

Broken Rules

by

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cover art

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What if...

Cinderella hadn't fancied Prince Charming?

Time moves on

It is now many long years later...

Broken Rules

"Oh...my...lawks!"

I thought my ears were kidding me. I got the *say WHAT?!* reaction all the way through, only I couldn't let it out because I was on the train. People would think I was weird.

Besides...he was cute.

Yes. *He*.

Eye Captain Kidd ewe knot!

And he was staring at me. "You're her!"

I'd thought he was going to say I'd got my breakfast on my suit or something - what was I supposed to say to that? Well...he *was* cute, and cute guys don't talk to me every day, or...hm. Ever.

"I'm who?" I sounded exactly how I expected to sound: stupid.

I could see him starting to squirm. "Eh, uh, um...I mean, haven't I seen you before...?"

I sighed a bit and dropped my glasses down a fraction to look at him over the rims. "Re...ally...?" It was one of my best, and it worked as well as ever. He went through several shades of embarrassment before settling on purple and muttering a barely intelligible "Sorry", but I still wished I hadn't done it.

He...sparkled.

I could feel my joints locking up. The muscles too. Especially the ones concerned with breathing. My body did *not* want to breathe just then, but I forced it to anyway, and deliberately shoved my glasses back in place. The tint did its job perfectly: through polarised shades of grey he looked like any perfectly ordinary, if annoyingly pretty, teen.

Boy band material.

He started fiddling with his phone. Probably searching

for an app. Or texting. Do all teenagers have bionic thumbs now? I drop mine when I try doing that one-handed thing. I diverted my gaze out of the window at the zooming scenery and decided I'd forget I saw him.

Shame it was such a grey day...the reflection was perfect.

He looked up over his gadget and caught me.

Holy-!

No. I was definitely *not* falling for a smile like that, even if he did have the prettiest blue eyes...

"This is you, right?"

He shoved the phone at me, screen first and I was staring at...me.

It was an old photo. Pre digital. *Awful!* It was even worse than the one on my passport and had been bad even before someone scanned it in low res. It was that bad I could probably have gotten away with saying it wasn't me, but I was so caught up staring at the person in the shot standing next to me that I missed the moment.

There were really two people. One was the tall Prince Charming type glomming on my arm and the other was the one I was looking at. Almost out of shot, caught by the lens before he could get away...

It was Him.

"Where" How did I manage not to sound like a strangled chicken? "did you find that?"

"Mum had it. I mean, it *was* her camera took it and dad wanted to keep it for some reason. Don't know why. I mean, what sort of idiot wants souvenirs of his failures?"

The photographer...I couldn't remember the photographer at all. Until I looked at that picture I couldn't have told you what the tall guy looked like either.

But I could've drawn Mr Camera-shy from memory.

"So you're...?"

"Yup."

I waited.

It was a really *good* blush. "You're going to make me *say* it? On a *train*?!"

I couldn't let him have all the fun. I lifted an eyebrow and watched him wriggle.

He sighed. "I'm a...mutter."

"A what? I didn't hear."

"Muttermutter."

"I must be going deaf. Still didn't quite..."

He leaned over, pronouncing exaggeratedly "I'm a fairy godmother. Satisfied?" and was still young enough that being embarrassed in public made him want to cry a bit too.

I couldn't help snorting. Really. I didn't mean it.

But it took me a minute to get back in speaking mode. "You know, you really should do something about that job title. Or maybe, I don't know...get a sex change?"

He threw it back at me deadpan. "I can't be a godfather. Can't do the voice. And dresses don't suit me, so..." He flopped back in his seat. "Damn. You're just like he said. More down-to-earth than a landslide. I'll bet that was why you lost that guy."

"That was years ago...and I didn't *want* 'that guy'." I could smile now that I thought about it, when I'd avoided thinking about it for so long. But it really was so long ago that the thoughts felt dusty. Funny how all those years had slid by and I hadn't even realised it was safe to look at those memories now.

It was even almost funny to find out He'd married the photographer. Despite my not remembering her, I was pretty sure everyone else there was human...which meant fairy godmothers lie.

He lied to me that he couldn't marry a human.

"So...you're *his* son...?" I wasn't expecting him to fill in the gaps. It's like half-hearing an introduction at a party and spending the rest of the evening having to refer to someone as 'um'. I didn't get it back then either, why they weren't allowed to give out their names-

"Alan's. Yes." He shocked me all the way out of my past with ease.

Oh. Another lie then. Or simply a put off. I held onto the hurt the same as always, somewhere inside, secretly, but I was happy to see the next to last station name whiz by.

I started to get up.

"Why?"

"Excuse me?"

"Why didn't you want him? He was rich, well-born, educated..."

Oh. That. "Incompatible expectations. He wanted a doll to sit pretty and listen to his woes... and after about five minutes in his company I wanted to add to them." Actually 'rip his face off' would have been nearer the mark.

Oops. I think some of that must have slipped into my expression. "Besides. There was someone else...Well. Nice seeing you. I'm getting off at the next stop."

I did that sort of smile goodbye thing and he smiled back.

I'm not sure I caught exactly what he said as there were others pushing to get by, but it looked oddly like "Yes. I know."

Then there was the bustle of being squashed in the crowd by the door and managing to be last out into the cold of a damp, grey morning - and I nearly wasn't out at all. My stupid heel caught on the step and I wound up balancing on one foot like an idiot crane as I fished back for the shoe.

A hand brushed by mine a moment before the door shut.
He knelt in the puddles like a thin, silver-haired ghost,
wrestling the thing back onto my foot.

"This fits, right? I know it just came off-"

I used his back for a hand rest and yanked the thing out
of his hands to do it myself. I stamped a bit hard. He got
splashed.

It's weird being addressed from hip level. "That
was...remarkably inelegant. You always could make me feel
like an idiot."

From the idiot kneeling in the puddle...

Then he looked up and it was those eyes and that smile.
"Hullo, Cinders."

"...Hullo, Alan..." Not that I mind a man on his knees,
but...I held out my hand. "You're ruining that suit."

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