

The Picnic Proposal

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A Deleted Scene from *The Princess and the Pea*

Stefan grunted under the load he carried.

“Alaric, is all this necessary for your proposal?”

Alaric peered at his brother over his armload of supplies.

“Yes. You’re the one who said you wanted to help.”

“As I keep reminding you, I thought helping you win a lady's heart would involve talking and fashion advice. Not academic research and hard labor.”

“It will be easier to carry if you stop talking. Look, we’re here.”

“You really have to propose to her on top of a mountain?”

“Yes.”

Alaric lowered his armful of supplies and breathed deeply. Mount Evangelina was his favorite place in all of Aeon. The smell of snowbells mixed with pine and sea took him straight back to his childhood.

Stefan dropped his armful and gasped for breath.

“She’d better appreciate this.”

“You don’t think she will?”

The seriousness in his tone caught Stefan off guard. He smiled at his brother.

“I’m sure she’ll love it. It's a gorgeous spot.”

“You don’t really think that.”

“No. I think it is wild and uncivilized. And these purple flowers smell like perfume. Annoying perfume.”

“That’s the point. I used to come here all the time.”

“Is this where you disappeared to whenever Cassandra was in one of her moods?”

“If by moods you mean blasting everything in her path with dark magic, then yes.”

“Clever. I always hid in the tower. So, we spread the blankets here?”

“We’ll set up some of them here. There’s a mossy spot up ahead with a perfect view of the city. That’s where I want to ask her.”

“Sunset proposal with a view of the city. What girl could refuse?”

Alaric picked up one of the blankets and shoved it at Stefan.

“Here. You can carry the lightest thing. I’ll get the candlesticks.”

Alaric gathered an armful of candles and led Stefan further up the mountain. He knew the spot well. His heart swelled as he passed familiar landmarks. He had found the emerald here. It was only right that he give it to his bride in the same place.

He would tell Carina everything. His past. His desire to protect the kingdom. He would be himself. He had seen glimpses of a real person behind the boring facade. Maybe she was just shy. Maybe-

Alaric stopped. Stefan ran into him.

“This is the spot?” Stefan asked. “It’s, um-”

Rage burned in Alaric’s chest. Who had done this? Who would destroy such a beautiful spot?

The moss had been dug up. Bits of white rock where scattered all around the muddy mess. It looked like someone had fought a battle there. A large rock that had been covered with moss was now covered with deep gashes.

Stefan set down the blanket and studied the rock.

“Sword practice?” he asked. “Please tell me you were the one who hacked this rock.”

“No. That was buried under moss.”

Alaric picked up a piece of the white rock.

“Stefan, this is marble. I think it was a statue.”

“Great. You can tell your grandkids how you proposed surrounded by shards of marble. So romantic.”

“Obviously I can’t use this spot now. Someone’s ruined it.”

“You think they were digging for something?”

“For what? We’re on top of a mountain. There’s nothing here.”

“There was a statue. You don’t think they found Evangelina’s Temple?”

Alaric looked at Stefan. He was serious.

“Evangelina isn’t real.”

“Really?” Stefan said. “You’re going to pretend you don’t believe in her now? After we just found her temple? I bet this rock is the door. We can pry it open. You go in and kiss her awake. Wife problem solved.”

“Stefan, that’s ridiculous.”

Stefan pulled at the rock.

“Yeah, maybe not. This rock isn’t going anywhere.”

“Let’s get back to camp. I’ll have to find another place for the proposal.”

They picked up the picnic supplies and walked back down the mountain.

Alaric’s heart felt heavy. Who would destroy that place? And why? He had found an emerald there. Maybe there were more gems? Maybe someone had been digging for artifacts?

“I bet it was goats,” Stefan said.

“Goats?”

“Sure. They’ll eat anything. They probably dug up the moss with their little goat feet.”

“Goats don’t eat marble. Let’s set up the proposal spot here.”

Alaric gestured to a flat spot in a field of snowballs. Stefan spread the blanket over the flowers.

“You should have brought chairs,” he said.

“It is supposed to be rustic.”

“Ok, Sir Romance.”

Alaric set a candlestick on each corner of the blanket to hold it down. He tucked a flint under the corner of the blanket so he'd have a way to light the candles. He stepped back and frowned.

It had looked a lot better in his head. He had pictured a romantic picnic. A nice, relaxed place to finally end the princess test.

In reality, it just looked like a blanket with four candlesticks on it. The candles didn't even match.

“It's nice,” Stefan said.

“No it isn't. It looks stupid.”

“The blanket? Maybe. But you're right. The view is great. I'm even getting used to the smell of the flowers.”

“I'm not proposing to you.”

“A princess will love the flowers even more. They buy perfume that smells like flowers all the time. They must like them.”

“Thank you for that insight.”

Stefan grinned.

“Any time. See, that's what I thought I'd be doing when I agreed to help. Come on. Let's go set up the spot for the loser princesses.”

“Stefan-”

“What? That's what it is. They'll be sitting with Marta and me stewing while you're up here proposing to their rival.”

Alaric breathed the scent of the snowbells and studied the field of flowers. Stefan was right. A princess would like them. Carina would like them. They were beautiful flowers.

He glanced at the sun. It hung low on the horizon. They needed to hurry. The princesses would arrive at any moment.