

Asalah: Princess Warrior

By Braylin Keller



My name is Asalah. Formally, Asalah Keziah Ithatozia, Crown Princess of The Ithatozian Empire. However, I prefer simply Asalah, it flows off the tongue better. Today, I will be telling you a story, a story about my youth. A story of adventure, and danger. This is the story of me:

I stand in the wind, my red hair whipping around my face, my blue tunic pinned to my legs. My sharp violet eyes scan the landscape, the silver in them glinting in the sunlight. I see carriages rumbling into the castle gates, carriages carrying people who live far from my native kingdom, the Ithatozian Empire. If you want to know why they are here, I will tell you. They are here for me. More specifically, my 18th birthday celebration.

Today is the day I will turn 18, and my family is going all out. Not to celebrate my entrance into adulthood, goodness no. This is to announce my betrothal, a tradition that has gone back hundreds of years to our first reigning couple, King Fioux and Queen Anora. The only problem is, I don't want to be betrothed. I want to be free, to roam the hills and countrysides of our beautiful kingdom. If I could, I would run away, but I know I can't abandon my family and duty.

A few hours later, my mother and the royal seamstress Calico Lorel are helping me dress in my new ball gown, a rustling silver piece that, at first sight, I thought was lovely. Now, I'm starting to change my opinion. Calico has pulled my seams so tight, I can scarcely breathe. "Calico," I wheeze, "let it out some."

She shakes her head disapprovingly. "Nonsense, child." Calico scolds gently. "You need to look perfect for your future husband."

"Who I have yet to meet." I remind my mother.

"You will meet him right after the announcement." Queen Sylmae reminds me. "You needn't know who he is until then, it's not like you can change who you are fated to marry."

I roll my eyes, and listen to my mother ramble on about how wonderful the prince is, how he has impeccable manners and is very polite. I wish she would stop talking, and that Calico would stop pulling! Instead, I try to think about my mother's betrothal to my father, King

Vesryn. I picture her in my gown, her straight blond hair swinging and baby blue eyes sparkling. I think of her walking up to the stage to meet my brown-haired, brown-eyed father. I smile at the thought of my mother as a girl my age!

At the party, I dance with many charming young men, yet none seem the type my parents would select as a husband for me. I'm startled out of my thoughts when the song changes from a traditional waltz to a faster dance. This one switches partners after a few stanzas, so after a while I'm very dizzy. Then, I swirl into the arms of a young man I recognize. As I fall into his warm hazel eyes, I realize I'm dancing with our head knight, Kaden Hayle.

I blush as he lifts me up, then spins me into the dance. This is one of my favorite dances, and I have danced it for years. Even so, Kaden matches me step for step, and I'm amazed at how good of a dancer he is. After the being tossed around to about seven more young men, plus one elderly duke, the dance is finally over. I stumble over to the refreshments table, where I collapse into a chair, laughing. A hand reaches out to help me up, and I take it automatically.

As the hand pulls me to my feet, I realize it belongs to Kaden. I turn red, embarrassed. He laughs gently and leads me over to the drinks, and serves me a small glass of punch. He smiles. "Don't pull another Cinderella on me, OK?" I smile softly. I don't think I danced much after that, all I remember is spending the evening with him.

At midnight, my parents go up to the stage, and I know they are about to announce my fiancée. I realize I don't want to marry whoever they select for me, I only want to marry one person. And because of my parents and their silly traditions, I can't marry the one who I love. Shaking with rage, I murmur to Kaden, "I have to go." Then I run off towards the castle, knowing full well what I have to do.

In my room, I gather a few dresses, a hairbrush and other things I will need in a basket. I sneak down to the kitchen and take a few loaves of bread, some fruit, and a large flask of water. I run out to the stable and saddle my horse Noria, and call my dogs Cassin and Lucian. I quickly check my supplies, then ride into the woods, my pets following me.

Six days later, it registers that this might not have been the best idea. My water is gone, and I have little food left, only an apple and a few slices of bread. My rich, usually well-fed stomach growled, and I groan in hunger. I slump down on a tree and wonder why I did this; I'm sure it would have been better to live with a man I don't know than possibly not live at all.

I hear horses, and bury myself under a log, telling Cassin and Lucian to hush. I hear Kaden's voice calling out my name, and all I want to do is run out there and fall into his arms. But I stay where I am, knowing that if I go out there then I will have to go back home. And I can't do that, no matter how hard it is in the wild.

Later, when my heart has settled and the riders are gone, I come out of the hole. I stumble around in the forest, crying and alone. My dogs and Noria follow me, making sad noises. But even my beloved pets can't cheer me up. I fall onto my knees, weeping as my heart is broken.

I feel a strange item under my leg and pick it up to see what it is. To my surprise, it's a flute. I don't know how it could help me, but I stick it in my pack anyway. Maybe I can trade it for food or something I need. I spy a small note on the ground by where the flute was, and read it. It says,

BLOW IF IN TROUBLE OR HELP IS NEEDED

Puzzled, I pick up my things and start walking through the forest, unsure of what to do next. As I wander, I think about the turns my life has taken. I've gone from a rich city princess to a poor forest girl. My picture perfect life has been annihilated. Never will I be the same.

In a strange spell of delirium, I start running. Wind whips my tears off my face. I see a large rock face coming up in front of me, the forest so thick I didn't see it until it was mere feet away. I try to turn, too late to stop, and trip on an unseen rock. As I black out, I hear the yipping and howling of coyotes in the distance.

When I wake up, I see a trio of the largest coyotes I've ever seen circling me. I close my eyes again, not wanting them to know I'm awake. I brace myself for death, sure it's near. I breathe in the animal's awful stench, and swallow to keep from vomiting.

Then, I remember the flute. With utmost care, I slowly move my hand towards my back, where I stashed the instrument. I pull it out, but one of the dogs grabs it, salivating. Disgusted, I snatch it back; I ignore the coyote spit all over the flute and blow a random note. To my amazement, the coyotes run away, whining in fear. The flute glows, and melts away all the liquid on it. However, I'm not burned in the least.

A beautiful song pours out, my hands dancing over the silver tool involuntarily. I listen carefully, and hear words mixed in with the music:

With a song and a kiss,

Away you go,

Just a sweet summer's kiss,

And I can't follow.

A rush of air ends the magical moment, and I turn to see the wall of stone, which I had quite forgotten about, had a large, gaping hole in it, and from that hole emerged a majestic young she-wolf. A thick, well-kept silver coat glistened, and her violet eyes that matched mine twinkled as though she had a secret that she would never share.

Although I regret this, I jumped back, screaming bloody murder. Mainly because I was sure one of those was about to happen. However, the wolf did not move to eat me, so I hushed up and sat up to face her. She spoke to me, but her mouth did not move. I realised her voice was in my head, and squealed in surprise. *Relax, girl. You are safe with me.* She told me.

“H-how do I speak to you in our heads?” I stammered to her, rather flustered.

All you have to do is imagine speaking to me, then say the words you want to say in your head. I will hear them. The wolf replied.

I focus hard on her, and then think the words. *What is your name?* I ask, impressed that it was so easy to communicate.

My name is Achirebalteryniela. But you can call me Achilla, most humans have a hard time saying my full name. I can't imagine why, however. It's a common name where I'm from.

Achirebal... what? Yeah, I'll just call you Achilla. My name is- I get cut off when Achilla speaks to me again.

I know your name, girl. Your name is Asalah Keziah Ithatozia, Crown Princess of The Ithatozian Empire. But you prefer Asalah.

I blanch. *How did you know that?*

It doesn't matter now. Now, we must get to the witch. She sent the coyotes to kill you, I'm sure she will be angry it didn't work. We must get to her and defeat her before she defeats you.

Who is this witch? Why does she want to hurt me? I ask, dismayed.

Achilla didn't answer, just walked away into the woods, her tail beckoning me to follow. She leaped through the trees, power and grace tumbling out of her. Gathering my supplies, I got up and scampered after her, wondering what kind of crazy adventure I was falling into. Little did I know what awaited me through those mysterious trees...

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