

Defense Lessons  
A Frog Prince Short Story  
By: K. M. Shea

“I hear your beloved is taking defense lessons.” Colonel Friedrich smiled gamely at Lucien as he balanced a book on his fingertips.

“Yes.” Lucien rubbed his eyes and leaned back in his chair, grateful for the moment of reprieve from writing out missives and letters to send to the other representatives. “Since we appear to be stuck here for the next few weeks, I knew I needed to give her something to do, or she was going to become a plague on Severin’s staff.”

Severin, unlike Friedrich and Lucien, was slower to abandon his work. “I doubt they would ever consider her a plague. Heloise speaks very highly of her,” Severin said as he shifted through papers.

“Heloise?” Friedrich asked.

“His housekeeper,” Lucien supplied. “In any case, I suggested the lessons, but it was Severin who recruited Elle and some of his troops to teach her daggers and such. Though I suspect he had ulterior motives and really wanted to distract Elle.

Colonel Friedrich arched an eyebrow. “Distract her from what?”

Lucien shrugged. “I haven’t the faintest idea.”

“That’s the falsest lie you’ve ever told.” Severin finally pushed the papers aside and gave Lucien and Colonel Friedrich his full attention. “If it weren’t for *you* dripping information into her ear, I wouldn’t have to try so hard to keep her occupied so she won’t gallivant across the continent, spying on who knows what!”

Lucien jumped out of his chair and made his way to the door. “You know, Ariane is supposed to be taking her lessons right now. I think I’ll go see how she’s doing.”

“By all means, flee. I’m still aware of how you connive with my wife,” Severin said.

Colonel Friedrich smiled charmingly. “I always thought I had my hands full with Cinderella insisting on running her duchy in a hands-in-the-dirt manner. But my short stay here has taught me to be very grateful she has no inclination for battles or fights.”

Severin chuffed, but Lucien was out of the room and down the hallway before he verbally replied, so he missed whatever his brother said.

Lucien smiled as he made his way to the gardens, happy at the prospect of seeing Ariane. *All of these meetings with Severin and Friedrich have kept me cooped up and unable to see her. We have the rest of our lives to look forward to together, of course.... But I never thought I would miss my days as a frog, when I spent most of my time with her.*

He nodded to a set of footmen when he slipped through a door and abandoned the chateau for the gardens. He kept to the perimeter, trotting toward what he thought was the most likely area for Ariane and Elle to have slipped off to: the spacious area that surrounded a small pond and gazebo.

He passed by an area extensively walled off by tall bushes, glancing at it as he passed. Through an opening in the green wall, he saw a small squadron of guards arranged neatly and staring straight ahead. *Strange. Are Severin's soldiers holding informative meetings in the gardens now? Wait...*

Lucien paused, turned around, and returned to the opening. He stuck his head inside, his suspicions confirmed when he saw who stood at the head of the area.

“I applied the broom here—right where the skull meets his neck.” Ariane, holding a broom, lightly marked the spot on a soldier, who stood with his back to his companions.

Lucien gaped at the soldiers who, for all appearances, were watching Ariane with rapt attention as she explained exactly how she had taken a rogue mage down with nothing but a broom. The soldiers were genuine in their attention. In fact, if his eyes did not deceive him, it looked like the captain of the squadron was *taking notes*.

The soldiers who noticed Lucien saluted him, but when he waved them off, they instantly shifted their attention back to Ariane.

“My Papa,” Ariane continued, “mentioned the hilt of a sword could do much damage when struck here, but a broom actually has an advantage over a sword in this case. I was able to hit upwards—much like an athlete throwing a javelin.”

Elle, her arms folded across her chest, nodded thoughtfully from where she stood with the first row of soldiers. “When using a sword, you must strike downwards which *does* give you more momentum, but by striking upwards, you could move much faster and had less of a chance of catching the target's attention, yes?”

Ariane beamed. “Exactly. Here—please turn, Thèò, so I may show them from a different angle.”

The display-soldier obediently shuffled into a side view so Ariane could demonstrate how she jabbed at the mage.

“Using a broom for lethal force is quite creative,” a soldier standing next to Elle mused. “Do you think we could request additional training? It might be useful in emergencies.”

“At the very least, Intelligencer Rangers should experiment with it,” Elle said. “I received training for daggers, crossbows, short swords and more, but never anything *practical* like a broom.”

The soldiers around her nodded.

“A fire poker is also useful in times of trouble,” Ariane added. “But a broom is much lighter, easier to jab with, and—I believe—far more unassuming.”

“After the mage fell to the ground, how did you further maim him, Mademoiselle?” the captain asked.

“Ahh. Then I did use downward momentum, for I slammed the butt of the broom into his throat.” Ariane twirled her broom and demonstrated the movement.

Elle whistled. “No wonder he stayed down.”

“Very effective,” a soldier agreed.

The captain of the squad narrowed his eyes and studied Ariane. “Perhaps instead of daggers, we should train you in polearms.”

Elle shook her head. “She can’t easily carry a polearm around with her and avoid notice.”

The captain raised an eyebrow. “And daggers are better?”

“She can hide one up each sleeve of her dress,” Elle argued. “That’s the only reason I endure the drooping sleeves on my winter dresses.”

“What about summer, when dress sleeves cover little more than shoulders and upper arms?” Ariane asked.

Elle beamed. “Oh, I have a solution for that! Hair pins sharpened to a point so they are dagger sharp!”

*I’m not sure if I am proud of Ariane or horrified that she is going to prove all my fears correct—she’ll likely wade into any fight that takes place in her general vicinity.* Lucien shook his head and slowly backed away from the rather informative display.

Though he would rather have Ariane more concerned with her safety, a part of Lucien was relieved to have walked in on the defense session. *It's proof. Even when she marries me and is crowned a princess...she's not going to change.*

Lucien smiled as he ambled back to Severin's study. "She'll always be Ariane: my bold maid."

The End