

FAIR LADY

BY: MAYRA DURAN

GENOVIVIA, before my life turned upside down

“Follow your heart... it will tell what you should do.” my mother spoke to me softly. “You will choose the best suitor if you listen to your heart. The kingdom will stand by you and bless your marriage, no matter what your choice is.”

I nodded and my mother left the room. I turned back around to the window and sighed. “I don't know how much I'll have to wait till my true love arrives.”

I watched my servants milling around outside, preparing for today's festivities. The stable hands were exercising the horses that were going to be in the tournament later. I watched as the maids rushed outside with buckets, and mops, and started to wash the courtyard. I saw when the cook approached my mother with a plate of food.

To my immense horror, I became witness to the murder of my mother. I did not see what hit her until I saw my mother falling to the ground with blood spilling from a wound in her chest. I was still watching when the maids ran towards my mother.

What I did not see was the stable hands creeping up towards my room. I did not watch as they reached the castle guards and receive weapons from them. I only realized the mutiny when they broke down my door and my father fell in gagged and blindfolded.

I did the only reasonable thing that I could think of: I jumped out of the window. I heard the shouts of the men when they thought I had committed suicide. Luckily, for me I knew that the laundry maids liked me despite my snotty behavior. They always helped me escape by placing a bin filled with sheets that always remain “dirty.” I gave a simple prayer of thanks for the hardworking servants that give so much.

Someday when bloodthirsty mutinous men were not hunting me down, I am going to give them at least a simple gift of thanks.



PART ONE: CURSED

“Pull that wreath of flowers. Not that wreath; the other, pull the other.” I opened my eyes and smiled. No one could quite get the voice of exasperated matron quite like my godmother. “The red not the green! Honestly, if you want something to be done right, you have to do it yourself.”

I got up from my bed and peeked from around the corner of the door. Sure enough, my godmother was fixing garlands around the hallway. She caught sight of my head and smiled.

“Celi hurry and dress. My hand maidens can’t understand me like my goddaughter.” I smiled in response and ducked back into my room to get dressed. I walked over to the bureau and pulled out a cotton gown. I sighed as I remembered the feel of silk on my skin back when I was still *the* Princess Cecilia. But the past is the past and I have to move forward in my life.

I stopped in front of the full-length mirror on the back of my door and looked at myself. Emerald green eyes, cream colored skin, fiery red hair, simple white cotton gown with blue embroidery and ankle boots; only the eyes, skin, and hair resembled the famous Princess Cecilia. I sighed again and opened the door.

Every day that passed got closer to THE day: my wedding. I smiled remembering the shock when I went downstairs for breakfast and Charles was sitting at the table.

He had asked me for my response as soon as we were alone. Of course, I had said yes. By marrying Charles, I would have Princess Status again and I would make life living hell for those... but that was for later.

“Celi.... What are you thinking?” my godmother came up and hugged me. “You can’t keep dwelling on the path... your kingdom-”

I shrugged off her words. “Don’t worry Goodie. I no longer have bad dreams.” I smiled and hugged her tightly. “I’ve moved on from that particular time of my life.”

“Well... If you’re sure... Oh!” she clapped her hands. “You’ll like this news.”

“What news, Goodie?”

“Charles came early and said the dressmaker would be here today. He’ll bring the selection of fabrics to choose from.” I smiled. “He said to expect him around 3 o’clock. Remember you must-”

“Dress like an ordinary, almost, eighteen year old that is going to get married in a month. And I must never speak of my real identity.” I smiled.

“Well, I try to protect you from harm.”

“I know Goodie. However, some things are set now. Ever since that... time I have learnt to dress simple.”

She smiled sadly and placed a hand on my cheek. “I know my girl. I know.” Goodie sighed and turned around. “Come downstairs. I could not wait until you awoke so I have eaten but I shall like to think Cook still has warm porridge.”

I followed her down the magnificent oak staircase. Goodie’s house was not the same thing as my castle but it was luxurious enough for any person. “Goodie?”

“Hmm?”

“Will you stay with me, Charles, and the dressmaker?”

She stopped and looked up at me. “Do you want me there?”

“Yes.” I said without hesitation. “I want you to be there as if you were-” I broke off. Goodie was a great caretaker but she was not my sweet mother. That was precisely what I was going to say. I wanted her to be there as *if she were my mother*.

“I understand...” Goodie Goldrich was my mother’s best friend and understood completely the loss I felt with her death. “No one can be your mother and even though I try to give you that motherly love... I know I can never replace her.”

I smiled. “That is why you are my godmother. You can understand me.”

“I remember how it was to be young and alone in the world,” she laughed. “This Goodie might be old but still remembers her youth.”

I laughed with her and we continued our descent. As soon as Goodie set foot on the first floor, three servants quickly flocked to her.

“Lady Goldrich-” the doorkeeper started.

“Ma’am-” my personal maid interrupted the attendant.

“Goodie I need for you to say what colors you want for the decorations. Your vague allusions to colors were not helpful.” Goodie’s maid spoke with familiarity to my godmother. It was obvious that she had been in service to her for a significant amount of time.

Goodie spoke first to her maid. “I told you already. What other colors are symbols of yuletide? Only red and green. Oh and please tell Cook I want her to cook a meal from her native land.” she turned to the doorkeeper. “Yes, Robert?”

“His Royal Highness came by ten minutes ago and said that he wanted to speak with Princess Cecilia. I was not aware she was awake and told him she was still asleep. He gave me this message for you.” he handed a folded paper. I opened it up and read Charles’s scrawl.

My love, I stopped by to tell Lady Goldrich I am to bring the tailor and fashion your dress. We must choose fabrics and designs and it shall be better if you chose the style and fabrics for your own gown. I shall stop by at three o’clock. Loving you always, Charles.

I smiled and folded the paper.

Goodie was talking to my maid when suddenly there was noise outside. I instinctively fled to the top of the stairs. As I looked on from the top of the stairs, I watched a pair of men wrestle their way through the door despite Robert’s be efforts.

They stopped in front of Goodie and bowed. “Lady Goldrich, we ask of your leave to search your house for a fugitive,” said a man with an olive green beret.

“You have already forced your way into my house.” Goodie spoke with the confidence of aristocracy. “How are I sure if I do not give you leave to search, you shall not trespass anyway?”

“You are not giving us permission then, Lady Goldrich?” another man stepped forward. He wore the uniform of a high-ranking official. “We are looking for an outlaw. She is highly dangerous and may try to harm our leader.”

“May I ask what woman is dangerous enough that your leader sends out armed forces to find her? Is she so dangerous that he finds the need to search in lands that are not his?”

“Lady Goldrich our ruler respects you very much on behalf of the memory of Lord Goldrich, may he rest in peace. However, he is also aware that you were, and still are, the godmother of the former Princess.”

“The Princess Cecilia is my godchild. The Royal Majesties asked my husband and me to be godparents when their only child was born. What of it?” She jutted her chin out in a familiar posture of stubbornness as she spoke.

“Cecilia is no longer the princess and her parents are not the reigning monarchs. We have a new leader, Lady Goldrich; the monarch epoch has ended. We have further evidence the former Princess are now planning a rebellion on our leader. If you are harboring her, it shall be best for you to let us search this home. If we find her, you may only risk a fine. If she gets caught when we are watching, you shall go to prison and lose ownership of all the land.”

“I am not harboring an outlaw. Never in my right mind would I give room to a wrongdoer. My husband worked long and hard to help Their Majesties keep justice and equality in their reign. He would never allow me keep some vagabond in this house.”

“We are aware that...you may think the former Princess is no danger. She is very dangerous and might even be armed.” beret man spoke up.

“Why is there a sudden hunt for the Princess? This is the second Yuletide that has passed and not an unwelcome visit until today.”

“Rumors of a rebellion have circulated. It is said she is the one behind it all.”

“Your leader suspects her simply because she was the only one who survived the overthrow of the reigning monarchs. Princess Cecilia would have never hurt a fly. I know her personally; you have not seen her in your life.”

The high-ranking official said, “Lady Goldrich with all due respect please either give us leave to search the house or say that you are not allowing us.”

“Search all you want.”

I scrambled down the long hallway and ran into my bedroom. I picked up my half-done embroidery and sat down in a rocking chair, seemingly there the whole time.

When the searchers burst into my bedroom, I had almost finished my embroidery. I stood up and stepped towards the door but standing at a respectful distance from the men.

“Yes, how may I help you?”

They looked at each other. The official said. “Miss...”

“Ingrid. Ingrid Goldrich. I am niece to Lady Goldrich.” I lied smoothly stretching my hand.

“It is a pleasure to meet you Miss Ingrid. I am Lieutenant General Richard Swanson. I am part of a hunt for the former Princess.” the Lieutenant kissed my hand. Richard Swanson? That name sounded recognizable...

“This involves me how?” In some way, the lieutenant seemed familiar but...

“We need to search your room for clues that might involve the former princess.”

“Why would I be involved with the princess? I do not know who she is.”

“The former Princess Esmeralda Maria Elizabeth Joana Cecilia Zilarra, daughter to Janet Montgomery and Peter Alexander Gerald Emmanuel

Zilarra, is the only one who survives the royal lineage. She fled the castle after the overthrow and, we believe, that she is delivering threats to our leader.”

“Why should my Aunt be harboring an old princess?”

“Lady Goldrich is the godmother to the former princess. Cecilia may have come to her house.”

“I have not seen any woman in this house apart from Goodie and her servants.”

“Either way we have to search. It is part of regulation.”

I shrugged. “If must you search, you may.”

They started to search through the drawers of the bureau. When they finished with my bedroom, they moved on to my sitting room. Finally, they felt content with the thoroughness of their search and returned to my room.

“Miss Ingrid we have found nothing. We shall leave now.”

“Prin-” my maid walked in and made my blood run cold.

“Yes Delilah?”

“Prince Charles is waiting for you downstairs.”

For once Delilah thought fast. “I shall be right down.”

“Prince Charles? He was one of Cecilia’s close friends and suitor.” The lieutenant asked looking at me suspiciously.

I frowned and said a bit huffily, “He is my betrothed.”

“Your betrothed? There has been no news about his engagement.”

I shrugged. “We do not want any drawn to my home. The Prince rarely goes out of his lands and he is easier to harm when he comes here.”

“Hmm, we are sorry for the trouble we have given you.” the lieutenant looked at the other guy and shrugged. They left and I exhaled relieved. My maid walked in slowly.

“Delilah?”

“Yes milady...”

“Do you not know the men were here?”

“No milady. I thought they had left. So I came to tell to Your Highness that Prince Charles has arrived and that he is downstairs.”

“Oh dear me, I had forgotten completely about him.” I got up and ran out the door. Taking the stairs two at a time, I went down to the first floor to see Charles. “Charles!”

He turned around and I realized that the lieutenant was talking to him. “Ingrid.” he winked at me.

I smiled. “Are you busy?”

“I believe so.” he gestured towards the men and made a face. “Wait for me in the parlor, I shall be there soon.”

I ignored the others and kissed him on the cheek. Then I went into the parlor where my godmother was sitting. “Greetings Aunt.”

“Ingrid.” she smiled. “Charles has arrived early. It is only two thirty.”

“Yes, he likes to be punctual and slightly early if he can.” I sat down next to Goodie and picked up a book. I wrinkled my nose when I saw it written in Old High Nurmish. It reminded me when my father had tried to broaden my horizons with a foreign language. He had paid a tutor to give me lessons every day. I smiled thinking of how angry he was when he’d found out I had been obsessed with the tutor. I sighed, wistful for old times when everything was simple.

Suddenly two hands covered my eyes, I reached up to try to figure out who it was and felt the ring I had given Charles back when I was still the princess. “Charles?”

“My princess.” he kissed me on my cheek and let go of my eyes. I turned around and stood up. I hugged him and stood that way for a while.

I pulled back. “We shall see the tailor to choose fabrics and the dress design.” he made a face. “What is wrong?”

“It is nothing. It’s just...” he touched my forehead with his. “I forgot to bring my royal dresser. Since you do not have one anymore I was going to bring him to help with the dress.”

I smiled. “You do not want your bride to wear a gaudy gown?”

“Well...”

I laughed at his expression. “It shall be fine, I always make excellent choices.”

He leaned in. “Have you noticed?” he whispered in my ear.

“What?”

“We are alone.” I looked around him and saw that my godmother was not in the room any more. I meet his eyes. “And we are awfully close...”

“You should fix that.” I said with a smile before he leaned down and lowered his lips to mine. I placed my arms around his neck and melted in his arms. He hugged me closer to him and deepened our kiss. “That was neither princely nor noble.” I accused him when we broke free, placing a finger on the tip of his nose.

He shrugged. “Was that an accusation?” I laughed.

“We should go to the tailor.” I started towards the door when he grabbed my hand.

“Wait.”

I turned around expectantly. “Yes?”

He looked down uncomfortable. “Your false name is Ingrid, yes?”

“Yes. Why do you ask?”

“The Lieutenant General asked me if I had an intended. I answered that I did. They also inquired whether you were my bride.”

“What do you say?”

“I answered yes but they kept asking questions about Princess Cecilia.”

“What kind of questions did they ask you? What do you answer to them?”

“They asked me if the princess was as extremely beautiful as your legend says.” he smiled. “I said the princess was more so beautiful than they could imagine.”

I laughed. “Well they saw beautiful.”

“They saw you?”

“Yes, they did.”

“Well then that’s why they asked me exactly how she looks and I told them.” he paused. “Then they inquired if the princess looked more or less like you...”

“You answered how...?” I felt my heart beat faster at the thought of the façade ending.

“The only difference between you and the princess was the prideful scorn for commoners.”

“Why thank you. They do think now the Princess as an excessively arrogant woman.”

“Why do you think that?”

“I was full with superiority while they searched the room.”

“You cannot change the way you are.” Charles said smiling.

“Either way, it is good they never saw me as Princess.”

“The lieutenant general was a tutor. I do not think he would-”

“What do you say?” at the mention of tutor, my blood ran cold. “He was a tutor?”

“Yes he taught ancient languages. You strongly dislike learning to begin with so...”

“My father forced me to learn Old High Nurmish with a tutor when I was four and ten years. He said it would make me seem refined.” I said in a wooden voice.

“I do not think the tutor you had in the past is the same who is now a lieutenant general.”

“Who else in the wretched government they now have would know who I am?”

“Well...”

“The lieutenant general’s name is Richard Swanson?”

“Yes.”

I thought back to the lessons. I closed my eyes. “He was wearing a hat, was he not?”

“Who was wearing a hat?”

“The lieutenant.”

“Yes. Why?”

“My former tutor had curly brown hair with a bit of yellow. Green eyes the color of spring grass with flecks of gold. If I had paid more attention to the Lieutenant...”

“Be at ease love; he cannot possibly remember you. He was a good teacher. He must have taught a number of people before and after you.”

“Yes but I was mad about him. I can guarantee he will remember my face.”

“You are changed since you were four-and-ten.”

“How do so?”

“When you were four-and-ten, your mother dressed you in simple gowns and left your hair down. Now your elegant gowns and hair styles are very much the contrast.”

“Thank you Charles,” I said smiling “however my face is the same. He will know that I am the princess and come back for me.”

“No he will not. I promise.” Charles reached out to me and pulled me into a hug. “I promise they will not take you away from me. Ever.” he spoke again my hair.

“How will you manage that?” I said leaning into his chest.

“If we are married they cannot enter my country. If they tried to hurt you while being my wife, they are dead.” he said.

“But I am not your wife. I am just your bride-to-be and I shall be that for a month.”

“You are right but if you could be my wife sooner...”

“Are you trying to change the date?” I said raising my eyebrows.

“Will you change the date?”

“Why should I?”

“Because I love you and want to be with you for life. The sooner the better.” he kissed me softly. “The more of my life I spend with you the happier I shall be.

“I’m unsure Charles. Although I am seven-and-ten, I feel time are passing too quickly. Only a year has passed since my parents’ deaths. Is it too soon to wed?”

“I think your parents would be overjoyed to have you married after years of pleading to choose a suitor.” he said sarcastically.

I laughed. “That’s true... but still.” I sighed. “I think it is too soon in a month but... I cannot wait any longer. I want to be with you as well.”

“So why can we not wed sooner?”

I frowned. “Why do you want to get married soon? You were delighted when we were to wed in a moon’s time.”

“You do not understand!” he said frustrated.

“Why do you say that?” I said confused.

“I love you...” he paused and lowered his voice. “I love you Esmeralda Maria Elizabeth Joana Cecilia Zilarra. I always want to be with you. However, I cannot travel from my palace to here for another month. The distance is too great! Sometimes during nighttime I want to see you and I cannot visit because it is dark and too dangerous for me.”

“It is too dangerous for you?”

“My parents are becoming strict on my visits. After Genovia they cannot afford trust.” he closed his eyes and walked over to the window. I stared at him for a second and went to him. I wrapped my arms around his waist and kissed him.

“If you really want to change the date... then change it we will. I am willing to get wed soon.” He turned to me with hope in his eyes. “Place a date.”

“Two weeks from now.” he took me by surprise; I thought he would say three weeks minimum... but two?

“Two weeks?” I chewed my lip. Was I ready to tie my life to another person in two weeks?

“You told to me to place the date...the sooner the better.” he placed a finger under my chin and pulled my face up. “Unless you do not want to marry me?”

“I do. I just cannot conceive it...” I pursed my lips. “How will I wed in two weeks?”

“Two weeks.” he kneeled. “Please.”

“Charles...”

“Please... I want all to know that you are my one and only true love. I want to be the proud husband to the most beautiful woman in the world.” he grabbed my hands and kissed them. “My princess... say you shall marry me in two weeks and be a Princess again.”

“Charlie... it is hard to be wed in two weeks. I am getting used to the common life but to return to royalty...it shall be strange.”

“That is why I want you with me.” he scowled. “My parents are trying to get me to change my mind about our marriage.”

“Will you?” I said with my heart pounding. “If your parents are upset with you on the cause of your denial to marry a wealthy princess... your parents do not want you to wed me because I have lost all... will you change your mind?”

“No. Never. You are the only being I shall never change for another.” he got up and hugged me. “Not ever shall I change my mind about you.”

“So what do you have again being wed in a moon’s time?”

“What do you have again being wed in two weeks?”

I frowned. “You cannot answer my question with another question.”

“Why can I not do that?”

“Charles. Stop playing. This is not a light talk.”

“Why do you think I speak lightly? I want to be wed and soon.”

“Why?”

“I told you why. I love you and I want to be with you as soon as I can.”

“Good things come to those who wait. If you wait good shall come of it.” I placed my hands on his cheeks. “Edmund Charles Pendragon, you are the love of my life and in name of the love we share... I plead you to respect my decision to get married in a month. Please.” I kissed him softly. “Please.”

He groaned. “You always get your way.”

I kissed him again. “Please Charles... respect my decision.”

“Do you have Power over me or is I weak? Yes then, we shall wed in a moon’s time.”

I smiled and hugged him, ecstatic. “I love you.”

He hugged me back but with lack of enthusiasm. “I love you as well.”

I grabbed his hand and pulled him towards the door. “Now we should go to the tailor.”

“Umm... can we go tomorrow?” he looked at his timepiece. “I have another...” he quailed under my furious glance.

I let go of his hand. “Let me hear the reason you have for leaving your bride-to-be.”

“I have no reason.”

“Well you had better give a good one. Why you are suddenly walking out?”

“Should we put this for another day?” he looked at the floor. “You have to understand... I have realized that the woman I love does not want to wed me. That is painful.”

“I do want to be your wife. I love you. But think of what the people will say if we wed so soon. I do not want to spoil our reputations.”

“Let them talk!”

“I cannot allow my name to be damaged. I have lost too much in my path. My name has already been marked enough! I thought you would understand.”

Charles sighed. “Ceci please, I do not want to fight.”

“I do not either but you are trying my patience.” I frowned. “Why cannot we go see the fabrics and the designs?”

“It is getting late Ceci and if we become indecisive ... If I should get back late, my parents shall be angry.”

I raised an eyebrow. “You are acting like you are still five-and-ten. You are two-and-twenty, engaged, and the only successor to the throne. By royal law, you have to be the next King whether or not you get back late to your house. Charles, I thought you had more courage. I remember all those adventures we had when we were younger. How could you go out in the middle of the night and go to a costume party with me but not be able to arrive late a few minutes to your house?”

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