

From the Notebooks of a Middle School Princess

Royal Crush



Written & illustrated by

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ROYAL CRUSH: FROM THE NOTEBOOKS OF A MIDDLE SCHOOL PRINCESS.

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Monday, November 23

10:30 A.M.

Royal Genovian Academy
World Languages



So I'm going to be an aunt.

A year ago I never would have thought I'd be writing those words.

But there are lots of words I never thought I'd be writing—let alone saying—a year ago, such as:

- “I’m a princess.”
- “Please have the limo brought around, Monsieur Henri, as I’m expected in half an

hour to cut the ribbon at the grand opening of Genovia's first Starbucks."

- "No, thanks, Dad, I don't care to go salmon fishing in Iceland again with you this weekend, but I appreciate your asking."

Out of all these, the fact that I'm going to be an aunt (especially at age thirteen, which I'll be exactly five days from today) seems the weirdest.

Even weirder is that I'm going to be an aunt to royal twins. That's the part everyone in the whole world is talking about.

Seriously. You can't go online without seeing a post from some celebrity—from Kim Kardashian to the president—guessing what sex Princess Mia of Genovia's babies are going to be, or what she and her husband, Michael, are going to call them.

It's so weird to me that total strangers care so much about something that has nothing to do with them. Most of them don't even live in Genovia!

And okay, I get that royal twins aren't born every day. But professional bookies in Las Vegas have

begun taking bets on the babies' sexes, names, and birthday!

They're giving two-to-one odds that both babies will be girls, their names will be Clarisse and Mignonette, and they'll be born on December 3.

It's not like Mia and Michael are doing anything to encourage this craziness. The opposite, in fact: They haven't posted the twin's sonograms on their Facebook page (they don't even have Facebook pages—though there's a page for the Palace of Genovia, where you can find out what time it's open to the public for tours).

They haven't even told anyone in the *family* what the babies' sexes (or names) are going to be! All they've told us is the due date (it's in two weeks).

Which made Grandmère huff, “What good does *that* do us? How can I tell Tiffany's what initials to monogram on the miniature gold scepters I've ordered if I don't even know the babies' names? I understand why you wouldn't want the rest of the world to know, Amelia, but I don't see how telling *me* the babies' names could hurt.”

Except that telling Grandmère the babies' names *could* hurt. Every time Mia has suggested a name in front of our grandmother, Grandmère has said, "Oh, no, you can't possibly name either of the babies *that*. There was a girl in my class called that, and she used to

- chew with her mouth open.
- show off her double-jointed legs at recess.
- brag about how many Chanel handbags she owned.

"You simply can't burden a child with *that* name."

This happened so many times that Mia's blood pressure began to rise . . . so much so that the royal obstetrician had to put her on bed rest out of fear for the babies' health. The doctor wouldn't allow her to do any of her royal duties *or* have any visitors who might cause her stress. . . .

This turned out to include Grandmère.

You can imagine how unhappy this made some people (mainly Grandmère).

But it worked. Mia's blood pressure is almost down to normal (although the doctor still won't let her get out of bed).

And, as an added bonus, I have now seen almost every teen movie ever made! Because I'm one of the people who was judged low-stress enough to visit Mia, and she decided my entertainment education has been sadly neglected, so we've been watching nonviolent movies together in her room almost every day.

Anyway, I guess given all of the above, I shouldn't have been too surprised just now when I was Skyping with my best friend, Nishi, and all she could talk about was my sister and the babies.

What *did* surprise me was the incredibly rude way she brought it up:

"I saw a photo of your sister last night on Rate the Royals," Nishi said.

"How?" I asked. "She's on full bed rest. She hasn't been anywhere."

"I think they got one of her through one of the palace windows with a telephoto lens. I was shocked

she's gotten so fat. One of those babies *has* to be a boy."

"Excuse me?"

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Nishi lives in America, so if we want to talk, we have to call each other, FaceTime, or Skype.

I know I shouldn't have been Skyping during World Languages, and that I should have been practicing my German instead.

But in my defense, everyone had their headphones on, including Madame Chi, so it wasn't like anyone was going to hear me, and I'd already finished all my German homework.

"I'm just saying," Nishi went on, oblivious to how mad I was at her for calling my sister fat. "Your sister is as big as a house! She's too huge to be having two girls. My mom says when a pregnant woman is that big, it's got to be boys. Or a boy and a girl, at least."

Obviously I had no choice but to do what I did next. It was a matter of family pride.

“You’re wrong,” I said, feeling my cheeks heat up. “You are so wrong, I will *bet* you that you’re wrong.”

“What?” Nishi sounded confused. “*Bet* me? You want to *bet* me that I’m wrong?”

“Yes,” I said.

I get why Nishi was surprised. It’s considered “poor form” for royals to gamble. The last time Nishi had been to Genovia to visit—over the summer—one of my cousins (I have so many cousins, even I can’t keep all of them straight) had been caught in a horse-race gambling scandal, and Grandmère had gone on and on about how he’d disgraced the family, and what were we going to do, but that it was only to be expected considering the fact that he came from the Italian side of the family, and that side of the family is known for acting without thinking first, et cetera.

And now here I was not only gambling but gambling on the sexes of my sister’s unborn twins!

But in my defense, everyone was doing it. I’d even overheard Lars, my sister’s bodyguard, make a bet

with Serena, my bodyguard, that the babies would both be boys, and that my sister would name one of them Michael, after her husband, and the other Phillipe, after our dad, about which Serena had had a long laugh, accepted the bet, then told Lars that when he lost, she wanted his money in American dollars, not euros.

“I will bet you anything you want that both babies are girls,” I said to Nishi.

Nishi looked even more surprised. She was in her bedroom back in New Jersey. Because of the time difference between Genovia and America, she hadn’t yet left for school. The only reason she was up so early was to chat with me.

“Anything I want?” she asked, raising her eyebrows.

“Sure,” I said, not thinking of the consequences (which I have to say is very rare for me. Normally, I am much more levelheaded, being a Sagittarius).

“You name it.”

“Great!” Nishi said. “Then if I’m right and at

least one of the babies is a boy, I want four photos of my crush, Prince Khalil.”

That’s when I realized I’d made a really big mistake. REALLY big. “Wait. What?”

“You heard me,” Nishi said. “I want four photos, taken by you, of Prince Khalil. I want two of him smiling, one of him looking serious—because you know how cute he looks when he gets all serious about something and those eyebrows of his get all squinchy in the middle—and one of him smiling in front of a sunset, preferably without a shirt on.”

“But . . . but . . .” I could not believe what I had just gotten myself into. “That’s—”

“That’s what?” Nishi demanded. “You said anything I want, and that’s what I want.”

“But why?” I burst out, then realized I’d spoken too loudly when several people sitting near me in the language lab—including another one of my cousins, Lady Luisa Ferrari—turned to stare at me, wondering what I was doing, since it definitely wasn’t speaking German. I hunched my shoulders to cover

my computer screen, and also lowered my voice. “Why, Nishi?” I whispered. “Why do you want photos of Prince Khalil? I thought you liked some boy in your English class—Dylan or something?”

“I do,” Nishi said. “But I can like more than one boy at a time, can’t I? We’re in the seventh grade, Olivia, not college. We’re *supposed* to like a lot of different boys at a time.”

I sighed, realizing that Nishi had gotten even more boy crazy than I thought since the last time I’d seen her.

Not that there’s anything wrong with being boy—or girl—crazy. This is something that happens to people. I mean, I get it: Everyone grows and changes as they get older—they can’t help it. Look at me: I’ve grown *two whole inches* since I last saw Nishi. My riding habit barely fits anymore.

We’d planned to see each other again soon—at my sister’s coronation, as a matter of fact. Since Dad gave up ruling in order to spend more time with me (he missed out on most of my crucial formative years), Mia has to take over the throne.

But then the coronation got postponed, because the royal physicians didn't want Mia risking her or the babies' health by having her stand for a huge long ceremony in the throne room, which doesn't have air-conditioning. It's too old.

(This was not the official explanation from the palace. They decided to say that the coronation would be held next December 31, so that they could save expenses by combining the annual New Year's fireworks with the fireworks for Mia's coronation. But really they knew the babies would have been born by then, the weather would be cooler, and they could cram more people into the throne room without them dying of heat prostration.)

So we postponed Nishi's next visit until my birthday ball this weekend.

But now Nishi's parents won't let her come because she's getting a D in English—which I don't understand, since English is our native language.

Nishi says it's because of Dylan, whose cute lips distract her, making it very difficult for her to pay attention.

So you can see why I found it hard to believe she suddenly wanted photos of Prince Khalil—without a shirt on—if she won our bet.

“How am I even supposed to do that, Nishi? How am I supposed to get a photo of Prince Khalil with no shirt on, smiling in front of a sunset?”

“I don’t know,” Nishi said. “That’s not my problem. You’re the one who made the bet. Can’t you just ask him to stand in front of a sunset without a shirt on and smile? I thought you two were friends . . . unless—wait.” Nishi’s eyes widened. “Olivia, do *you* like him?”

“What?” I cried. “No! Of course not. What are you even talking about?”

“Well,” she said, “you two danced at your sister’s wedding—”

“Yeah,” I said. “But it’s not like we were ever *going out* or anything. We were only ever friends.”

“*Were?*” Nishi echoed. “You aren’t friends anymore?”

“Yes,” I said. “I mean, no. I mean . . . I don’t know. It’s hard to tell sometimes with boys.”

“Ha!” Nishi let out a sarcastic laugh. “You’re telling me. Boys are an enigma wrapped in a mystery.”

She wasn’t kidding.

And it was especially true in the case of Prince Khalil. He had come over to visit a couple of times during the summer, and we’d played floating table tennis in the pool and talked about autotomy (the ability of lizards to drop their tails when threatened by a predator) and movies and stuff.

And then suddenly I didn’t see him at all. He’d texted that he had to “go home,” and that was it.

It wasn’t until school started up again that I saw him in class, and then he was just like, “Hi,” but he didn’t smile or ask how Carlos, my pet iguana, was doing or anything.

It wasn’t like he was mean, but something had changed. The connection I thought we’d felt when we’d talked about Carlos and danced together at Mia’s wedding or played floating table tennis over the summer was gone, and all that was left was just . . . nothing.

So now I don’t know what’s going on.

“Well, whatever,” I said to Nishi. “It isn’t going to matter, because I’m going to win this bet anyway. And when I win, you’re going to send me a big jar of peanut butter, because we can’t get that here in Genovia.”

Nishi gasped. “What? Why not?”

“I don’t know,” I said with a shrug. “They have Nutella instead.”

“Nutella is better than peanut butter,” Nishi said. “But fine, it’s a bet.”

I would have asked her to tell me what other stuff people were saying about my sister, but Madame Alain had just come on over the intercom with an important announcement, and I needed to log off and listen.

It was probably just as well, since anything else Nishi told me would only have made me mad. People say the stupidest things, especially about royals.

Monday, November 23

11:15 A.M.

Royal Genovian Academy
Still in World Languages



I should have known when Madame Alain said she had an important announcement that it wasn't going to be good news.

I don't know why I thought it was going to be something nice, like that we were all going to get to go home early because the new baby princesses of Genovia had been born (except that I had already made my dad promise that if Mia went into labor while I was in school, I'd get pulled out of class

immediately and brought to the hospital so that I could be one of the first people to meet the babies, and they would imprint upon me like baby ducks and then follow me everywhere).

But no. The announcement was nothing like that.

Instead it was:

“Your Royal Majesties, Highnesses, Graces, lords, ladies, and gentlemen, I’m sorry to inform you that I have only received twenty-seven permission slips for this week’s trip to the Royal School Winter Games in Stockerdörfel,” Madame Alain said after some of the hissing, screeching, and feedback had died down over the intercom.

The Royal Genovian Academy is a very fancy school, with extremely high tuition fees (except for the two hundred or so refugee children who had recently been admitted—they are allowed to attend tuition-free), but it’s also housed in a building that was constructed before sound systems (or electricity) were invented, so it has a lot of technical problems.

“As you know, unless I receive at least another

thirty permission slips from those of you who signed up for the trip last week, the Royal Genovian Academy's participation in this year's Royal School Winter Games will be canceled due to lack of interest."

Of course as soon as he heard the name of his hometown mentioned, Prince Gunther Lapsburg von Stuben of Stockerdörfel stood up and gave a fist pump, causing a few of the younger girls in the language lab to squeal. (Prince Gunther is considered extremely good-looking, for a seventh grader.)

This annoyed my cousin Lady Luisa, who flashed the girls a dirty look. She and Prince Gunther have been going out since June, even though all "going out" means in the seventh grade at the Royal Genovian Academy is holding hands. Anything more than that would be a violation of the school's "honor code." If they get caught, the head of the school, Madame Alain, will probably expel them, and they'll have no choice but to attend The Royal Academy in Switzerland, or worse—to Luisa, anyway—Genovian public school.

Luisa grabbed Prince Gunther by the arm and tugged him back into his seat. He looked confused, not knowing—as usual—what he’d done to offend her.

“It’s *anceled*,” Luisa hissed into Prince Gunther’s ear. “She just said our trip to the Games is going to be *anceled*. Why are you so excited?”

Prince Gunther looked as hurt as if someone had punched him in the gut. “Canceled? No!”

Luisa rolled her eyes. Except for the fact that the Games meant getting out of class for a few days, no one at the Royal Genovian Academy cared very much about them . . . no one except for Prince Gunther.

“I know how much of a blow this might be to some of you,” Madame Alain went on over the intercom, almost as if she’d seen Prince Gunther’s look of sadness. “I am extremely disappointed that so many of our royals seem to be lacking in the kind of pride for our school that I have come to expect from students at the Royal Genovian Academy.

“But it is not simply that we don’t have enough permission slips. This illness that so many of you are

referring to as La Grippe—when it is, in fact, merely a little cold—has struck down many of our finest athletes. Princess Charlotte on our cross-country ski team. The Contessa Gerante on the girls’ hockey team. Even Lady Marguerite is apparently too ill to work a camera and take photos for the school yearbook, which I find somewhat hard to believe. But there it is.”

I raised my eyebrows at this. Lady Marguerite is another one of my cousins. I knew she hadn’t been feeling well, but I also knew how much she’d been looking forward to going on this school trip. (She’d wanted to get out of a test we were having in Algebra on Friday.)

She must have actually been feeling sick.

La Grippe is a particularly nasty flu that has been going around our school as well as up and down the Mediterranean coast. It is pronounced “La Greep” but sounds even nastier when someone like Grandmère or Madame Alain says it, because they both roll their *r*’s and pronounce the letter *i* like *ee*, so it comes out sounding like *La Grrreeeeeeeep*.

Yuck!

Half the student population of the Royal Genovian Academy seems to have come down with La Grippe, and so has the faculty.

It's gotten so bad, it's started affecting other things at school besides field trips to the Alps:

"In addition," Madame Alain went on, "because my administrative assistant, Monsieur Gerard, was too ill to come to work last week, we were unable to make your seating assignments for lunch today. Therefore, you may sit wherever you like. Thank you, and remember: Manners matter!"

Though the walls at the RGA are nearly three feet thick, I could hear cheering from the high school classrooms all the way down to the kindergarten (and that was across the courtyard, in another building). Normally, seating for lunch at the Royal Genovian Academy is assigned (like at a wedding), so that we don't form into "friend groups."

Madame Alain *hates* friend groups. She thinks an important part of our training to be "leaders of tomorrow" is developing the ability to make polite

conversation with *anyone*—from the lowliest sixth grader to the tallest senior—and she does that by assigning seats and forcing us to eat lunch with different people every day.

But today we were going to be able to sit anywhere we wanted.

While I felt sorry for Madame Alain’s administrative assistant, this was definitely an unexpected benefit of La Grippe.

So I guess the news wasn’t *all* bad . . . at least, not to me. Some people, however, were pretty upset by it.

“Madame Chi,” Prince Gunther cried, leaping to his feet. “If replacements can be found for those suffering with La Grippe, could we not still go to Stockerdörfl on Wednesday?”

Madame Chi, sitting at the front of the language lab, looked as if she might have been coming down with La Grippe herself. Rubbing her temples with her fingers, she sighed so heavily that a curl that had escaped from the tight bun in which she always wore her hair fluttered up into the air.

“Well, Your Highness, I don’t know . . . it’s terribly late. But I suppose you could always ask.”

Prince Gunther spun around to face our class.

“Come on, everyone!” he cried. “I know you can do better than this! Show some school pride! Get your permission slips to your parents and get them signed. We *have* to go to the Games. And we have to win! We have to beat TRAIS!”

TRAIS stands for The Royal Academy in Switzerland, against whom the Royal Genovian Academy competes every year at the Royal School Winter Games, a kind of Olympics for all the royal schools in Europe. (The Royal Academy in Switzerland swept most of the medals last year. I understand that they even won the spirit contest, showing better sportsmanship than the RGA by wearing matching tracksuits and chanting, “Go team, go, TRAIS, TRAIS, TRAIS!” at each event. This would be unthinkable to any student at the RGA.)

This year the Games are taking place in Prince Gunther’s Austrian mountain village of Stockerdörfel,

just a short—well, okay, fourteen-hour—train ride from Genovia. Prince Gunther’s parents, Prince Hans and Princess Anna-Katerina Lapsburg von Stuben, are going to hand out the medals at the closing ceremonies.

So I guess I can see why Prince Gunther is so excited. If the Games were being hosted in Genovia, with my family handing out medals, I might have been more enthusiastic.

But despite Prince Gunther’s impassioned speech about beating TR AIS, everyone (except me) whipped out their cell phones and began pressing buttons . . . not to ask their parents to sign and send over their permission slips, but to text one another about where to sit for lunch.

I think Madame Alain is right: the RGA really does have zero school spirit.

And I’m afraid that might include me. I’ve carefully refrained from mentioning anything about the Games to my dad, stepmom, Grandmère, or Mia. Why would I want to go to some dumb royal kids’ competition when my sister is due to have royal

twins at ANY MOMENT? Especially since newborns can't really see all that well (according to my sister's birthing books). They become accustomed to those closest to them during those all-important first few days in their life by the sound of their voices.

No way am I leaving Genovia and missing out on that.

Monday, November 23

1:15 P.M.

Royal Genovian Academy

Lunch



Oh dear.

Right after the bell rang for lunch, as I yelled at Princess Komiko to please wait for me because I'd forgotten my backpack, then whirled around to get it, I nearly smacked right into Prince Khalil.

I've gotten much more graceful (in my opinion) than last year when Mademoiselle Justine, RGA's dance instructor, despaired of me ever learning to do a proper Genovian folk dance.

But I still occasionally bump into things.

And today what I bumped into was Prince Khalil Rashid bin Zayed Faisal.

He was super nice about it, though, bending over to help me pick up all the things that had scattered out of my backpack and pretending like I hadn't just made a total idiot out of myself.

He even asked—looking at me with the same thoughtful, sad expression he's been wearing on his face ever since returning to school at the beginning of the new semester—“Are you all right, Princess Olivia?”

“*Me?*” I squeaked as I gathered up all the German flashcards I'd made for myself so I could remember my vocabulary words. “*I'm fine. What about you?*”

He smiled. It was the first time I'd seen him smile all semester, practically, and the look of it made my heart sing.

There was still something a bit sad in his smile, though, and that made me feel sad, too.

“I'm fine also,” he said. “You seem very excited.”

“Oh,” I said. “*I am excited!*”

“About the Royal School Winter Games?”

“What? No!” I made a face. “About the fact that we get to sit wherever we want at lunch today!”

His smile grew confused. “Wait . . . so you’re not going to the Games?”

“Oh, goodness, no,” I said. Then I noticed that his smile had disappeared altogether, and he was regarding me with a look that seemed more troubled than ever. “What I mean is . . .” What had I said wrong? Was Prince Khalil upset with my lack of school spirit? “I can’t. I have to stay in Genovia until my sister’s babies are born. I’ve got to be here for the birth. I’m going to be an aunt, you know.”

His dark eyebrows, which he’d furrowed when I’d said I wasn’t going to the Games, relaxed after I explained why.

“Oh,” he said. “That makes sense.”

“Does it?” I laughed a little nervously. I was still mortified from having crashed into him, but also a little freaked out that we were the only two people left in the language lab. It had been one thing to be alone with him back when we’d been friends and could talk so easily about our mutual love of iguanas.

It was quite another to be alone with him now that this strange distance had grown between us.

“I’m afraid people are going to call me a dork when they find out,” I said, climbing to my feet, my backpack secured. “But I’d rather stay home with my sister and her new babies—when she has them—than go skiing in the Alps.” I smiled at him in a fashion that was probably one hundred percent dorky.

He didn’t smile back, though. In fact, he climbed to his own feet, then said, very seriously, “I don’t think there’s anything weird about wanting to stay close to your family. And I’d never think you were a dork, Olivia. In fact, just the opposite. You’ll see. . . .”

But instead of telling me what it was I was going to see, he turned and left. He just shouldered his own backpack, turned around, and left the language lab.

And that was it. That was the end of our conversation.

I don’t want to sound sexist or anything—my sister says making prejudicial remarks about people

based on their gender is called sexism—but boys can be really weird sometimes.

(Although I guess girls can be, too.)

Now I better put my pen down, because it's rude to write in your journal when you're supposed to be eating lunch with someone. (I asked Princess Komiko to sit next to me, after all, and she has to be wondering what I've been writing about this whole time instead of talking to her over our salades Niçoises.)

Monday, November 23
5:45 P.M.
Royal Genovian Bedroom



I know I should be concentrating on more important things—for instance, tonight we're having a banquet in honor of volunteer trainers of Hearing Dogs for Deaf People, and I'm giving each of the volunteers the Bronze Medal of Appreciation for Genovian Generosity.

But all I can think about is how Prince Khalil said I'm the opposite of a dork, and that I'd see. See what? I haven't seen anything yet, except that he

avoided me the whole rest of the day (no big change from any other day).

I guess I must have been really distracted by this since at high tea with Grandmère in the Royal Genovian Gardens, she said, “Olivia, I can’t imagine what’s wrong with you today, but this is the third time I’ve had to ask you to pass the clotted cream. Please pay attention. If I were a dignitary visiting from a foreign land, you could have caused an international incident by ignoring me so rudely.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry, Grandmère,” I said, and passed the clotted cream. “I’m just having a hard time concentrating, I guess.”

“Ah,” Grandmère said. “Well, yes, we’re all feeling a little down about the fact that, once again, your sister cannot join us at the tea table. But fortunately we have your father here for once, so let us bask in the radiance of his manly presence.”

“Mother,” Dad said, turning the page of the newspaper he was reading, “please. All I said was that I’d join you for an espresso.”

“Which is not, nor has it ever been, tea, but we will take what we can get. Shall we ask Olivia why it is that she’s so out of sorts, or would you prefer to read about the stock market, Phillipe?”

Dad lowered the newspaper. “What is bothering you, Olivia?”

“It’s just,” I said, “that Prince Khalil used to like me, but then he went away for the summer, and ever since he came back, he’s seemed really down, and today he said he thinks I’m the opposite of a dork, and that I’d see. But he didn’t say what the opposite of a dork is, or what it is I’m going to see. And anyway, I thought being a dork was a good thing. Mia’s always said so.”

“Good heavens,” Grandmère said, adding jam to the cream on her scone. “Phillipe, are you listening to this?”

“Yes.” Dad had stuck his face back into the newspaper. “I think you should ignore him, Olivia. Ignore all boys.”

“Phillipe, you aren’t even paying attention. The child is speaking of Prince Khalil of Qalif. Prince

Khalil of the *Zayed Faisals* of Qalif.” Grandmère poked her butter knife at Dad’s newspaper.

Dad lowered the newspaper. “Olivia,” he said, “I not only want you to ignore that particular boy, I want you to stay away from him. Period.”

“*What?*” I dropped the piece of cake I’d been about to eat. Snowball, my puppy, found it beneath my chair and gobbled it up. “But Dad, what are you talking about? Prince Khalil and I are friends.” At least, we used to be. “Remember, he used to come over all the time over the summer—”

“Yes, honestly, Phillippe.” Grandmère poured herself some more tea. “It isn’t the boy’s fault that his uncle has turned into a megalomaniac who is purposely trying to destroy his own country.”

“*What?*” I cried again.

“That’s where your Prince Khalil went this summer when he seemed to disappear,” Grandmère explained. “Back to his own country with his parents, who were doubtless trying to talk sense into the boy’s uncle, the supreme leader of Qalif. But the man wouldn’t listen, preferring to plunge his

kingdom into civil war than save his own people. So poor Khalil and his parents had no choice but to smuggle out whatever of their meager belongings they could salvage, and return here. Now your sweet Khalil is a prince without a country.”

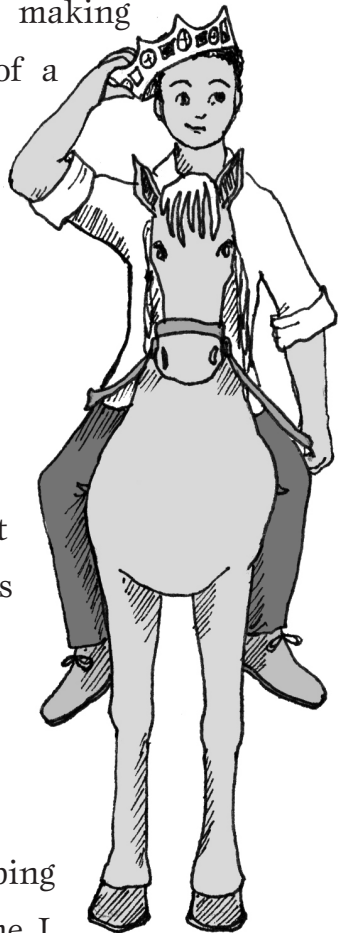
“Mother,” Dad said, “you’re making the boy sound like the hero of a romance novel.”

“I’m not making him *sound* like anything,” Grandmère declared. “I’m only stating the facts as they are written—some of them in that very newspaper you are holding, Phillippe.”

She pointed at it, and I couldn’t help noticing one of the headlines between Dad’s fingers:

CIVIL WAR IN QALIF

“Oh no,” I cried, dropping another piece of cake. This time I



didn't notice what happened to it, whether Snowball ate it or what.

Dad saw what I was looking at, then quickly tucked the paper away so I couldn't see the headline anymore.

"Don't worry about Prince Khalil, Olivia," Dad said. "He and his parents are quite safe here in Genovia. Your sister and I are seeing to that. There's no need for you to involve yourself in his difficulties."

"How can she not involve herself in the boy's difficulties?" Grandmère asked. "She is his friend. And then you tell her—quite cruelly, I might add—to stay away from him."

"Mother," Dad said with a sigh. "Of course I didn't mean for her to stay away from him completely as if he were some sort of leper. I only meant—"

"What did you mean, Phillipe? Because it sounded to me like you meant stay away from him completely. Whereas if I were the one giving Olivia advice, I might say it would be a good idea for her to

be a little extra kind to him during this horrible time—even if he might seem a little . . . odd, as he was today.”

“Extra kind?” I wrinkled my nose. “Like how?” Luisa was extra kind to Prince Gunther in school—holding his hand between classes, texting him heart emojis, and stuff like that—but those were the sorts of things I definitely did not want to do with Prince Khalil, or he might get the idea that I was in love with him, or something.

“Well, by paying special attention to him,” Grandmère said. “People who have experienced profound loss, as your Prince Khalil has, can be known to suffer from low self-esteem. It’s likely that because he’s lost everything, he feels that he is not worthy of you anymore . . . especially considering what a beautiful flower you are blossoming into—”

“Mother! *Please.*” Dad threw down his newspaper and stood up. “This is precisely what I was talking about. Stop filling her head with such melodramatic nonsense.”

“I recall a certain prince who did a good deal of

pinning after a beautiful woman he thought *he* wasn't worthy enough to have," Grandmère said with a sniff. "No one accused *him* of being melodramatic."

Dad rolled his eyes and stomped back into the palace, saying he had work to do . . . which was funny, since he's officially retired.

But I don't care what he thinks. I'm going to take Grandmère's advice and try to do something nice for Prince Khalil. That's what royals do best—perform random acts of kindness for others less fortunate than themselves.