

“I don’t dance,” Rob grumbled, throwing Elodie an absolutely foul glare. “I would never subject them to my lumbering feet.”

“I’ll teach you,” Cleo nearly shouted with glee. “Let me find Pru—she has my mask. Then I’ll meet you on the floor!” She scurried to find the royal nursemaid with the sort of boundless energy that nearly made Elodie want to dance, too. Instead, she sighed deeply and rummaged through the left pocket of her gray satin gown, pulling out a small mask of black lace.

“She’ll have me waltzing with her until midnight.” Rob reached for the ribbons of his sister’s mask, tying what Elodie knew would be a perfect bow to secure it tightly on her head. The mask was simple and slightly itchy, but Elodie only planned to attend the festivities long enough to be seen. “I hate you sometimes, you know,” Rob grumbled.

“I know,” Elodie agreed. “But you love me more.”

“Maybe,” Rob conceded as he put on his own eye mask of black leather. The music swelled, a tune bold and bright and beautiful. The Loyalist who was standing guard gave them a nod of recognition, reaching for the door. Elodie steeled herself, slapping on a false smile.

She would stay for one hour.

She would eat two lingonberry tarts.

And then, Elodie Warnou—whose mother was dead, who had been passed over for the position of Queen’s Regent, who would go down in the history books as a mere footnote—was going to bed.