

*Deleted chapter from Archmagician Dieter Dreyfuss's perspective.*

*In the final draft of Royal Outlaw it would be placed between Chapters 18 and 19.*

*It describes how Dreyfuss discovered Mariel, Cara, and Hallie were in prison.*

A hulking man with a nicely kept blonde beard and a smaller man in his earlier thirties, both wearing the green and silver uniforms that marked them as royal guardsmen, walked into the lavish office with their shoulders thrown back, but the looks on their faces were of dejection.

“You didn’t find her?” Dieter asked, not turning from the massive window that normally provided spectacular views of the city, but currently only showed sheets of rain.

“No, Archmagician,” the smaller man replied. “We didn’t find the other girls either.”

That was not good news. Princess Mariel and two of her lady’s maids had been found missing hours ago. It was the large guard who had cried the alarm—Tristan was his name, which Dieter only remembered because he had been one of the princess’s spies.

Dieter had been rudely torn from his wonderfully soft bed in the early morning, only to be informed that the princess had gone missing. Tristan had reported that the princess always tried to escape through the door he guarded every morning before dawn. When she failed to show up, the guardsman knew that something was wrong and had entered the royal suite only to discover that the young woman he was supposed to be protecting had vanished. The facts were somewhat unclear after that, although Dieter thought that might be because he had tuned out the rest after hearing that Princess Mariel was gone.

The news got worse too. When the princess’s guards went to rouse her lady’s maids to interrogate them, they discovered that two of the young noblewomen were also missing. After a brief investigation it was determined that Lady Hallie and Lady Cara had left the suite in the

evening the night before. They had not returned by the time the shift of guards changed; however, that was not unusual. What was unusual was that they had failed to return at all.

Now he had three young noblewomen missing, who had evidently been gone since the previous night. As of yet, no one had come up with a logical way that the princess had escaped, but what concerned him more was where she had gone.

Not only did Dieter want to avoid a scene, but he also wanted to keep people from learning that the princess was wandering about unprotected, not when there was an unidentified magician trying to kill her. Because of this, only the men assigned to guard her were now scouring the Citadel for her.

Dieter continued to stare at the downpour. “Guardsmen Tristan, you were acquainted with the princess before our good king named her as his heir. Who did she know here at the Citadel? Where might she have gone?”

“Archmagician, the princess was very secretive. I didn’t know who she worked for, let alone who her other contacts were. When she wanted information, she found me, and it wasn’t as though I could ask around. She was Mariel *Quickwit*. She was wanted.”

Dieter silently cursed the competence of the young master outlaw. It did not help that the City of the Gods was the city she terrorized the most and was the most familiar with. He hoped she had not left the Citadel, but his instinct and logic told him that she had.

“Permission to speak, Archmagician,” the smaller man asked, although Dieter could not remember his name.

“Permission granted.”

“I think I know how she escaped the suite.”

Dieter spun to face the man and waited for him to continue.

“As you know, I am a member of the Versati Corps.” Dieter had actually forgotten that. “We go through an intensive training to become versatile, so that we can perform nearly any task that needs doing, including spying, which is why Darren Brightsword was so efficient as leader of the Resistance.”

“I do not need the reminder, Guardsman.”

“Sorry, Archmagician. My point is that Princess Mariel learned from her father who was one of the best members of the Versati Corps. We’ve been thinking that she somehow left through the doors, but I think left through a window.”

“A window?” Dieter asked dubiously. “Perhaps you fail to remember that the royal suites are located on the fifth floor?”

“No, Archmagician, I haven’t forgotten. But in the Versati Corps we learn to scale walls, although, I was never very good at it.”

Dieter tried not to stare at the man with incredulity. “So, you believe that the princess crawled out of a window on the fifth floor and climbed the *wall* all the way to the ground. She has an injured arm.”

The man shook his head, but did not appear to be embarrassed by his theory. “Her arm is healing. And I don’t think she climbed *down*, I think she climbed *up*.”

The man had his attention. “Explain.”

“The evening guards report that Lady Hallie and Lady Cara left the suite around seven and they were both wearing cloaks. The men didn’t think it was odd because it’s October and they said they were going for a walk. But I think it was planned. I think that the young ladies went to a rendezvous point that the princess had named. I think the princess used her balcony to exit the

room and climbed up to the window of the room above. The rooms above hers are unoccupied, Archmagician.”

Dieter could not help but be impressed, although he was careful to keep his expression neutral as he returned to staring out the window. He had had no idea what he was getting into when he finally found Princess Mariel. Of course, he had known she would be difficult and would prove unbreakable no matter how hard the king tried, but he had not been expecting this reckless behavior. It seemed to him that the girl had a blatant disregard for her own life, making his job frustratingly difficult.

Mariel fought against him at every turn. He should have known that if she could repeatedly escape prison cells, his order to stay in a well-guarded suite would have little effect on her. It did not help that someone powerful was determined to kill her either, for unknown reasons. Why could she not understand that she could not continue to risk her life like this?

“Permission to speak, Archmagician?”

“Granted, Guardsman Tristan.”

“Meaning no offense, but I think I understand the princess a little better than you—although gods know I don’t know half the stuff that goes through her head. Anyway, the thing I do know about Mariel is she prizes freedom. And to be honest, Archmagician, you haven’t given her any.”

Dieter wanted to use a spell to immobilize the huge man for his insolence and presumptuous attitude toward him, but he wanted to hear what Princess Mariel’s ex-contact had to say about her. Any bit of information regarding her and how to manage her without stressing himself to death was helpful.

“Maybe if you gave her a little more freedom she would be happier. She would have to go around with guards all the time, but don’t the king and queen do that too?”

The man had a sound argument, as much as it irked Dieter to admit it, but once again, his point was as useless as the Versati Corps soldier: it was not going to help them find the missing princess and her two lady's maids.

“Do either of you believe she is in the Citadel?”

“No.”

“Not a chance.”

Dieter's hand twitched.

“If she left with her lady's maids, do you think she would have returned before now?”

There was a pause and Dieter wondered if the two guardsmen exchanged glances. He repeated the question, this time the dark tone of his voice told them they needed to answer.

“We think they went into the city . . . and something went wrong.”

But what in Throvim's Realm had gone wrong? Was she dead? There was one way to find out.

Dieter reached toward the chair behind his desk and threw the cloak oiled to repel water over his shoulders. He walked out of the room with purposeful strides, leaving the incompetent guardsmen behind. The halls bustled with people, all unaware that their future monarch was missing. No one but him seemed to understand that the welfare of this kingdom depended on Princess Mariel—least of all her.

He marched a direct path to the door that opened near the fields where some of the horses were kept. The rain poured down from the heavens. He once again asked Valmir if the inclement weather was a sign that his work finding and keeping the princess alive were all for naught.

When Dieter reached the fenced field he searched the horses, looking for the creature that did not blend in. She was not easy to find in the mud and rain, but after mentally calling a spell, he

located her huddled beneath a clump of trees with several horses. The silver-eyed glare she directed at him made Dieter wonder if he had made the right choice, but Princess Mariel was missing and he needed to know if she was dead or not.

A vision flashed in his mind of him walking across the large field to the waiting creature. Annoying animal. He should have known a unicorn—especially this unicorn—would refuse to come when called. She was as obstinate as the human friend she permitted to ride her.

Anger mounting, and feeling like an idiot, Dieter sidled through the fence and began to trudge through the mud to the other side of the field. He did not like the idea of having nothing between him and this creature but air—a unicorn’s bite was known to be extremely painful.

Iyela watched every step the powerful magician took toward her, but made no movement to approach him. He stopped almost ten feet from her, hoping that if she chose to charge him he could gather a spell fast enough to protect himself.

“Is Princess Mariel alive?” He shouted through the falling rain, feeling like a fool. He hoped no one watched.

An image appeared of the princess smiling broadly with a wicked gleam in her impossibly dark green eyes. The vision changed to the girl lying on the sodden ground, with rain pelting her lifeless body.

“What does that mean?” Dieter demanded angrily.

The unicorn snorted and pawed the ground. She showed him the vision again.

The message was no clearer to him the second time. “Are you telling me she is dead?”

Iyela tossed her head, and showed him the image of Princess Mariel laughing and very much alive.

“She is alive?”

The creature nodded. But the flash of the picture of the princess lying dead entered his mind again.

Dieter struggled to puzzle through this. “She is alive, but she is in danger and may die?”

Iyela nodded again.

“Where is she?”

To his frustration, the same two images of the princess alive and then dead appeared in his vision. He tried to focus on the scenery around the body, but the rain drowned out everything. It could be anywhere.

“Tell me where she is you stupid creature!”

Iyela charged. Dieter used a spell to fling up a wave of mud, but his magic was overridden by the unicorn. He dove into the mix of horses who shifted nervously and hoped no panicked horse would crush him. The unicorn stomped and pawed the ground on the other side of the bodies of horses. She was going to charge again.

Dieter gathered magic from the surrounding earth and wound it around the unicorn’s legs. He tightened the magic knots and the creature fell. Without waiting another moment, he started running as fast as his legs could carry him. He had almost reached what he hoped would be the safety of the fence when he heard the unicorn behind him.

Ducking between the wooden rails, his robe caught on a loose nail a ripped. He lost his balance and fell into the mud. To Dieter’s relief, the unicorn remained on the opposite side of the fence. She reared, sending him a clear message. When she returned to all four hooves she turned and slowly walked off toward the horses and clump of trees, her long tail swishing behind her.

The archmagician cursed and clamored to his feet, soaked and muddy. He inspected his robe to discover a tear in the fabric near his calf.

“Archmagician! Archmagician!”

Dieter looked up to see a man wearing the black and green uniform of the Provost’s Guard running toward him through the rain.

The man stopped before him and bowed low, but did not bother asking for permission to speak.

“Thank the gods! I been askin’ ta see ya all mornin’ and no one let me.”

This man was a lowly soldier. Dieter did not need to tolerate his presence.

“Leave, Guardsman. You have no business being here.”

“But I ‘ave ‘portant ‘nformation!”

The manner in which this man spoke was appalling. He was middle-aged, but wore no insignia of an officer. If the man was still a simple soldier after all these years then he was an idiot.

“Protocol dictates that if you have information you should present it to your watch commander and if it is important enough he will tell the Deputy Provost. If I need to know, then Sir Mathias will inform me personally.”

“But the Deputy be the one who gonna hang her!”

“Don’t be foolish!” Dieter barked. He had more important things to do than listen to this stupid man. He needed to find the princess before she managed to get herself killed. “Deputy Provost Sir Mathias has my respect and I believe that he will act in an appropriate way. If a woman is to die, then she deserves . . .”

Dieter stopped talking. He stopped because the guardsman’s words began to sink in. He turned on the man. “*Who* is Sir Mathias going to execute?”

“Mariel Quickwit!”

“Are you sure. What did she look like?”

“She be very purty. Her hair be brown and curly and she ‘ad a nice figure. She ‘ad eyes like emeralds, jus’ like the li’l girl who tried to tell me she was the princess long ago.”

“You have seen this girl before then?”

“More’n eleven years ago, I ain’t niver forgot her eyes.”

“Was she alone?”

“No, sir. Two girls in purty dresses be with ‘er. The fat one told ‘em that Quickwit was the princess, but no ‘un but me believed.”

Dieter could barely believe his luck. He sent a silent prayer of thanks up to Valmir. Relief at knowing where the missing noblewomen were did not last long when anger quickly replaced it. The fool princess had managed to get her and her lady’s maids arrested. Princess Mariel had been sitting in a jail cell probably laughing at the mess and headache she had caused him, while he searched the Citadel frantically for her and got chased by a crazed unicorn. He was going to wring her pretty little neck when he found her.

He began walking toward the Citadel again. The Deputy Provost’s report that he had caught the infamous Quickwit was probably sitting on his desk this very moment.

“When does Sir Mathias plan to execute her?”

“At noon!”

Dieter stopped cold in his tracks. “*Today?*”

The guardsman must have said something in response, but Dieter’s mind was too busy to listen. What was the last hour that the bell had wrung? He had heard eleven peals, but how long ago was that? It was difficult to judge how much time had elapsed, and the clouds obscured the sun.

Forgetting any sense of decorum, Dieter started running toward the carriage house. He needed to get to the prison.