “I can see cobwebs too. I’m not walking through anything like that! No wonder your dress looks like you have been living in a peasant’s hovel.”

Sabella opened her mouth to make a sharp comment about princesses who acted like ninnies, but stopped and listened intently. "Something is going on with Galgriffe." She moved forward, "I can hear voices. One is definitely human."

"It's my prince." Princess Violet clasped her hands over her heart. "I just know he has finally come to rescue me." She began to rummage in a purple silk bag tied around her waist. "Where is that brush? I need to prepare. Ah." She drew out a small silver framed mirror and a silver handled brush. Sabella and Julian watched as she combed out her ringlets, arranging her royal circlet on top carefully. She wiped her perfect complexion with a small, embroidered handkerchief dampened with something from a miniature diamond cut bottle. She checked in the mirror to make sure she had erased any traces of dirt.

Sabella shook her head. "I think someone's coming this way."

Even Princess Violet stopped to listen to the sound of something hard scraping against the rock. As the noise grew louder so did the voice muttering, "Darn armor, should have worn my smaller suit. They never told us dragon's lairs could be so cramped. Ouch!" This last expletive exploded as the armored knight lumbered awkwardly from the tunnel, banging his head on a low hanging rock. Seeing he had an audience, he straightened and bowed, his sword thumping ungracefully against his scratched amour. He raised his visor, revealing a handsome young face with elegant cheekbones, straight nose and soulful dark eyes

"Fair princess-uh." His eyes darted from Violet to Sabella. "Fair princesses. So pleased to make your acquaintances." He looked quickly at

Julian and then away. "I have fought the dragon and come to rescue you-ah..." Again he stopped unsure of where to go. "Come to rescue one of you, since of course the handbook specifies the rescue of only one fair princess. Sorry. And yes-- I am Prince Lorenzo."

Princess Violet stepped forward. "Prince Lorenzo, I have eagerly awaited your rescue from this dreadful lair. Now that the dragon lies insensible you can take me away."

For some reason Prince Lorenzo looked uneasy.

"You didn't hurt him, did you?" Sabella cried.

"Of course he hurt him," Violet sniffed. "What else would you do with a dragon?"

"He wouldn't let me fight." Prince Lorenzo said.

"What?" Violet's beautiful porcelain skin flushed rose.

"He wouldn't let me fight," Prince Lorenzo enunciated each repeated word. "He just lay there with his treasure and told me to get on with it and rescue a princess. I tried to get him up but he just looked at me. There is no honor in killing an opponent who won't defend himself."

Julian's pale eyes lighted indignantly. "Then why did he try to stop me from coming in the lair?"

Prince Lorenzo finally looked at Julian. What he saw obviously did not raise Julian in his estimation. "You were able to fight the dragon yet you are still in here?"

“Well, I didn’t exactly fight him.” With Sabella’s eye on him, Julian squirmed and admitted, “He actually caught me.”

“Can we just get on with this?” Sabella stamped her foot. Ouch! Her big toe had just poked through the worn lining.

“Yes, my prince”, Violet cut in, flouncing her dark curls and fluttering her very dark eyelashes. “I am eager to be gone. This past day has seemed an eternity.”

“Ah princess,” Lorenzo gazed at her with soulful brown eyes. He seemed happy to pretend that he had not heard Sabella. “This life has been an eternity without you. Let us away.”

Violet looked triumphantly at Sabella who shrugged and muttered under her breath, “As if I’d want to go away with a prince like that. Let us away - blah!”

“Let us away!” Prince Lorenzo insisted, holding out his hand to Violet. She took it but shrunk back at the cramped passage.

“I simply can’t go through that way. I’ll get spiders in my hair. The thought of them makes me faint.” She threw a smooth white hand up against her brow.

“Uh oh, here she goes again,” Sabella said to Julian.

Sure enough, Violet collapsed in a graceful heap. Prince Lorenzo seemed unfazed. After all, his handbook had probably versed him in the expected behaviors of princesses. He gazed upwards at square of late morning sky, and then began to take his armor off. As he removed a piece, he tossed it effortlessly through the hole, where it landed with a soft thud in the grass. Soon Prince Lorenzo stood before them, clad in his sapphire blue tunic and leggings. He whistled and the sound of horse’s hooves answered him. A white steed’s head

leaned over the hole, giving a whinny. A rope dangled down into the cavern; it appeared to be tied around the middle of the steed.

“Ho Braveheart!” Lorenzo greeted the horse before he bent down to lift up Princess Violet.

“Where am I?” She fluttered open her eyes.

“Beautiful princess, you are with Prince Lorenzo and we are about to escape this evil dragon’s lair. Just hold on to me.”

Princess Violet did not appear to fear heights as she did spiders. She quickly put her arms around Lorenzo’s neck as he grasped the rope.

“Uh, wait,” Julian said. “Can’t you just leave the rope after you get up? Tie it to a tree or something.”

Prince Lorenzo looked down his nose. “My dear fellow, my duty is to rescue one princess. If you care at all for your duty to family, you would try harder to rescue this last princess without any help from me. Good day.”

Nimbly, he shinnied up the rope, helping Princess Violet unto the grass as they reached the top.

“There goes our chance of getting out,” Julian sighed as they listened to Brave heart’s hooves pound away.

“Didn’t you have a steed?” asked Sabella.

“A what?” Julian had placed Gertie on a damp spot in the dirt. Every time Sabella looked, the pale bulging frog’s eyes were fixed on her face.

“A horse, you ninny!”

“Oh, one of those. Well, yes. It sort of threw me when we came through the woods.”

Gertie stuck out her long pink tongue. “She just stuck her tongue out at me!” Sabella exclaimed.

Julian bent down over Gertie. The long tongue had flicked back inside her mouth. “Well, why shouldn’t she stick out her tongue? Maybe she thought she saw a fly.”

“She was looking at me.”

“Perhaps you have been in here too long.”

“Of course I’ve been in here too long!” Sabella yelled. “The prince who was supposed to rescue me is still here! The princess who came after me is gone! If the prince here was just willing to try to help me escape, that might help. But no, he’d rather just sit in this cave.”

Sabella plopped onto the hard floor and buried her head in her lap.

“Princess Sabella?” she felt the light touch of a hand on her shoulder and looked up into Prince Julian’s serious blue eyes. “I know I’m not much of a prince, but I’m willing to follow any plan to get us out of here. Just tell me what to do.”

“I should have fought that prince,” Galgriffe mumbled to himself, his tail curled around a nice hard crown, his body resting on a bed of jewels; he looked like an extension of his pile of gems. He had deliberately gone against handbook

protocol. Many times in his life, he had not followed the handbook on time, but eventually he followed it. Today he had let the prince by without a fight, so for the first time he had not followed protocol. He stirred uneasily, thinking about it too much made him uncomfortable. Maybe if he went for a flight, caught that livestock he was behind on, he'd feel better.