

Begonia {part two}

by Emily Sparkles

Down in the village, Coriander was just stepping outside of his family's cottage to take in some fresh morning air. As was his custom, he turned his head to gaze up at the castle; the domain of his beloved Isabella. As he lifted his head, the rain suddenly stopped, though whether this meant something, we do not know.

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The day passed, and with it the knowledge of the ailing king and queen spread amongst the villagers. The humble people still did their duties, as all realized the best way to honor their royal protectors would be to care for their kingdom. Coriander also worked hard and efficiently at his work as assistant shoe-maker. But all day long his heart was even more heavily distracted than his fellow townsmen, for he wanted nothing more than to be with his cherished princess, comforting her in this frightening time. Of course Isabella longed for this, too, but the duties of the castle and the tasks of the village kept them apart. Only Isabella knew that her duties were bound to keep them apart forever.

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As the days work was completed, the villagers gathered at the castle, lighting candles one by one as one by one the stars began to twinkle overhead. The people said prayers and sang songs, trying to lighten the heavy pain all were feeling. Princess Isabella watched from the window of her parents' bedchamber and opened it slightly so that the royal couple could hear and be encouraged. They decided Isabella should go down and greet the people, giving them food from the castle kitchen and thanking them for their support.

As she appeared in the grand doorway of the royal abode, after the servants had distributed food to the crowd, everyone stopped to see what she had to say. They all admired her strength in this trying time, and more than one whispered that despite her grief, she seemed more beautiful than ever, which was likely true. Isabella

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told her people that her parents were in the Lord's capable hands, and they had no need to worry. She would do her best to lead them, should the need arise. She was regal indeed as she delivered her speech, and the people felt much relieved. Coriander stood in the crowd and also felt that Isabella would make a magnificent queen, gazing and smiling at her, in spite of his pain, for he loved her more than ever when he saw how strong and true she stood before them all. Isabella's heart felt as if it would break in two, for she also loved Coriander tremendously. How could she bear to marry another? She decided to end her speech before mentioning Prince Sage's impending arrival; for though she still accepted her fated union with a prince, she could not bring herself to tell Coriander in such a way. She decided to speak with him first; he deserved as much for loving her as he did.

The townspeople were provided with baskets of food generously filled from the royal kitchen and gardens. Upon receiving them, they drifted back towards their homes in the village in conversational groups. Isabella noticed Coriander staying behind, waiting for a chance to speak with her. By the gentle smile upon his face she could guess his heart's wish; for it was truly her own to be with him as well. Yet inside she was torn, for how could she make him understand that her dreaded betrothal to another was upon them? As it happened, Sir Bryony descended upon the princess just as Coriander approached the castle.

"Princess, you have had quite a day. Perhaps it would be best if you retired for the evening," said Bryony.

"Of course, Sir Bryony. I only require a moments word with a fellow citizen first; surely you understand?" replied Isabella. She turned then and saw her beloved nearing the castle, so she moved forward and met Coriander on the steps.

"Isabella, my dear!" cried the young man, and as he did so the two clasped hands. Sir Bryony was a bit startled, but he knew the princess could be trusted so he entered the castle alone. Tears began to form in Isabella's upturned eyes.

"You suffer on behalf of your parents," Coriander said, noting her tears.

"Yes, though I am trying not to worry; but there is another pain brewing in my heart as well."

"You are to be married, then?" Coriander had known the law of royalty marrying royalty. Yet in spite of it, even now, he held hope that something could be done. He loved his princess so dearly that surely such a love was blessed! His eyes conveyed as much to the girl, and she found herself feeling hopeful as well. It was most inexplicable; perhaps because they were holding hands and sharing tears; perhaps because the moon shone so brightly; perhaps for no reason at all; but both the Coriander and Isabella felt a surge of hope so strongly that both smiled a genuine smile.

"Perhaps!" said Isabella, though neither had mentioned their hope.

"Yes! Perhaps!" agreed Coriander.

"Let us meet tomorrow, after your work, and see if we can't find a way," the princess suggested. They agreed the young man would come to the castle and the two would speak to the advisors. Maybe the law could allow it; perhaps there was some overlooked loop-hole? All the pair knew was that their love was too strong to simply dismiss so quickly.

