

Devlin's Princess

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Maria Elizabeth Maxwell-Eire sat in her window, looking out at her Twin brother with tears streaming down her face. She was born the second child of a fifth prince, and worse, a girl. The Eire line had been cursed with females this entire generation, with her brother being the only male born in twenty years. Her father had almost nothing of importance in society: he had no money, no land, and would never be King. \

What he did have was a Name, a Noble Wife, and most importantly, A Son. His elder brothers either only had girls or could not have children. The laws of the realm passed titles down the male line, so the King disowned his daughter and named his only nephew, Ywain Bran Eire, Prince. The boy was taken to from his family at the daybreak of his fifth winter and even though they were Twinborn, Maria was looking at Ywain for the first time since then. She could not see him clearly through the violet twilight, even with the rise of the second moon behind him.

Daybreak would mark their thirteenth winter. As is the custom of the realm, both Maria and Ywain would celebrate their Betroth Day. They were promised to the twinborn children of the King Alasdair Albain of Dorchadas. Their mother, Eliza

Maxwell had originally been promised to him, but she ran away from the dark realm to marry Prince Gavin of Íonachta.

She found her happiness in the light realm, and her scorned intended swore vengeance. However, rumors of impending war with the malicious Drochaigeanta changed his plans from attack to alliance. The two Kings agreed to unite their realms through their heirs and Maria, and to move their Seats to the shadow realm, Tír Na Scáthanna, changing it from a protected no-mans land to the High Court of Ceiltigh.

The Hand-fasting would unite, finally, Eire and Albain under one banner, with two Kings and two Queens. The Drochaigeanta returning to Ceiltigh terrified the populace from Noble to Slave. This would be every-mans war, and they needed a united government. Especially since the Drochaigeanta have ready made spies in both Realms as even a Quarter-Drocha would be compelled to obey their evil King.

When rumors became reported intelligence, both Kings decided to advance the wedding ceremonies. Young though they were, the Princes had to produce heirs of their own. So, messages were sent to the Houses where the children were held apart to prepare them and the Hand Fasting ceremony, six months premature. The time saved by skipping the betrothal ceremony would be used to produce at least one heir for the combined Kingdom.

Even before the sun broke the horizon, just as the second moon set beyond it, the courtyard burst into activity. Maria was not given enough time to ponder the sudden activity as her mother's handmaidens bustled through the door. They were carrying an elaborate gown that screamed wealth. Immediately Maria knew that the day's plans had changed. A quick glance out her window confirmed this, as a high carriage drawn by four tamed Dragons rolled through the gates. The carriage bore the crest of Albain, the Prince and Princess of the Dark Realm had arrived.

The sun had risen fully by the time the handmaidens released Maria from her rooms. By this point, the girl had thought of one thousand ways to prank her mother for turning her into a play-doll. The servants smiled at her as she was led passed. It was truly refreshing for them to see her so well dressed. Her skirt was made from the woven leaves of the Cornwood tree and Dragon skin. The leaves, when ground, boiled and pulled, created a soft light green fiber that absorbed light. The fibers would not blend, despite the best Tailors in both realms most concentrated efforts. In response, they added leather made from a skinned Dragon. This leather shimmered a deeper green and reflected the sun, however, it was bad luck to kill a Dragon so they had to wait for one to die naturally. The Tailors did not mind as the older the Dragon; the better the scales and hide would look when harvested.

Maria's Dragon materials had come from a particularly old Dragon-mare. She had lived so long that her hide practically glowed like emeralds in the bright sunlight. The bones of the old creature had been used to create Maria's bodice. Like the hide, the

bones were green and shimmered; they had been softened and formed to Maria's torso first thing that morning, then allowed to dry as she was held still. The result was that the bodice moved with Maria as she moved, and was never too tight. Although her dress was essentially confirmation, Maria still gasped in fear as her Mother approached her. The older woman was carrying the Hand Fasting ribbons. Thirteen ribbons in total, these would be tied around her and her bridegroom's wrists. They would be bound together for a full two days. From moonrise to moonrise, they would have to learn to work as a team.

Maria's mother had drafted a slave that had the same build as Prince Devlin Albain to measure the ribbons against. Since it would not be proper to use Maria's own wrist, her best friend Rachel had also been conscripted. Maria watched in awestruck fear as her mother carefully measured each of the thirteen colors, releasing her held breath when the Noblewoman did not truly wrap them around the pair's wrists. She was ushered into her private sitting room and told to wait.

Hunger had set in quickly, but Maria was not allowed to eat until the feast after the ceremony. It comforted her that neither could anyone else. Further distraction from her frets and worries about the day came when the King unceremoniously opened her door and pushed Ywain through. He was also dressed in Dragon and Cornwood, in fact, except for the form; the separated Twins were identically dressed. Prince Ywain's tunic and pants looked exactly like her bodice and skirt.

Neither twin focused much on their clothing as they met again. Ywain threw his arms around his sister the hug of a boy long separated from his family. Maria eagerly returned the hug, and then directed his attention to their mother's chair. Twin smirks graced their faces as Maria set about shortening one of the legs on the chair. It was the least painful, most easily attainable prank on her list of one-thousand-and-one. She had barely finished knocking the dust off her bodice and skirt when her door opened again.

The twin Nobles plastered convincing looks of innocent curiosity as their mother strode through the door. Not knowing what her erstwhile children had planned, and wanting to believe the best, Lady Eliza introduced the two children behind her, "Ywain, Maria, this is Prince Devlin Albain and his Sister Princess Morgana McCallistair-Albain of Dorchadas. You are to be Hand Fasted to them at Moonrise. Use your time well to learn about each other."

Maria studied Prince Devlin carefully. He wore a charming smile, but had a mischievous glint in his Obsidian eyes. His eyes told her that they would get along well, so she turned her attention once more to her mother. Eliza had just sat down in her favorite chair only to discover the reason behind her children's innocent masks. She provided them with even more amusement as she tried to keep both balance and composure. Her eyes found her daughter's and held them as the girl began to giggle.

Almost as if the sound gave them permission, Prince Devlin joined in with his own muffled chuckles whilst Ywain out right laughed at her.

Eliza, never one to turn down a good laugh, joined in quickly while Princess Morgana looked at the group with a bit of disdain and much disapproval. Hers was exactly the reaction Eliza had feared from one of the Dorchadas Heirs. It seemed that she could not appreciate a good joke, even if it was juvenile. Her disdain made the loving mother fear for her only son's future happiness, even as she rejoiced that Prince Devlin was such a good match for Maria. She could only hope that the blessing of the binding ribbons opened the somber Princess' mind to Ywain's natural charms.

A quick glance at her daughter and her daughter's Prince proved that hope was not necessary, an attraction was already there and a quick, easy friendship appeared to have already been formed as they talked and flirted on the other side of the study. She smiled softly as her husband slipped in, unnoticed by his daughter.

The Fifth Prince made his way to his wife, unseen by his little girl and dismissed as unimportant by his regal son. He watched as Prince Devlin charmed Maria, and she charmed Devlin in return and had to admit that his arrogant brother, the King, had been right. Prince Devlin was perfect for his daughter. Gavin looked out the still open door; he could see the moonrise from where he stood. Reluctantly he cleared his throat to catch the children's attention. Once all four were looking at him, he spoke, "It is time. The

Princes need to follow me now, and Princess Morgana and Maria will be brought out by Eliza shortly.”

Maria’s anxiety from last night, her anger from this morning, and her trepidation from the afternoon had shifted to excitement and anticipation as she spoke with Devlin. Ywain, on the other hand, wore a look of dread as his father led the Princes over to the Kings. The father of each Bride held the binding ribbons, and King Liam Eire of Íonachta held the bands that would be placed above the ribbons and the rings for their hands. Ywain thought that they resembled shackles, an opinion obviously not shared by Devlin. He grinned as he looked between the older men.

Too soon, in Ywain’s terrified opinion, the girls were brought out and their hands joined. Silently the fathers began wrapping their wrists together, tying each ribbon. First the red for passion and fertility, Ywain nearly fainted as Morgana looked on, bored. Then orange for encouragement and kindness, yellow for joy, green for prosperity, blue for devotion. This color caused Morgana to look at her brother, he only had eyes for Maria, though and she sighed. He would find something to actually be devoted too now. She hoped that the bonding would teach him responsibility, but she doubted it. Her father had wrapped the Purple for Power, Black for Strength, White for Purity, Gray for Balance, and Pink for Romance during her distraction. Only three colors remained before they would be literally chained together, Brown for Grounding preceded Silver for Values and Gold for Longevity.

With finality, King Liam locked the bands around each bride and grooms' arms. They were stuck together with a bond that would erode over the course of two days. He then put the rings on their free hands' fingers. Neither the bands nor the rings could ever be removed, and that terrified Morgana and Ywain, but elated Devlin and Maria. As the newly married couples were then led to the farewell feast, Maria's only thought was '*I am going to love being Devlin's Princess!*'

As was traditional, after the feast, the young couples were led to the childhood rooms of the hosting bride and bridegroom to begin their new lives together. They were to be sequestered together in the childhood chambers until their hands could be unbound. After that, they would be sent to their own palaces in the Shadow Realm, to gain independence and to become better friends.