

PROMPT #2: You've been raised all your life to fulfill a prophecy, only for the seer to realize they were mistaken — you have no great destiny after all. What do you do now?

Who the Hell Cares About Destiny

by **Carrie Cheng**

“You’re not the one.”

It was more annoying than difficult to sneak into the East Wing of the palace, but I had to reach the Royal Quarters before the news spread. Before, I could have waltzed through the doors and the servants would bow to me like I was the next ruler. But now, I was crouching and checking corners, being excruciating careful to not step too loudly. Thankfully, the guards were easy to maneuver around, their routine still the exact same as when I first arrived at the palace, forced to learn more about this country and its stupid customs.

After four hallways, a small detour jumping out the window (where did the king and court advisor come from?!), almost breaking an arm scaling up the wall while praying nobody saw me from outside, and three more hallways, I finally slipped into the bedroom uncaught and, frustratingly, out of breath.

My breaths come loud and heavy, now able to freely be as loud as possible from that last dash to safety. I quickly locked the door before I looked over to the princess sitting on the divan, looking as regal as when I first met her. An unimpressed look was shaped on her delicate features, completely unbecoming for a royal. But to me, she never looked lovelier.

I tried to flash her a smile, but only a crooked grin slipped on my face as I straightened up my posture, trying to appear more put together than I was. But my body was still trying to remember how to breathe properly while words mocked me in my throat. So I raised my hand, signaling to her to give me a moment. Or several.

“You shouldn’t be here.”

Damn it. I wanted to speak first.

“You look awful,” she said, shaking her head as she stood up and walked over to the window. She was facing away from me, but I had a guess on what kind of expression she had.

I made my way over, the former adrenaline now smoothing out. “Thanks. I knew I could count on you to tell me the obvious.” The retort came ready on my tongue, even though I knew she hated how unserious I was during important moments.

“Then you wouldn’t mind hearing more, would you?” She dryly laughs before turning towards me, that familiar concern masked as anger. “My father is about to put a price on your head for deceiving the royal family and country for making them believe you were the hero.”

Her eyes locked onto mine, staring me down for an answer. I shrugged.

“Do you not understand the situation?” Her voice rose, but I could only focus on how the opal earrings matched well with her eyes. I wondered who chose them. “You’re going to die! Or- or become an exile at best! God, sometimes I don’t know if you even think.”

My face scrunched up as I thought about her last comment before I leaned down slightly to make our heights more similar. “Okay. That was uncalled for,” I said.

Her breath hitched at the closeness, but I didn’t move. I never will. “Are you not concerned?” She asked.

I shrugged again. “It wasn’t my fault that stupid seer got it wrong. *I* honestly feel like the victim here. I spent—” I squinted, trying to think about when that seer dragged me by my arm and presented me before the king. Was I five? six? How long would that make it now?

She gave me a look. “Fourteen.”

“*Fourteen* years into this shithole, swinging a sword around over and over again to fight something I’m apparently not going to be able to kill. Do you know how crazy that is?” I scoffed. *Huh. Has it really been fourteen years?*

“You can’t blame the seer.” She said, pushing me away and turning back to face the window. I looked over her and watched the army march through the front gates, spreading into the town. “The seer can’t do any wrong.”

“Then what about me?”

There was a heavy pause. Neither of us moved, but I had the advantage, able to see every little emotion flicker across her face while she had to keep her eyes glued to the scene below. Regret. Anguish. Frustration. I almost wanted to bark out a laugh. She really had to stop getting angry.

I don't want to keep seeing her get so upset on my behalf.

"He didn't even explain anything," I said, recalling the few hours prior. "Just 'you're not the one' and then left. I had to go ask his apprentice what he meant and you wanna know what that kid said? He told me about how I have no great destiny ahead of me."

"...I-I'm sor—"

"Why?" My fingers had made their way onto the ends of her hair. I twisted the strands, noting how the sun shined on them. I could've never done this before. "It's not like I did all this to be a hero."

She didn't say anything immediately. "You're going to ruin my hair."

"Hm."

She finally turned around again and I almost cursed when my fingers lost their gentle grip. But I followed along with her actions and locked eyes with her. I never knew why she always looked into mine when her's was so much more interesting. If I was better with my words, I would compare them to the sky we always dreamed in, to the shiny hilt of my sword I stared at constantly, and maybe even to the water I see when I drink. *Maybe I should learn to become a bard or something after I escape this kingdom.*

"Is this a yes?" My voice became quieter as my face inched closer.

"You didn't even ask anything," she said, letting out a soft huff. But she didn't move away.

I laughed. As if I needed to explain anything to her. She knew everything.

She clicks her tongue. "My father is going to be livid. A fake hero stealing the princess?"

"Oh? I'm stealing, am I?" My right arm wrapped around her body as she rolled her eyes. "These charges are racking up faster than I can count."

"I didn't realize you could count," she quipped, openly laughing and I found myself relaxing. This was everything I've ever wanted. None of the formal lessons on territories and treaties, countless training sessions with opponents, or being the face of a flawless hero.

"Well, if you're okay with a no great destiny guy who can't count—"

She leaned in quick, holding just enough for me to realize how soft her lips were before she pulled away.

I could barely keep my grin from splitting my face.

"Who the hell cares about destiny?"