

# The Unexpected Princess

By TheSpiralledEye

The air rushed from his lungs as Hale found himself on his back, slammed hard into the packed earth. He groaned, both from pain and embarrassment as the jeers from his older brothers broke through the ringing in his ears. Hale loved his brothers, truly, but would it kill them to let him win just once? The eldest of them, Landon, stood over him, training sword in hand looking resplendent in his shining armour. He was everything a good heir and knight should be; strong, brave, handsome, all the things Hale definitely was not.

“That was pretty good.” Easton tried, walking over and offering him a hand, “Normally Landon has you on your ass in half that time.”

“I don’t think that’s the compliment you think it is.” Hale grumbled, wincing at the awkward squeaking of his own armour.

If he took it to the royal blacksmith to be taken in somewhat, he might last longer in the sparring ring, but he already had the smallest set in the entire armoury, having it taken in further would be the ultimate humiliation.

“We should be going anyway.” Landon sighed, “It will be supper soon and Father mentioned he had something important to discuss with us.”

“With you.” Hale grumbled under his breath, most of the time when the king gathered his sons together, he forgot about him entirely. What’s worse, Hale couldn’t blame him.

He was the youngest of five brothers and utterly superfluous. His father already had Landon as his perfect heir, Easton as a spare and general and the twins Brandyn and Kennard as talented diplomats and further back ups were anything to happen to his eldest sons. Brandyn, the arrogant twat, had even shown some aptitude for magic and was already being trained by their mother to take over the role of court wizard when Landon took the throne. He on the other hand was small, talentless and utterly ordinary; destined for some cushy but ultimately unimportant court position to keep him out of the way.

His brothers, with the exception of Brandyn, were sympathetic to this at least but that was almost worse. The way Landon always agreed to spar with him out of pity made Hale want to punch him sometimes. He almost suspected his brother did it for the ego boost, a victory so easy he barely had to try. Landon gave him a firm pat on the shoulder, as if to say ‘at least you’re trying’ before heading back to the castle. Years ago, he’d have stayed behind, beating the stuffing out of one of

their training dummies until his arms hurt. That was back when he still had some hope that with enough hard work, perhaps he could become a decent enough knight to lead their forces. Now though, he didn't have the energy; that dream had long since been dashed, after all, even if he did manage to master the sword to any degree, why would his father pick him with four other, better options?

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Hale picked at his dinner; his sparring match with Landon had left him in a foul mood but he knew better than to complain. He was a prince after all, there wasn't a single peasant in their kingdom who wouldn't happily trade places with him; at least that's what Mother always told him if he whinged.

"I have something important to discuss." Their father announced, placing down his goblet.

They all sat to attention, especially Landon at his father's right hand. Their father wasn't a man of many words so when he did choose to speak, he made sure you listened.

"We need to discuss betrothals." He hummed and he and his brothers' shared looks.

Landon had been betrothed to the princess of a neighbouring kingdom since birth, the same could be said of Easton. While nothing was set in stone for the twins yet, it was all but guaranteed for them to marry the daughters of high-ranking nobles in their father's court. Brandyn, of course, had already taken to 'sampling' the offerings ever since coming of age. Hale slumped down in his chair slightly, there was no way this conversation would have anything to do with him. He drained the last of his wine and held out his goblet for the servants to refill. If he had to sit through talks of Brandyn's marriage, he wanted to be good and drunk for it.

"The situation between us and Hytheria is becoming tense." The King continued and they all nodded; they had been at war with their southern neighbour multiple times over the last few decades. Border disputes that never seemed to quite get put to bed.

"King Leopold and I believe we have reached an agreement to tie our lands together in matrimony."

Hale blinked in shock.

“But...doesn’t King Leopold only have a single son?” Brandyn asked, the king nodded.

“That is exactly why he is so eager to have the boy married in order to produce heirs, lest their bloodline become broken.”

“So...one of our cousins is going to marry him?” Landon asked, Hale couldn’t help but smirk at the befuddled expression on his face, Landon hated not being on the same page as their father.

“No.” The king cleared his throat, “Hale is.”

Silence.

“What!?”

Hale stood, knocking back his chair.

“You can’t marry me to another man!” He cried, “Even if I was interested, which to be clear, I am *not*, I can hardly produce heirs for him now can I?”

“Hale, sit down.” The king ordered as one of the servants came and righted his chair, Hale obeyed, still fuming.

“Your mother and I have never been blessed with a daughter.” The king continued, “This alliance will bring an enduring peace to our lands and as we have only sons your mother has taken to drastic magical means. Hale, you are our only son without a place in court, you are also not well known outside the castle walls. This means your disappearance will be the least conspicuous.”

Hale felt a cold sweat forming on his back.

“Your mother has concocted a potion with which to make you...a woman. You will drink it, marry King Leopold’s son and ensure peace for our people and kingdoms for generations to come.”

Hale sat; mouth agape unable to even form a proper sentence. The silence was finally broken by a snort, then a chuckle, finally both twins burst into laughter. Hale grit his teeth, watching as Easton and Landon tried to hide their own amusement.

“My God!” Brandyn wiped a tear from his eye, “I’ve always wanted a sister, Hale this is brilliant! You’re finally useful, how does it feel?”

“Shut your damn face, Brandyn!” Hale hissed, “I am not doing it! I refused. It’s barbaric! It’s cruel! It...it’s.... emasculating!”

“But just think,” Kennard chortled, “You’ll finally fit your clothes properly.”

Hale felt his blood boil, he was about ready to fling himself at them when their father stood.

“Silence all of you!” His voice thundered through the room, the only sound Brandyn desperately trying to get his giggles under control.

“You are a prince, Hale.” His father said sternly, “and while as a man, I sympathise with how great this sacrifice is, I am also your king. This is an order, not a request.”

“But Father-“

“No buts. As prince, it is your duty to serve your kingdom and people. This sacrifice is necessary for the good of the realm.”

Hale felt his heart sink into his stomach. His father was not to be argued with, he knew that tone of voice; nothing he could say would change his mind. He grit his teeth, sliding his chair back so that it scraped against the floor and stood, giving his father a short, curt bow.

“If you will excuse me.” He seethed through clenched teeth, “I am no longer hungry.”

They didn’t call him back as he stormed out, having no desire to stay and listen to them all discuss his situation. Hale was used to being the least loved, the least important son, hell, he’d actually come to accept that role but this? This was too much. Screw the realm, there was no way he was letting his family do this to him.

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Packing proved much more difficult than anticipated once the burning anger had subsided. As the adrenaline began to fade, he found he'd stuffed a random assortment of garments into a leather hunting bag with no real plan other than 'leave'. Abandoning his home was the only recourse he had but now that he was thinking more clearly, he realised the inherent problem facing him; namely where he would go? He was a hopeless hunter and an average fighter at best, how was he going to survive outside the palace walls? He'd struggle to make ends meet on the streets of their great city, let alone in the woods and mountains that surrounded them.

He needed to come up with a proper plan but time was of the essence, now that everything was laid out before him his father would no doubt want to take action. He needed to be well gone before that point. A knock at his door made him flinch.

"Hale, it's Mother."

Normally, he would be pleased with such a visit. His mother spent hours, sometimes days cooped up in her towering creating all sorts of magical concoctions, when she did deign to visit her family it was a rare and wonderful thing. Right now though, she was the bringer of despair.

"If you're here to make me drink that stupid potion you can leave!" he called out only for his mother to push open the door anyway.

Hale always thought it was cruel the way fate had given him his mother's brown curls and eyes, today it felt especially bitter. While his mother was undeniably a beauty, the features she'd given him always made him look boyish and plain. Idly the thought occurred, were to drink the potion, would those traits finally suit him? He squashed the thought down; he wasn't drinking it so there was no point in posturing such things.

"I hear things didn't go well at dinner."

"Yeah well, how would you feel if that got sprung on you." Hale crossed his arms. "I'm not doing it mother. I don't care what you and father have decided."

"That is what I told your father when he first suggested it." She sighed, clasping her hands in front of her. "You are much more stubborn than even he is, believe it or not. But it must be done, Darling. Think of the good it will do both our kingdoms and you."

“Me?” Hale scoffed, is that what she’d told herself? That robbing him of his manhood was some kind of twisted favour in his behalf?

“You’ll be queen in a few years’ time. A ruler, second only to the king.” She sat down on his bed, patting the mattress, “You’ll never have anywhere near that level of power should you stay here.”

“Did it maybe occur to you that I don’t actually care about power?” Hale clenched his fists, “I never coveted the crown.”

“Because you were born with it firmly out of your reach. Darling, I’ve watched you struggle for years to find your place here and it’s never worked, why not try with a new slate?”

“Because I don’t want to be married to a stranger, a man no less and I certainly do not want to be a mother!”

“I had the same reservations when I was betrothed to your father.” His mother sighed, launching into the history of her own prewedding night jitters and Hale realised, to his disgust, that this was the sort of speech mothers gave their *daughters* before being married off. Here she was, acting all understanding and gentle when she didn’t comprehend who he was at all. She may have been his mother but she had no right to decide his future in this capacity.

“Just, stop.” He seethed, “Nothing you say is going to change my mind.”

She sighed, looking at him with brown eyes so full of warmth and kindness. So totally at odd with the words that left her mouth:

“I know dear, that’s why I put the potion in your wine at dinner.”

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Things got hazy after his mothers’ confession. He remembered yelling until she fled the room. He’d over turned his desk in frustration and chipped the stone walls of his room with the force of some of his kicks. Furious tears stung at his eyes and he locked the door to ensure nobody would enter and find him crying.

None of them cared. How could they have done this to him? Just taken away who he was for 'the good of the realm'? He didn't even know how long it would take for the potion to take effect, would he pass out, or be forced to watch as his body transformed before his very eyes. He felt sick. The nausea had almost made him tempted to try throwing it all up before it could take effect but he knew too much time had passed for that to be effective; his mother was as clever as she was beautiful, she'd waited to tell him until it was too late.

His father had tried to visit, as had Easton; he'd not answered the door when they called. Let them stew in his silence, it was only a fraction of his own suffering. He sat, with his arms wrapped around his knees on the rug by his fireplace, staring at the flicking flames trying desperately to dry his eyes. He could still run away but a woman on the streets had even less means of survival than a man did, what would he do with himself? More than likely he'd be starving and homeless within the week and as horrid as his current fate was, he had no desire to die destitute and alone.

That left him with one option, to marry Leopold's son. It wasn't ideal but were he to move to a new country and a new court, perhaps that would present the opportunity for a cure. King Leopold, like all kings, had a royal magician, perhaps if he could get close to them, he could find a way to reverse the potion. Then, he could escape into one of the small villages in Leopold's Kingdom, never to be seen or heard from again with a clean slate to make a life for himself. Living as a farmer wasn't the dream, but it was better than being forced to live as a woman. The plan had several flaws, chief among them his wedding night but he could deal with that later, right now he had to calm himself and prepare for the challenge at hand. The transformation itself.

So far, he hadn't felt any sign that his body was different or changing. He felt like a powder keg that could explode any minute and the tension was maddening. Part of him was tempted to have a servant call his mother so she could give him some knowledge of what to expect but he was still too bitter to do so. He could imagine his family now, all gathered in one of the castle rooms discussing him like a piece of meat; he could hear Landon's condescension, Easton's pity and the twin's cruel laughter. His parents would be discussing his selfishness, how poor his character was that they had to resort to trickery just to get him to fulfill his 'duties'. The arrogance. If they had the gall to treat him as though his upset was unreasonable, he would break their noses, woman or not.

Hale sighed. He was exhausted after the emotional turmoil of the evening and even his nerves couldn't keep him awake all night. Throwing on a nightshirt, thankful to see his chest was still flat, he hopped into bed to try and get some rest. If anything was happening tonight, he was sure it would wake him.

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*"Presenting, his royal highness Prince Hale!"*

*Hale stepped forward as the large double doors were opened for him; the whole court was here for his coronation and he beamed at them. They should have clapped and cheered but instead he was greeted with silence and confusion. For a moment he glanced around, waiting for somebody to start the applause but then snickering reached his ears. His brothers, all standing by their father and his*

*throne at the end of the procession were laughing. Like a wave, that laughter began to spread through the crowd and people pointed and laughed much to his bewilderment.*

*He followed the fingers pointing at him, looking down at himself to see a large ball gown, ill-fitting and ugly on his awkward male body. Humiliation burned through his entire being as he hastily tried to cover himself but it was no use, the gown seemed to be getting bigger and more outrageous every second, swallowing him in fluffy fabric until he couldn't breathe-*

Hale awoke with a cry, a thin sheen of sweat coating his skin. Fortunately, he'd sent all his usual servants away when he'd stormed in after dinner so he didn't have to explain to anybody that a grown man, a prince no less, had just been awoken by a bad dream. With a sigh of relief Hale ran his hands over his face, wiping away the sweat only to freeze. His hands...they looked wrong. Years of tiny imperfections, scars and other such marks were gone, leaving smooth skin and long dainty fingers. Blood rushed in his ears and he jumped out of bed, running for his mirror only to slip and fall on his ass. His feet had received the same smoothing effect, the socks he'd worn to bed were now loose and baggy around his ankles.

"Oh Gods..."

His breath was coming in short gasps; part of him had been willing to believe this was all some prank Brandyn and Kennard had somehow managed to convince everybody would be funny but now it was undeniable. He was *changing*. It wasn't happening all at once and somehow that was worse. He stood, noting how his sleeping shirt was now reaching past his knees, he'd always been the shortest on his brothers, this was just rubbing salt in the wound. He ripped the article of clothing off to look down at himself, half relieved half concerned to see his body was still mostly male. His skin seemed smoother, his thighs thicker and hips wider but in all the ways that counted, he was still himself.

He placed a hand on his hip, taking in the slight curve that was forming between his lower stomach and hipbones. His palm felt strangely smooth against the skin, years of training callouses smoothed away in a matter of hours. The physical proof of all his hard work, the hours in the training yard, gone. The mirror across the room beckoned him but he resisted, grabbing the sheet from his bed and covering the reflection; he didn't want to see himself as some half transformed freak. The night began to pass and Hale was unable to sleep, every tingle of skin, each stretch of muscle made him jump. His hands were constantly roaming across his body, feeling for the slightest change but despite his vigilance they still seemed to sneak up on him.

He felt the curve of his ass extend as it became round and peach-like and his square shoulders slope further as the night went on. Worst of all were his breasts; it started with his chest becoming sensitive, then soft, then finally it began to swell. Each hour his bust seemed to grow, nipples darkening to a rich pink. Almost as a response his manhood seemed to decrease in tandem; Hale's face burned with humiliation, watching his length disappear into the curly hair between his legs. Never in his life had he felt so emasculated. He felt as though all his sharp edges were being smoothed over, like metal under the blacksmiths hammer. But instead of a sword or other deadly weapon, he was being melted down into a pretty, useless ornament



By the time the sun was rising he could resist it no longer; judging by his now curvaceous figure the transformation was complete. He had to know what he looked like. He ripped the sheet from the mirror, letting it flutter to the floor around his ankles. In the mirror stood a stranger; a woman who shared many of his mothers' traits, a woman who could easily pass for his own sister. Even knowing what he did, watching the woman in the mirror copy his movements, he could scarcely believe he was looking at himself. The figure had short, curly brown hair cut in a boyish style which clashed with her bodacious figure; large breasts, wide hips and a round heart shaped face with dark eyes and pouted lips.

Hale wanted to scream.

Already he could hear the jeers and whispers of his brothers behind his back.

"Hale? Are you awake?"

Mother.

"I'm coming in."

"As if I could stop you." Hale whispered, gathering up the sheet to cover himself though he needed of bothered, the first thing his mother did after smiling at his appearance was rip it away.

"It seems to have worked nicely." She praised, as if he had anything to do with it, "Nice, childbearing hips too, I was a little worried you'd end up as a tiny waif of a thing."

"I am so glad *you* are please." Hale hissed.

"You will get used to this darling." His mother took his face in her hands, "I know it's hard to understand now, but I truly just want what's best for you."

Hale wanted to tell her to fuck off but bit his tongue. There was no point in arguing with somebody who was never going to change their mind, all he could do was suffer through this and hope he could get help from King Leopold's magician before he had to marry his son.

"There is the matter of your hair though." His mother mused, "One moment."

There was a gentle purple glow in her palm as she waved it atop his head, taking an errant curl between her thumb and forefinger before pulling down. The hair came with her, growing into long brown ringlets as she went. Hale squeezed his eyes closed, by the time she was finished his hair brushed against the small of his back, just above the curve of his ass.

“Beautiful.” His mother sighed, “I did always want a daughter, let’s get you a lady’s maid in here to get you all dressed up to present to the rest of the family.”

“...Fine.”

Hale had always wondered why the ladies of the court took so long to present themselves at social events, now he knew. The routine was simply ridiculous in its intricacies. Two servant women had to help him into the gown, which had three layers despite being a simple, everyday dress of flowing green fabric. His hair took almost an hour of brushing, braiding and styling before it was organised into a formal bun atop his head; his mother then took her time picking out necklaces, earring and other jewellery with which to adorn him. Hale was drowning in fabric and gems.

“There, done.”

She turned him to face the mirror and Hale found himself blinking. The woman in the mirror had been a stranger before but now he was even more unrecognisable. A proper woman of nobility. A real lady, some would even call her a beauty; the dress supported and cinched in all the right places to show off his curves without being indecent and the gentle light cast from his emerald earrings seemed to catch the light in such a way that his face almost glowed. Hale had felt he was many things in the past; a disappointment, small, weak, but never handsome and certainly not beautiful. Now, despite the humiliation, for the briefest of moments his cheeks dusted a gentle pink with pleasure at being so fetching.

“I told you, didn’t I Haylyn?”

“Haylyn?”

“Well, you can’t go by Hale now can you.” His mother chuckled, “Haylyn is what we planned to call you, had you been a girl when you were born. I am glad we finally get to use the name.”

Hale bit his lip; they could call him that all they wanted but deep down they would never take his name from him. Never.

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Each step down the hall felt like another foot in the grave; his mother was humming a light-hearted tune under her breath completely oblivious to her son turned daughters' trepidation. They were going to see his father and brothers, apparently, they had all gathered in the main library ready to meet their new sister. Hale felt humiliation burning at his cheeks; he wished for something, anything to call them all away so he could run back to his room and lock the door.

His mother pushed open the heavy wooden doors with gusto, stepping aside immediately so that he had nowhere to hide.

"Everybody, meet your new sister, Haylyn."

Hale swallowed, eyes finding his fathers instantly. For the first time in his life, they were looking at him with pride and Hale felt like crying. How long had he waited to have his father look at him with such appreciation and love? Now, he finally had the man's attention and it was because he was a woman. He didn't have time to dwell on that particular disappointment long before a tiny wheeze distracted him. Eyes flying to the twins, both red in the face, biting their lips to keep from laughing.

"Got something to say?" Hale growled, his feminine voice piercing the air and breaking the tension.

Brayden and Kennard burst into laughter, unable to hold back any longer and Hale stormed forward ready to clock them only to have his mother grab him by the arm.

"Fighting is not lady-like." She hissed, "You need to remember yourself."

"Y-yeah Haylyn." Brayden chuckled, "Remember you're a l-lady you n-need to act- bahaha! I can't even f-finish-!"

"Shut up you twat!"

"Language, Haylyn!"

"My name is fucking Hale!"

This body was even weaker than his old one, he couldn't pull away from his mother's iron grip and was forced to stand in a huff, vividly imagining how it would feel to break Braydan's nose.

"Haylyn is making a great sacrifice." Easton chided the twins, smacking them both across the back of the head, "You should show him-uh her some respect."

"Exactly," His father nodded, walking over and placing a hand atop Hale's shoulder. "I am proud of you, I know this must be hard but believe me, we all appreciate your sacrifice."

A small mote of guilt swirled in Hale's gut and he looked away; he knew once he found a cure for this it would likely fracture their alliance and break his father's heart. But he couldn't stay this way, he just couldn't. Biting down on the inside of his cheek Hale forced himself to look up at the man he so admired and hated in equal parts, at least in this moment. He loved his father and his people but he would never forgive them for this.