



Ain't No
Princess

by
Alessa

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Slouching further in my chair, I crossed my arms over my chest as the music thudded and people jerked around awkwardly, making random motions that supposedly represented dancing. I heaved an irritated sigh... *I. Hate. Dancing.*

No, I'm sorry; I don't hate it.

I loathe it.

And I'm pretty sure it loathes me right back... If that's even possible.

And yet somehow, under an unexplained set of circumstances of which I'm still trying to figure out the details, my friends, who right now are *not* on my "best friends" list for this specific reason, had managed to dress me up in a tight, pink halter top dress, two-inch heels, make-up that supposedly brought out my "emerald" eyes, and—now I admired them for this—tamed my unruly chestnut ringlets into pin straight hair. Then, finally, after one hell of a fight, dragged me kicking and screaming all the way here. But after that, their success ended. After I was unceremoniously dumped at our school gym hall, I went straight for the chairs lined up on the side, and no amount of protests, threats, or bribes could convince me to get up and dance.

See, here's the thing about dancing: I used to like it... once when I was five. But you've got to understand, dancing becomes kind of painful when you see the object of your affection and realise it would be socially awkward, if not downright unacceptable, to engage with this person simply because she happens to share the same gender as you.

Looking up, I groaned. Think of the devil... It seems she spotted me.

Ariel smiled. I glared. Maybe she wouldn't come this way.

Yeah... *riiiight.*

Did I mention that all of this is a gazillion times harder when the person of my affection is also my best friend?

"Hey, Mia."

Well, it is. It's hard for me not to go weak at the knees and ignore my rapidly beating heart and butterflies in my stomach when she smiles her gorgeous smile at me, the one where she shows her perfect, pearly white teeth in an amazingly attractive manner.

Like... she was doing right now.

Damn her.

"Sup?" Short. Simple. Upset.... at the dance, not her. But she knew that, which is why she smirked, seeming to find pleasure in my pain. Again, I repeat... damn her.

"You look lonely, Mia."

You look adorable, I thought, looking up into her caramel eyes. She shook some of her sandy hair out of them and tilted her head, her glossy lips curling into a curious smile. I could feel a blush creeping onto my cheeks and was glad the gym hall was dark and shot through with rotating disco lights. I averted my eyes and shrugged.

"Wanna dance?"

My eyes snapped up to her, then at the people around me. Was she talking to me?

"No!" How did I manage to say that? Oh, right... my mouth is on autopilot. Stupid mouth.

"Aww... c'mon, Mia. Why not?"

"Are you insane?" I snapped at her. "Let me remind you, Ariel. You're a girl, and so am I. Girls don't dance together. Besides..." I mumbled now, looking at my feet. "I don't dance. Not with a boy, not with a girl, not even with an alien. Period."

"Why not?"

"I *can't* dance." That was no lie. There is no coordination in these gawky, adolescent limbs.

"But you owe me one, Mia," she pleaded, taking a seat beside me.

"A dance?" I asked, raising an eyebrow. I remember no such promise.

"No, a favour. Remember, today in math class?" As if she thought I wouldn't, she reached out and grabbed a girl walking past us by the arm. "Jamie, doesn't Mia owe me one? You heard her say that, right?"

I looked up at Jamie, shaking my head *no*. A large grin spread across her face. "You totally saved her ass, Ari!"

"So, yes?"

"Yeah, absolutely!" Jamie squeaked in delight, gloating at my misery.

Ariel looked back at me as Jamie walked away. Poor girl; I would have to kill her later. "See?"

"I remember," I groaned. Math... got to love math. You see... No, I don't even want to go back there. I guess I *did* owe her one. "I don't see what that has to do with anything."

"My favour is a dance."

"With me?"

"With you."

I was afraid I was going to faint right there.

"Aren't you embarrassed to dance with... with a girl? While everybody is watching?"

"Of course not if it's with you."

"Ari, please..." my eyes pleaded with her in desperation.

"One dance," she begged, taking my shaking hand in her soft one. She pulled her famous puppy dog face, eyes wide, bottom lip quivering. "Please, Mi-Mi?"

My heartstrings tugged as much as I disliked the idea of dancing. How could I resist her?

"F— Fine."

She grinned in triumph, and I couldn't help but grin back. What can I say... it was contagious.

Standing up, she pulled me gently up with her and guided me out onto the gym floor. I could feel dozens of eyes following our progress. Behind me, someone giggled, and I think I saw a girl pointing at us while whispering to her friend. As luck would have it, the song that just started was a slow song. The familiar chords met my ears, and I froze in my tracks. This was a love song.

A love song!

Luckily, Ariel had heard my "I can't dance" confession, so she took my arms and slipped them around her neck. I felt her own encircle my waist as shivers danced across my spine.

"Now all you have to do is sway," she whispered, smiling encouragingly.

At a loss for words, I nodded mutely, keeping my eyes downcast as we swayed to the music. I had never felt more awkward or embarrassed in my life, and yet, I felt butterflies in my stomach and something resembling a smile slowly creeping back on my lips.

"What are you blushing for?" Ariel's hot lips whispered into my ear. "I'm not blushing! I'm... I'm hot!"

"Stop making up excuses, blusher."

"It—it's true! I don't blush. Ever. I think it's a medical condition, like when a person's circulation is all messed up and they're unable to blush and they look kind of pale, like I'm right now and..." I quickly put an emergency brake on my mouth before I embarrassed myself even more. Was I really blushing so much that she could tell under these lights?

Ariel smirked. "If you say so." Then, bringing her hand to my cheek, she asked softly, "Did I tell you how gorgeous you look tonight?"

I looked up at her in surprise, eyes wide, unblinking. "N—no," I stuttered, gazing up at her. The look in her eyes made me turn my head away. "You're just saying that," I muttered quietly.

"I'm not, Mia," she said gently, in a way that made me look up again. "This..." she took one of her hands from my waist to brush it against my hair, "is definitely different. Though I have nothing against the curls," she added with another smile. "And the dress?" Her eyes took a moment to travel down the

low neckline of my halter top, and I thought my cheeks would catch on fire right then and there. She looked back up, meeting my eyes and grinning. "Stunning."

"Th—thanks," I mumbled, my blush growing more intense—something that I didn't think was even possible. "You don't look half bad yourself, Ari," I said, managing a small smile. She didn't, either. White button-down blouse partially tucked in and half unbuttoned, her pink tie loose around her neck, and a green print mini-skirt with a pink belt around her waist. Beautiful was an understatement. I gave her another look. A very *big* understatement.

She feigned hurt, pressing a hand to her heart. "Gee, thanks," she said dryly. Then she winked. My heart fluttered in response. "I do mean it, though," she said seriously, giving my hips a gentle squeeze for emphasis. "You look adorable."

Biting my lip, I nodded, not sure how to answer that. We lapsed into silence as the song continued, the lyrics hauntingly familiar.

"Mia, I..." Ariel started, gazing deeply into my eyes.

The song ended. From behind us, I heard someone make a loud kissing noise, and then the entire gym hall exploded in laughter and jeers. I wriggled out of Ariel's grasp as she turned her head to see who was mocking us.

"Mia, wait!"

"I need fresh air!" I yelled over my shoulder, pushing my way through the scornful crowds. I knew I was running away... Why did she make me go through this? If she liked me, why did she want to humiliate me?

"Mia!" I heard her call from behind me again, but I didn't stop.

Cool air slapped against my face and arms after I finally made my way outside to our school's courtyard. Crossing my arms over my chest, I took a deep breath.

"Breathe, Mia, breeeeathe," I muttered, walking around in small circles, trying hard to stop my eyes from tearing up. I will not cry. Not over this, and not over Ariel. But it was useless. I slapped my cheeks, as if that would take the flame away from them and hide my tears after everything she had said. "She didn't mean anything by it," I said out loud, as if I had to reassure myself. How *could* she mean anything by it? We've only been best friends for the past, what, five, six years?

"Out here all alone?"

I turned at the voice and had to restrain myself from cringing. "Hey, Pete."

"'Ello, Mia," he said. He looked and sounded as though he had been drinking. Great. Maybe you can't tell, but Pete's not exactly my favourite person in the world. "Wacha doin' 'ere? Wanna dance?"

"No—Not particularly."

"Awww, c'moon, just one wittle dance," he slurred, holding his thumb and forefinger an inch apart. He started at them funny, as though they confused him. A grin broke out on his face. Yup. Definitely drinking.

"I don't think so, Pete."

He took a step towards me. I took a step back.

"Please?"

"No." With that I turned and walked away, still wiping my eyes. Or at least that was the plan. My shoes, those stupid freaking shoes, had other plans. Having found the perfect spot of mud from last night's rain, my left shoe decided it would make a perfect home, and just *had* to get stuck in it right away. As I turned, my shoe stayed, my foot went, leaving me one shoe on and one off, standing oddly unbalanced. Pete didn't notice.

"Just one dance?"

"No, Pete," I said, glancing at the shoe in the mud and grimacing. If I tried to get that, the end result would likely be the rest of me falling in the mud. Sighing, I hobbled over to the bench and sat down to inspect the buckle on my other shoe. The stupid thing was so complicated that I was still trying to figure out how the other one managed to come off.

"But..."

"I believe she said no, Pete."

Looking up, I saw Pete spin around to come face to face with... Ariel? What was she doing out here? For a moment, they stood there, and it was a battle of wits, with Ariel staring down harshly into Pete's eyes and Pete glaring defiantly back up. Then Pete sighed in defeat.

"Whatever, freak," he said, walking away, bumping against Ariel's shoulder as he did. Ariel stood there for a minute, then looked up at me and smiled.

"I do believe I just saved you," she said, and I smiled back at her.

"Probably," I admitted.

"Maybe I'm your knight in shining armour," she said playfully.

I laughed in response and looked down at my bare foot. "Girls can't be knights."

"Says who?" She asked in mock disbelief, then followed my gaze and saw my toes wiggling in the open air. Her eyebrows knitted together in confused curiosity, and then, spotting my shoe stuck in the mud, a grin broke across her face. She strode over to retrieve it and shook the mud off as she made her way to me. "Or maybe I'm your Prince Charming and you're my Princess."

"I ain't no Princess," I muttered under my breath as she knelt in front of me and slipped the shoe back onto my foot, making me wonder how she managed to work the stupid contraption of a buckle. "Which means you aren't Prince Charming."

"You're wrong, Mi-Mi," she said softly, tilting her head up to look at me. The look in her eyes made me stop breathing. "You're *my* Princess, whether you like it or not."

I couldn't tear my eyes away from her this time. She stood up slowly and sat next to me. I turned to face her as she took my hands in hers. Ariel's thumb circled the back of my hand, and I shivered. Her eyes held mine, and she seemed to be leaning towards me.

"But I ain't no Princess," I protested timidly.

"Nonsense," she breathed, and I could feel her breath tickle my lips. The next thing I knew, her hands reached up and pulled my head towards her, and her lips crashed against mine.

I was so shocked, I could barely respond. After a moment, Ariel pulled away and looked at me, her thumb brushing against my cheek. "Mia... say something," she said, her eyes pleading.

"I think..." I started. I had to clear my throat before I could continue. "I think I made a mistake."

I watched as her face fell. She bit her lower lip as if trying to stop her eyes from tearing up, and her hands left my cheek to fall into her lap. "But, Mia..."

"I think..." She looked up at me. I reached forward and grabbed her pink tie, using it to yank her towards me. "I—I think... maybe... you *are* my Prince Charming after all," I told her, right before our lips met. I could feel her smile into my kiss.

"If you say so, Princess."

The End