

Childhood Ends-- Adulthood Begins

"Miss Vanita, hold still! I'll be poking you with a pin if you don't!"

"This dress is scratchy! Hurry up and finish pinning it, Hilda!"

"We have two more dresses after your ball gown that need fitting so you're just going to have to get used to it, Miss."

"I only need one for the ball. I don't need a closet full of dresses."

"Yes, you do Miss Vanita. After your formal presentation at the ball, you will be considered a young lady and will be expected to wear dresses at all times."

"I'm not going to wear dresses all the time!" protested Vanita.

"A princess is always in the public eye and must present herself properly for the position she holds."

Gordon poked his head in the door and taunted his sister, "Father says that your betrothal will be announced at the ball."

"Where did you get that idea, Gordon?"

"Father says that he's going to marry you off to a rich nobleman."

"You're an obnoxious little prat, Gordon!"

Hilda told Gordon, "Scoot with you!" and then turned to Vanita. "Well then, Miss, stop your fidgeting and let's get on with the task at hand. If your brother Gordon is right, it sounds like you'll be needing a trousseau."

Although Vanita hated being fitted for dresses, she had been looking forward to the ball given in honor of her eighteenth birthday.

After Hilda finished pinning the dress, Vanita hurriedly put her everyday outfit back on and headed out the door storming directly down the hall to her father's study. Without even knocking, she charged in to confront her father.

"What's this I hear? Are you intending to marry me off before I've had a chance to even take on my role as princess? Am I not allowed a say in whom I might marry?"

"It's true that Lord Brunswick has expressed an interest in you, but I haven't consented to any betrothal. When you come of age, you will be expected to do whatever is best for the kingdom. If it's best for the kingdom that you marry, then that is what you shall do.

Now, run along, Vanita. I have work to do."

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Vanita abruptly turned around and ran out of the room. As she ran up the steps to her room, she couldn't hold back tears any longer. Her naïvely perfect ideas about becoming an adult were crashing down around her. She had thought that she would finally be able to have some control over her life; that she could make decisions for herself and have freedoms that she didn't have as a child.

Queen Aislin knocked on Vanita's door and entered without waiting for an invitation to enter. Vanita was sitting hugging her knees on the window seat that looked out over the well-tended gardens of the palace.

"Vanita, my darling child. What did you expect would happen when you come of age? Marriage will be only one of the many responsibilities that you will take on."

"I'm not ready for marriage, Mother!"

"Your father isn't going to push you into a marriage right away."

"No? Then why did he even entertain Lord Brunswick's proposal? Father didn't consult me at all." After a brief pause, Vanita asked, "You knew, Mother?"

"Yes, I knew that Lord Brunswick paid your father a visit."

"It seems that everyone else knew about it but me. Even Gordon heard about it." Vanita turned her face away from her mother and mumbled under her breath, "What else should I know that no one has bothered to tell me?"

Queen Aislin rose from where she was sitting next to Vanita and walked over to the door. She checked to make sure that the door was closed and turned back to Vanita.

This action seemed rather direful and quite mysterious to Vanita. What other secrets didn't she know? The queen came back and sat back next to Vanita again grabbing both of Vanita's hands and looked her in the eyes.

"At the age of eighteen, anyone of royal blood is blessed with a special ability that manifests magically at the hour that they were born. No one can predict what this magical gift will be before it surfaces. All that is known, is that it's a special ability that is given only to royalty."

Vanita yanked her hands out of her mother's and incredulously exclaimed, "What!" looking aghast.

"No, no, no, no, no!" denied Vanita. The words seemed to catch in her throat, and she stood up and backed away from her mother. "How is that possible?"

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The queen was silent, allowing this new revelation to sink into Vanita's consciousness.

"Do you have an ability?"

"No, Vanita. It only appears in people with royal blood and I married into royalty."

"So... Father has a special gift?"

"Yes. He's able to suffuse emotions in people whether it's to calm and soothe them or whether it's to imbue fear, respect, loyalty, or even to impart joy. His gift is very powerful for a king to have."

"Why haven't you told me about this before now so that I could be prepared, Mother?"

"What would you have done with this knowledge, Vanita? You can't make your gift appear or change what it is. It just happens. Sometimes, you may not even realize what your gift is at first. It's not always apparent."

"Does Uncle Thaddeus have a gift?"

"Yes, he's able to get people to compartmentalize their emotions from objective reasoning. He's been an invaluable asset to your father as an advisor and negotiator."

"Who all knows this secret, Mother?"

"Your father and Uncle Thaddeus, of course, and myself. Now you. You can see that it's a secret that must be kept and not shared with anyone except for the person you marry. This is another reason that you're not told at a younger age. This big of a secret and the power

that comes with it is sometimes too hard for a youngster to keep to themselves or camouflage their ability from would-be enemies."

"Even though the ball is this weekend, I actually turn eighteen tomorrow."

"Yes, you were born early in the morning. Tomorrow is your big day!"

Vanita had stayed awake until late last night mulling over what she had learned about herself and what the future would hold for her, so waking up late was no surprise.

Reena, Vanita's personal maid, came in to help Vanita get ready for the day when she heard Vanita stirring. "I'm glad you were able to sleep in this morning, Miss."

Vanita immediately sensed that Reena was not telling the truth.

"Would you like to wear your yellow outfit today? You always look so pretty in it."

A lie!

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“No, I’ll wear the blue.”

As soon as she was dressed, Vanita scampered down the stairs and looked for her mother. She ran into a maid in her haste and the maid said, “Pardon me, Miss. I wasn’t watching where I was going.”

Another lie!

Vanita found her mother in the sunny alcove that opened to the garden enjoying a cup of coffee. She grabbed ahold of her mother’s hand and pulled her out of the chair and into the garden.

“Mother, I know what my gift is. I can tell when someone is lying.” Vanita recounted what had happened with the maids.

Gordon interrupted and told the queen, “I’m going out to the stables to help with the horses, but I’ll be right back to start my studies.”

Vanita whispered to her mother, “He’s lying, Mother.”

“I could have told you that, Vanita. Gordon is always trying to skip out on his studies, and the maids were showing you deference and making polite conversation. Let’s see what else unfolds as the day progresses before we jump to conclusions. Your father is meeting with his council in a little while. I’ll tell him that you’ll be sitting in on the meeting to see if you detect anyone lying.”

At the council meeting, Vanita had a hard time focusing on what the council members were reporting, but then, Lord Brunswick reported a shortage of young men needed to fill the conscription quotas required by the king to protect the kingdom. Vanita jerked her head up and caught her father’s eye, and almost imperceptibly shook her head. Lord Brunswick was lying. The king did not call out Lord Brunswick at the meeting, but he did send a detail to accompany Lord Brunswick back to his estate to make a head count. Lord Brunswick would not be attending the ball.

“What a shame!” commented Vanita to her father.

“I guess he won’t be husband material!” grinned her father. “Besides, it looks like I’m going to be needing you to stay by my side as an aide to the king.”

“I won’t ever be free from court life, will I?” Vanita asked her father.

“You were in such a hurry to grow up. Welcome to adulthood, Vanita.”