

Next in line

- Synopsis

"You're the next in line, right? An honor."

"Next in line? Such nonsense. Get out of my sight."

"Just stay quiet and don't bother me."

"Stay away from me. Leave me alone."

"Well then, I'm off. Have fun~"

"With a body like this, I don't deserve to be crowned king."

"It's not like you're here because I like you or anything, so don't get the wrong idea!"

"Please keep that pure heart of yours, or else there'll be no point."

In the country of Asteria, there is an unique law. 'The next ruler will be chosen by a commoner who has the purest and most beautiful heart in the entire kingdom'. That chosen commoner will be known as 'Belle' due to 'Belle' meaning beauty, signifying their beautiful heart. This law is in place to ensure the future prosperity and peace of Asteria, by letting a pure of heart person choose someone who they think will be the best ruler. One day, a 10 year old girl is called to the palace, as the next-in-line to become 'Belle', when the current 'Belle' hasn't even been chosen yet. By spending time with everyone in the palace, she gets to know each of their different personalities, and gets close to all of her candidates. How will her connections with royalty, and her role as 'next in line to be Belle' play out?

You know... I knew about the 'Belle' law and all... But... I never thought I'd be escorted to the castle at 10 years old and randomly be told that I'd become 'Belle'. All I did was defend the 5th prince, his highness Clarence Ashdown, but the very next day, I was dragged to the palace by the order of Sir Alexander, the royal advisor of the late emperor, his majesty.

"Amaria Katelyn, you are required to go to the palace at once."

"?!"

"The royal advisor has ordered us to."

And as simple as that, I was whisked away from my village and into the palace. So, all the princes govern a part of land. I lived in the village governed by the 5th prince. However, he's not very well-liked by the people. This was really unfair to me, as he was really nice. So, I decided to defend him when the townspeople talked badly about him and shunned him. Later, I found out he was really happy at least somebody liked him, so he wouldn't stop talking about it when he got back to the castle. Mr. Alexander heard about it, and decided that I had a pure heart, and I would be next in line to be Belle, as I was too young to actually be Belle.

"Welcome, Amaria."

"It's a great honor to meet you!"

"I am Alexander, the royal advisor of his majesty, and a worker at this palace. I ordered you be brought here. From today onward, you shall live in the palace. I will teach you all you need to know. However, do not expect me to walk you through everything, holding your hand. You will put in your own effort as well. Understood?"

"Yes, sir Alexander!"

Amaria Katelyn ↓



Long blond hair
Amber/golden eyes

"!... Very well. Read all these books by tonight."

Mr. Alexander widens his eyes a little before regaining his composure, and setting down a stack of books.

"Okay! Thank you, Mr. Alexander!"

"But before that, meet all the princes. Follow me."

He takes me to a room with a big table in the middle of it, and introduces all the princes to me, oldest to youngest. There are 7 of them. The first prince, 30, Ichi ro Primus. The second, 27, Alden Sage. The third, 23, Xander Shayna. The 4th, 20, Nicholas Constance. The 5th, 19, Clarence Ashdown. The youngest, twins, 16, Enzo and Oliver Clements. They all had something to say to me. The eldest said

"You're the next in line, right? An honor."

As expected of the eldest and usually the most dependable out of all the others. The second on the other hand...

"Next in line? Such nonsense. Get out of my sight."

The third said...

"Just stay quiet and don't bother me."

As for the fourth, he said

"With a body like this, I don't deserve to be crowned king."

The fifth, who was the whole reason I was here in the first place, got defensive.

"It's not like you're here because I like you or anything, so don't get the wrong idea!"

The twins were very different. The older, Enzo, said

"Stay away from me. Leave me alone."

The younger, Oliver, said

"Well then, I'm off. Have fun~"

And then he walked out of the castle and into town... What an... interesting group of candidates we have here... They all have... such... strong and unique personalities.

"Here is your room, Amaria."

"Thank you!"

"Make yourself at home. Your lessons begin tomorrow. Come to the room I took you to before at 7 in the morning."

"Ah... Yes."

What should I do...? I was so enchanted by the fancy interior that I didn't really memorize the way... But I can't be late either, as it is my first ever lesson here. Well, I can, but I'd really prefer to not be. I don't know what to do... I could just walk around the palace or something until I find the way. I remember bits and pieces of the way there... I think...

- 10 minutes later

Where am I? I think I'm lost... I was a fool for thinking I could magically find my way in a palace. It's a literal palace! It's huge, with hundreds of different doors, leading to different rooms. Especially since I'm really really really bad at finding my way around. Not like it actually mattered in my village, since it was really small, and you eventually got where you wanted to go if you kept walking around. And I didn't even go to a lot of places anyway. I was locked up like a princess in a tower, because I apparently bring bad luck to others, and that was my 'destiny' and no one wanted anything to do with me. That's probably why I could relate to the 5th prince though, so I'm thankful for my so-called 'destiny'. The reason I was destined to bring bad luck, according to villagers, was because when I was born, they saw a comet. So, they thought I brought bad luck because there was a comet when I was born, and a comet apparently looks like 'a fiery sword blazing across the night sky', a traditional symbol of war and death. It's also extremely rare as well, so... lucky me. Because I bring bad luck, I try my best to help others or at least make others feel a bit better every day, to make up for all the bad luck I will bring. That was actually why I stood up for his highness, since I knew I wouldn't be able to bear it if my bad luck affected the royal family as well. However... That led to this happening... The exact opposite of my whole aim in defending him. I honestly don't think I deserve the title of 'Belle'. My motive was so immoral. I thought I would bring him bad luck, so defending him or helping him was my one and only way of making up for all the bad things that would probably happen to him. My entire life mission is to help others, so I don't end up completely ruining other's daily lives unintentionally. But... Seriously, where am I? I don't recognize anything. Maybe I should just start opening random doors. I thought it'd be impolite to open doors, especially because some of the doors will lead to the rooms of the princes'. However... I don't really have any other bright ideas. I'm sure I'll find my way somehow with this method I start opening every door at random until I realize I should be opening doors that have the lights on if I want assistance from another person. How that very obvious fact only occurred to me after opening 10 doors, I have no idea why. Problem is, there aren't many doors that still have t

he light on at this time. The guards dragged me here at noon, and it got quite late after all the introductions and explanations. Ah! That door has the light on. I run over to it and start to open it, when I hear a strange sound. Is that... coughing...? I hesitantly open the door, and see

"Your highness the prince, Nicholas Constance?! Are you ill, your highness? Should I call the royal physician?"

He looks up.

"No... It's alright. I'm used to this."

"You're coughing up blood, it's not okay!"

"Amaria, right? Haha, Alexander is truly exemplary at finding candidates for Belle."

"Wh- What do you mean...?"

"Hey, hey. Don't cry. Come here."

I obediently walk over to him, and he gently dries my tears with his hands.

"I'm the one who's coughing blood, but you're the one who's crying? If someone were to see us, they'd think I was bullying you or something."

"?! I- I..."

"Haha, I'm just joking. As for what I meant, you're proving my point. You're crying for me, even though I said that I'm fine."

"But... How can I not cry?!"

"You'd be surprised at the amount of people who'd just pass by, Amaria. Oh, by the way, thank you for defending my little brother, Clarence."

He gently ruffled my hair as he thanked me.

"That child won't thank you because he's not very honest, but he couldn't stop talking about you when he got back. He was really so excited. It's probably the first time I've seen him so happy after a trip to the land he's assigned to govern. He always comes back all upset and gloomy."

"Ahaha... But are you really okay?!"

"Yeah, it's fine~ I'm used to it."

"Don't you have medicine of something?"

"I do... But... They don't help that much."

"Y- Yes...?!"

"It seems my disease is fairly rare, so there's no name, and no cure. My 'medicine' just lessens the coughing. At least... that's what it's supposed to do, but I don't think it's helping. But anyway, what are you doing here, especially at this hour? Good little girls should be asleep by now."

"Oh... Well, you see..."

I tell him how I got lost.

"Ah, so that's why. Although I am fairly sure Alexander was going to lead you there anyway, follow me if you want to know the way. And after I show you the way, go back to your room and go to bed."

"R- Really?! You can walk... right?"

"Hahaha... I know I'm frail, but that doesn't mean I can't walk. How do you think I got there this morning in the first place?"

"Oh... Yeah... I forgot."

"Come along now, Amari- Can I call you something else?"

"Something... else?"

"Yeah. Amaria is a pretty name, but it's a little long for my taste. Do you have any nicknames that your parents or friends used to call you instead of your full name?"

Parents or friends you say... Ha... What kind of person would give the harbinger of bad luck a nickname? No... This isn't fair to him. This... isn't his fault. I can't take it out on him. I force a smile on my face.

"No, I don't. If you think my name's too long, why don't you make one up?"

"Really? Thank you. Let's see... How about... Ria?"

"Ria...? I like it! I really really like it!"

"You do? I'm glad. Then... will you please call me by my nickname 'Nick' as well?"

"E- E- Ehhh?! B- But... I'm a commoner. To call a prince by his nickname..."

"It's fine, it's fine~ I don't like formalities anyway, so being called a prince makes me feel awkward and uncomfortable."

"Th- Then... Umm... I'll be in your care, N- Nick... Ahhh, I can't do it! It's too friendly!"

"Hahaha, your face is all red. You did well, Ria. Good job. The room you are looking for. Go down the right hall, then take a left, 3rd door on your right. As for your room, starting from the room you're trying to find, take a left and go straight. 2nd door on your left. Got it?"

"Umm... I think so?"

I start walking away, when he grips my shoulders and gently steers me in the right direction.

"Not left, Ria. Right. Actually, I'd better just guide you. I think you're going to get even more lost if I leave you alone like this."

"Ahahaha... Thank you."

"Here we are."

"Thank you!"

"It's really nothin-" *cough cough*

"Are you okay?!"

... He passed out on the floor... What do I do? I can't just leave him here on the floor, but... he's twice my age, so I don't think I can carry him to his room either. I mean... I guess I could try? It's better than leaving him lying on the floor, right? He's lighter than I expected, maybe because of the illness. I think I can make it to his room, although I'm half dragging him. I don't think I'm hurting him though, so good enough. What were the directions again? Go right, left, 3rd door on my right. So... all I have to do is flip those instructions. Okay this is his room. I open the door and lay him down on his bed. That took so much time and energy

... I'm tired... Wait, how do I get to my room? He gave me instructions for that too, but I don't remember them. I have a really weird brain... I'm great with things you can learn/memorize, but I could never remember directions for places. I can remember someone giving me directions, but I can't remember those directions, unless I used them to get somewhere. I'm tired...

"Amaria!"

"! M- Mr. Alexander... Good morning...?"

"Nick!"

"Cole!"

"Brother!"

"Hmm? Oh, hey guys. What's wrong?"

"Brother, are you kidding me?! You passed out in the hallway!"

"Oh, I did? Then... how am I here?"

"Amaria carried you back to your room, and fell asleep in that chair a few minutes later. I guess she was tired after carrying you to your room. You are twice her age."

"Ahaha... Sorry, Ria. I must have cost you a lot of trouble, right?"

"Y- Yes?! I- I mean, no! Not at all! If anything, I apologize for carrying you without your consent! Please forgive me!"

"Pfft... Haha. Oh, Ria. I would rather have been carried to my room than wake up on the floor. You didn't do anything wrong."

"Therefore, I will forgive you being late to your first lesson, Amaria. However, I hope you will be on time starting tomorrow."

"Hey, that's not fair! Did you even give the girl a tour? She might get lost here!"

"Brother is right... The village she used to live in is smaller than this castle. It's part of the land I govern, so I know."

Mr. Alexander thinks about this for a bit.

"True. I had forgotten how big this palace might seem for a mere 10 year old commo-ner. I shall give you a tour today."

"Thank you, Mr. Alexander!"

- After the tour

I didn't think it was physically possible for a building to be so big... Ah... So tiring~

"And that is where everything is."

"I see... Thank you, Mr. Alexander!"

"You look like you're about to pass out."

"The tour was very tiring. I barely go anywhere in my village!"

"Is that so? Well then, please do get used to it, Amari- Actually, I have an idea. I'll have one of the princes give you swordsmanship classes to boost your stamina. That'll probably help you."

"But I already know swordsmanship...?"

Mr. Alexander seems surprised.

"Excuse me for a moment."

I pull out my sword.

Her sword ↓



A plain normal sword

Not super good quality but still sharp enough to accidentally cut yourself

"It would be foolish to suddenly start wielding a sword here... Ah. The garden should be fine."

I walk out of the palace, and Mr. Alexander follows me.

"Okay, here we go then!"

To be absolutely honest, I didn't really learn swordsmanship. I learned a specific dance you do with a sword. But... I heard that only experienced people can do this dance without getting hurt, so hopefully I fool him into thinking I'm some expert. This dance is something I learned to go to school, and it means 'I will protect you forever' or 'I will give up my life to protect you' or something that has to do with protection. I personally thought making me learn an entire dance was a little overkill, but I really wanted to go to school, so I agreed. The reason I had to learn this dance was because I bring bad luck. So, in the event that bad luck happens, it is my duty to protect the rest of the students from it. The sword dance was evidence of my promise to protect the rest of the school. For some reason, whenever anything bad happened, I was always the one to blame, even if I had no idea it happened. I did eventually get kicked out, but... it's good that I learnt it, as I can use it now. I did get lots of cuts learning it, but it was totally worth it. When I finish I suddenly hear clapping. I quickly turn around and see all the princes watching me. The first prince was the one clapping. The second is watching me with narrowed eyes. The third is writing something down. The fourth was simply watching, but he had a soft smile on his face. The fifth prince looks shocked. The six

th prince has no real emotion on his face, while the seventh is watching me with a playful and sly grin on his lips.

"Lie."

"Prince Enzo?"

"Can't swordfight."

"How do you know?"

"Amaria, Enzo is one of the most talented among the princes when it comes to swordsmanship. I trust his judgement."

"Then... Let's hear his reasoning."

"Grip is wrong."

"Yes?"

He gently adjusts my grip on the hilt.

"Also stance and form."

He bends down and straightens my posture and changes my stance.

"Inexperienced."

He then points out various cuts on my arms and legs that I got while learning how to perform the dance.

"Well done, prince Enzo. I was nearly fooled into thinking she was adept at swordfighting."

I giggled softly.

"Wow, I'm impressed!"