

Cinderella Extra Chapter

By K.M. Shea

When Cinderella was eighteen, Queen Freja almost killed her.

“Cinderella, there you are, darling. I wanted to let you know that I intend to announce my pending retirement tomorrow,” the Queen said.

Cinderella—who had been eating a late breakfast—inhaled her honey porridge and coughed for five minutes—upsetting the servants with her evident demise—before she could speak. “I beg your pardon?”

“I’m stepping down from the throne. Come winter, you will be crowned Queen of Erlauf,” Queen Freja said.

“I think I hear someone calling me. Yes, I do,” Cinderella said, fleeing the room.

Queen Freja pursued Cinderella at a leisurely pace. “You cannot run from your future, Cinderella. You will be Queen of Erlauf.”

Cinderella stopped. “Yes, I agreed to that when I married Friedrich. But, My Queen, this is too soon! Friedrich and I have not been married for even a year, and—more importantly—I have a barely rudimentary grasp of governing and ruling. I haven’t gotten a chance to delve into studies on economics, military defense, and public programs. I’m not even learned enough to be Lord Diederick’s secretary.”

Queen Freja wore an amused half smirk, reminding Cinderella of the queen’s son. “Cinderella, it is precisely because you are aware of your shortcomings that I know you are ready to rule.”

“My Queen,” Cinderella protested.

“Enough. It is not yet fall. You have a season to prepare yourself—which is more time than I had before I ascended the throne. You will do well. Good morning, Cinderella,” Queen Freja said before she glided off.

Cinderella shoved her scarlet, shoulder-length hair out of her face. “This is unacceptable,” she said.

“Mother announced you are to be crowned Queen this winter, I take it?”

Cinderella whirled around to face her husband. “You *knew*?”

Friedrich shrugged and allowed an infuriating smirk to spread across his lips. “I was informed this morning. Father told me he would not be following mother’s cue and stepping down from his position of Commander, however, because though *you* are ready to be queen, I am not fit to be the commander,” he said, his tone wry.

“I...,” Cinderella started.

“Need to sit down,” Friedrich said, whisking a chair under Cinderella as her legs gave out.

“Friedrich, we must convince your mother that this is foolishness. I am not ready to rule!” Cinderella said, grabbing his jacket and yanking on him so he crouched to her level.

“I thought you would welcome this,” Friedrich said, studying Cinderella’s face. “You will have absolute control over the government. You may mold it as you please.”

“I don’t want to have absolute control. Not right now!” Cinderella said, wringing her hands.

“Why? What distresses you so? When we wed, you seemed to accept, perhaps even look forward to the day you would be queen.” Friedrich said, standing to his full height again.

“Yes—decades from now!” Cinderella said. “Your mother is hale and young. I thought surely she would rule for another twenty years, easily.”

“So you didn’t get to enjoy twenty carefree years?”

Cinderella yanked Friedrich back down. “NO! I LOST TWENTY YEARS OF STUDYING AND TUTORING!”

Friedrich blinked a few times before smiling. “I see how it is: you were thrown into your Duchess title and were forced to reckon with your ignorance while trying to make Aveyron survive. You are afraid this will be a repeat.”

“It’s *terrifying* to have such responsibility and to be a dunce,” Cinderella said. “I could easily make the wrong decision and bring ruin upon Erlauf.”

“No, you won’t,” Friedrich said, affectionately kissing Cinderella’s cheek. “Mother’s retiring, but she will gladly advise you. You can have as many advisors as you want, you know.”

“If she’s willing to be my advisor, why in the name of Erlauf is she retiring?”

“Because the change Erlauf desperately needs can’t happen under her rule.”

“...*what?*”

Friedrich kneeled. “Those of Trieux do not trust her. We will not reconcile as long as she is queen. You, Cinderella, can unite our people. You have both Trieux and Erlauf supporters who will help you mend this tear. That is why Mother is stepping aside.”

Cinderella leaned forward, resting her head on Friedrich’s shoulder. “I’m scared, Friedrich.”

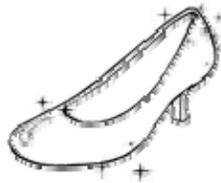
Friedrich smoothed her hair. “I know, Pet. But Mother would not step down if she did not think you were ready, or worthy,” he said. He hesitated, and added, “I know you have been sidetracked with your learning and schooling, but isn’t this what you wanted? The chance to unite our countries so we can stand against the pending darkness?”

“I didn’t think it would be so soon. I thought I could stand behind Queen Freja and soften the family’s image. I didn’t think I would be so *alone*,” Cinderella said.

Friedrich pulled back so he could look at Cinderella’s face. “You are not alone. You are my wife...and my queen. I will not leave you until the day I die.”

The intensity of his eye made Cinderella feel the weight of his words. She nodded. “Together, then?”

“Together,” Friedrich promised, leaning forward to kiss Cinderella on her lips.



The remainder of summer and all of fall was a swirling, chaotic mess. Cinderella’s teachers (several government figures, Lord Diederick, and her lady’s maids) assured Cinderella of her success, but they seemed to fear that when she ascended the throne, there would be some sort of written test she would have to pass.

They used every moment of her day to impart knowledge, quiz her, or press a book into her hands. One of her lady’s maids (the formidable Lady Gertrude, who used to be an ambassador to Sole) even read to her while she bathed.

Everyone seemed to fear she would be offended by their frantic preparations, but Cinderella welcomed them openly and enthusiastically.

Cinderella’s only respite was her weekly morning visit to Aveyron.

“I am impressed the duck pond was finished so swiftly,” Cinderella said, standing with Gilbert and Jeanne in the yard, watching the newly purchased ducks swim in their home. (Duck

eggs, Cinderella was told by the palace chef, were valued over chicken eggs for baking due to their size and distinct taste. Cinderella hoped to serve a niche market with the additions to the Aveyron household.)

“Yes, Madame” Gilbert said. “Have you need of anything else?”

Cinderella shook her head. “That is all. Thank you for showing me the new pond, Gilbert.”

“My pleasure, Madame,” Gilbert said, bowing before he left

“...Do you know if they really do lay green eggs, Jeanne?” Cinderella asked, ambling towards the ducks.

“Your dress, Madame,” Jeanne was quick to say.

Cinderella paused and looked down at the full skirts of her dress. “I forgot about that. Being home makes me forget what I am. Thank you, Jeanne,” Cinderella said, returning to the stand with Jeanne on the goat-trimmed lawn.

“Are you...,” Jeanne paused.

Cinderella was still and stared at the ducks instead of the housekeeper. Jeanne was worse than a skiddish horse, and she was terribly aware of class divisions—although Cinderella had done her best to teach the older girl otherwise. Cinderella waited for her to finish her thought.

When Jeanne finally did speak, Cinderella almost fell over in shock.

“Are you happy, Madame?”

Shocked by the frank question, Cinderella stared at the housekeeper. “I beg your pardon?”

“You were very joyful when you first married, Madame. But lately,” she tapped her forehead.

“Yes?”

Jeanne cringed. “Your worry lines—the same ones you had for a year after you became Duchess—have returned.”

Cinderella blinked. “You notice small details like that?”

“When it pertains to you, yes, Madame.”

“Oh. Thank you, Jeanne. You are right. The succession has me...apprehensive. Too many things can go wrong.”

“We believe in you, Madame.”

“We?”

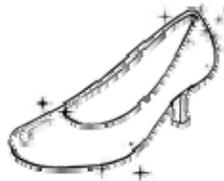
“The people of Trieux.”

Cinderella chuckled. “Vitore has been busy gossiping in the markets, has she?”

“You don’t need to be perfect, Madame. We can be patient. As long as it pleases you, we will be considerate of Erlauf.”

Cinderella inhaled. “Thank you, Jeanne.”

“My pleasure, Madame.”



Cinderella jumped when Friedrich and Colonel Merrich barged into her personal study two weeks before the crowning ceremony.

“Good afternoon. Please, do come in,” Cinderella sarcastically said as her husband stalked across her study.

“Pardon the intrusion, Your Highness,” Merrich said, removing his military hat from his head and bowing.

Friedrich planted his fists on Cinderella’s desk. “Mother tells me you are still balking.”

“I only asked if we could push the ceremony off until after our wedding anniversary. It would be more proper,” Cinderella said.

Friedrich pulled back in disgust. “You’re just buying time!”

“So what if I am?” Cinderella asked, her voice sharp.

“We need you! The country needs you. Why can’t you see that?”

“Maybe because I’m so green and inexperienced, I couldn’t name all the lords of Erlauf if my life depended on it!” Cinderella snapped.

Merrich approached the arguing couple and handed a satchel to Friedrich.

“You’re concentrating on the wrong thing. You’re so concerned with being proper and right that you don’t understand why Mother is passing off the crown.”

“Of course I’m concerned with being right! A queen *has* to act as is best for her country.”

“You weren’t proper when you donned servants’ clothes and worked side by side with your servants.”

Cinderella hesitated.

“None of your Trieux colleagues would have said you were right to plant flowers or to associate with me,” Friedrich continued.

“Yes, but those are personal reflections on me. Now an entire country sways in balance,” Cinderella said.

“An entire country that will be swallowed by darkness if you don’t deign to run it with your imperfect self,” Friedrich said.

“What do you mean?” Cinderella said.

“I think you’ve forgotten your original goal. So I mean to jog your memory,” Friedrich said, reaching to the satchel. He threw a black belt on Cinderella’s desk, as if it were a dead snake. Rat pelts and black crystals hung from it, and Cinderella’s skin crawled as she looked at it.

The last time Cinderella saw it, it was on the corpse of a black mage who tried attacking her. Before he died, he told her Trieux would fall, and Erlauf would collapse thanks to the bitterness and hatred that festered between the people. He spoke of a country of darkness and evil.

“This is your real enemy. Not your inexperience, nor your ignorance. This is an enemy that will take advantage of all the hate if you do not step up and do what Mother cannot do,” Friedrich said, leaning over the desk.

Cinderella was silent.

“She’s giving you the crown because she believes in you, Pet. She thinks you can do what she cannot achieve. She has too much bad blood with Trieux. As for you, those of Erlauf do not hate you; they are curious. Remember who the enemy is, Cinderella.”

Cinderella leaned back in her chair as she recalled the dark mage.

“Have I gotten through to you?” Friedrich asked.

Cinderella glanced up at him. “Please leave,” she said, not unkindly.

Sensing she was not angry with him, Friedrich smiled. “As you wish,” he said, taking her hand and kissing it. He reached for the belt, but Cinderella stopped him.

“Leave it, please. If you can...”

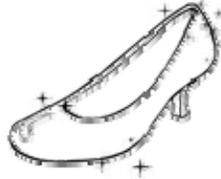
Friedrich nodded.

“Come, Friedrich. Let’s leave the future queen to her thoughts,” Merrich said, slinging an arm over Friedrich’s shoulders before pulling him away. “Good day, Your Highness.”

“Good day to you, Merrich,” Cinderella said, her voice creased with amusement.

When the colonels left her, Cinderella rose and walked to a window. She looked out at the sunshine, and the bare trees, and the few robust evergreens that were planted near the palace.

“Although it looks safe, we are at war,” Cinderella said. She glanced back at her desk, her eyes lingering on the grotesque belt. “We are **at war**,” Cinderella repeated with conviction. A smile crawled across her lips. “And the first move is mine.”



Cinderella and Queen Freja stood side by side on a dais in the throne room of the palace. Commander Lehn, Friedrich, and Friedrich’s brother Johann stood three steps down. The room was packed. The crowd trailed out into the hallway, down the palace, and in the streets below. The people of Trieux came from all distances, eager to see one of their own placed on the throne of Erlauf. Lords, ladies, army officers, and citizens of Erlauf were also there to salute their queen as she made her final speech as the monarch, as well as to get a glimpse of the princess who would replace her.

Cinderella knew this. And yet, her heart was calm, and she looked out at the crowd without a shred of fear. She studied faces in the crowd, only vaguely aware of Queen Freja’s speech.

“...thank you for your years of support. My reign is a time that will be remembered not because of me, but because of Erlauf’s expanse and increase in power,” Queen Freja said. “It has been my honor to rule, but I recognize my reign has come to an end. It is time for a new generation to take the reins of power. And so, with both sorrow and joy, I abdicate my title and position as Queen of Erlauf.”

Queen Freja removed her crown—a gold creation with rubies and onyx—and set it on a velvet cushion.

“The next queen and ruler of Erlauf will be Princess Cinderella, wife of Prince Cristoph Friedrich VI,” Freja said, taking a different crown off a velvet pillow.

When Cinderella saw what was to be her crown the night before, she thought Freja must certainly have ordered it to be made for her. Commander Lehn, however, told her that it was a very old crown jewel—perhaps the oldest of the Erlauf collection. The legend was it belonged to a Trieux princess who married the third son of an Erlauf King. Months after her wedding, Erlauf was hit by a terrible plague, wiping out nearly a third of the country’s population—including the King and his three sons.

“It is said they designed it so she would remember where she came from, and where she was now,” Commander Lehn said.

“What was her name?”

“No one knows. It’s been so long, we lost record of her. But we from the military will never forget her.”

“Why?”

“Because she was the one who forged us, who made the military the power it has today. This crown is the highest compliment we can give you, Cinderella. Please, accept it.”

Commander Lehn’s words echoed in Cinderella’s memory as Queen Freja—no, now she was only Lady Freja—approach Cinderella with the crown held high so all might see it.

It was a beautiful, delicate thing, made of white platinum that shone brighter and clearer than gold or silver. It had one jewel—a ruby that was the same deep scarlet color as Cinderella’s hair—and instead of curling in one solid piece, it was constructed with layers and layers of platinum, cut and forced to form popping swirls, vines and—placed on either side of the ruby—a delicate unicorn and a roaring dragon.

“Cinderella,” Freja started. “Do you swear to be faithful and true to Erlauf and her territories?”

“I do.”

“Do you swear you will uphold the laws of Erlauf and do what is right and just before all?”

“I do.”

“Do you swear to protect and honor Erlauf?”

“I do.”

“Then I crown you Queen Cinderella, ruler of Erlauf,” Freja said, easing the crown onto Cinderella’s head.

It was lighter than Cinderella thought it would be, but she was painfully aware of its presence.

“Hail, Queen Cinderella. Long live the Queen,” the onlookers said in one voice before those of Trieux and the First Regiment broke ranks and cheered and whistled.

Freja bowed to Cinderella and joined her husband on the lower step, leaving Cinderella alone on the dais.

But I’m not really alone, Cinderella thought, glancing at Friedrich and his family before shifting her gaze to her tutors, advisors, and—pressed in the very back of the room—Aveyron’s servants, easily identifiable by the bands of scarlet they insisted on wearing.

Cinderella thoughtfully studied her new subjects. Some of them still shouted and cheered and carried on. Others—those of Erlauf who were just now getting their second glance of her, the first being her wedding—merely watched her, as if hoping for a way to gauge her.

Cinderella took a deep breath and began her first speech as the absolute monarch of Erlauf. “I thank you for the warm greeting. I will honor my vows and see that Erlauf remains great,” she said, pausing when she was momentarily drowned out by cheers. “However, there is something you should know.”

Slightly alarmed, the Erlauf royal family looked up at Cinderella with wide eyes. This was not part of her practiced speech. Only Friedrich did not look surprised and/or frightened of what she would say.

“The separation between what was once Trieux and Erlauf must end. I stand before you today to declare **war** on the hatred and bitterness that has festered between us,” Cinderella said.

The room was utterly silent.

Cinderella boldly plowed forward. “We are united under one flag, in one country. It is time we act it. As queen, I ask for and expect your cooperation. No more division; no more hate. The world is waiting for us to fall. It *wants* us to fail. I dare to proclaim that as long as I breathe, joy and peace will run rampant in Erlauf. I will do whatever it takes to see that this country is healed. And so, as my first act as queen, I am ratifying the creation of a new committee: the

Prosperity Campaign. Lord Diederick and Armel Raffin will serve as the committee heads. The purpose of the Prosperity Campaign is to seek amnesty between our people—not through polite conversation and compliments, but through improvements and changes. The committee’s first act will be to see that in every city of Erlauf, Trieux town criers and city boards will be installed to keep citizens informed of the government’s actions—of *my* actions. They will also aid the Erlauf Army, which will begin accepting applications from Trieux citizens immediately. Additionally, Erlauf Army bases and permanent fortresses will be built in what was once Trieux territory. This land is no longer Erlauf’s or Trieux’s, but *ours*.”

The room was abuzz with the news. Officials whispered to each other; lords and ladies exchanged looks, and the few commoners that were present, gaped.

From the stairs, Commander Lehn eyed Cinderella. He quirked an eyebrow at her before giving her a wry smile. Weeks ago she had talked to him about the possibility of allowing Trieux citizens into the Army and building more fortifications in Trieux. He had heartily approved of the ideas, although she might have led him to believe she would install these changes a month or two after her crowning, rather than on the first day.

Cinderella was knocked from her musings by the first whistle.

It came from the direction of several officers of the First Regiment. Soon afterwards, the servants of Aveyron started clapping. Their approval nudged the others in the room, as the cheering and jubilation began anew.

“Long live Queen Cinderella!”

“Bless Queen Cinderella!”

“Hail, Queen Cinderella!”

If Cinderella was being honest, she thought her opening act would have made her woefully unpopular. Instead, it seemed to have an opposite effect. Both Trieux and Erlauf citizens greeted Cinderella’s decree with hopefulness, if not joy.

The Erlauf Royal family seemed to take it in stride. Lady Freja bowed to Cinderella, and discreetly pinched Johann until he did the same. Friedrich smiled at his wife and mouthed *Well done, Pet*, before he winked at her and bowed with his family.

For a moment, Cinderella’s heart welled with love for her husband and his family. They were more understanding than Cinderella ever dreamed, and Friedrich’s delight in her fiery temper and speeches warmed her heart.

Cinderella swallowed before she stepped forward to the edge of the dais and looked out at her still-cheering subjects. Her lips curled until she wore a complete smile on her face. It was not a smile of joy or happiness, but the pleased smile of a general who knows when victory has been won.

Just try and take us, Cinderella thought daringly of the deceased black mage and his allies. *Erlauf will NEVER fall.*