

# THE HERO: GETS THE GIRL?

“Look at them, Hyland. Off in their own world without a care,” Margrave said as he observed Paibow and Oana, sitting a few tables away.

“Seems so effortless for them. No kidnapping, no rescuing.” Hyland took a deep swig of his ale, wiping the froth from his mustache.

A familiar sound rose light and breezy above the drunken murmuring of the inn, a beautiful and dainty laughter. Both Margrave and Hyland searched for where it was coming from. There she was, glittering amidst the dingy throng: Princess Colette!

Margrave and Hyland jumped from their chairs and fell over one another to reach her table. They soon stood next to her, shoulder to shoulder, watching the Princess sip an ale. She let out the tiniest of burps. Margrave found this oddly adorable.

Then, a louder belch came from across Princess Colette - it was the new hero, that woman who beat them to rescuing sweet Colette! The princess and her companion laughed together before looking at the men standing awkwardly next to them.

“M’Lady, I will be there to rescue you first from here on out! I will not let you down again!” Hyland proclaimed with a deep bow. He grabbed the Princess’ hand and gently kissed it. Hyland scowled at the female hero before turning, shoulder checking Margrave, and leaving. He signaled to Oana that it was time to move on to their next adventure.

“Sire Margrave, this is Lady Hero Arley,” Colette said, cleaning her hand of Hyland’s lips. “I’m going to use the ladies’ room.”

Arley and Margrave watched her go. Arley signaled for him to sit and he did.

“Hello, Lady Arley.” Margrave said.

“Oh don’t give me that ‘lady’ crap, Margrave. You love her, don’t you?” Arley got right to the point. Margrave was not used to this forward a conversation. Times seemed to be changing.

“I do. I rescue her often from her various kidnappings, misadventures, and so on,” Margrave stated proudly.

“Can I give you some advice, hero-man?”

“I guess I could use some,” Margrave laughed.

“She’s more than just a princess that needs rescuing. Colette is a woman with needs and wants. Rescuing isn’t wooing her or dating. You show up, rescue, then leave! Do you even really know her?”

Arley was making sense. What did Margrave know about Colette? He was a hero, she was a princess. Heroes rescue princesses, then marry them. Did it need to be more than that? Did he want to get to know her?

“Trust me, man. The effort will be worth it!” Arley leaned back and took a swig of her ale.

“Why did you not give Hyland this advice?” Margrave asked.

“Because I know things that you don’t. And because I’ve taken the time to talk to and get to know Colette. Besides, Hyland is an ass.” Margrave nodded in agreement.

Princess Colette returned, excited and giggling. “Arley, I just told a drunken fool that he was quite unpleasant! Ooh, I’m so naughty.” The ladies laughed.

“Well, Princess, Arley. I must be on my way. Thank you for the conversation, and enjoy your evening.” Margrave stood, relinquishing the princess’s seat, and gave a polite bow. He turned and met Paibow at the door, and they walked into the cool evening together.

“Sire, this is Princess Colette’s castle. Has she been kidnapped again?” Paibow’s face showed concern for what trials they might face on this day.

“No, Paibow, ol’ friend. I received some advice yesterday that I intend to follow. I’m here to court the Princess. To... get to know her.”

Margrave grabbed the lion faced door knocker and clanged it three times. After the door was answered and the castle’s staff sent for the Princess she finally came to the door.

“Oh, Sire Margrave. You must be mistaken, I am not in need of rescue at present,” Colette said.

“No, Princess, you are not. I am here to inquire about a walk through your beautiful gardens.”

“As in, together?” she asked with the touch of a smile at the corners of her mouth.

“Yes, m’lady. If you’ll allow it.”

“Of course. It is quite a pleasant day for a walk in the gardens.”

Margrave asked Paibow to chaperone, but to hang back a respectable distance.

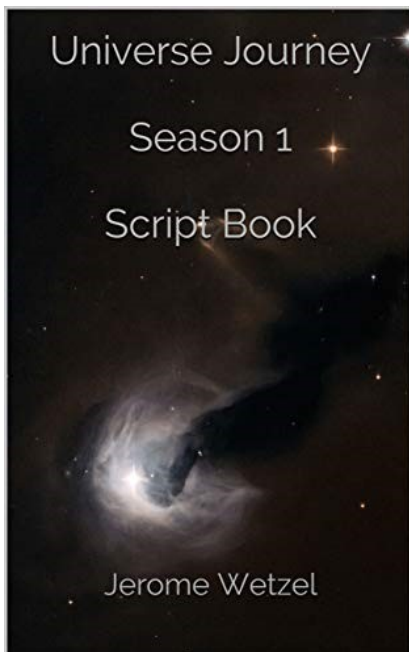
The three entered the gardens, and once the initial awkwardness passed, the conversation flowed naturally. Margrave grazed Colette’s hand, their pinkies hooked, and before they knew it, they were strolling hand in hand among the flowers and topiary and butterflies.



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