

## Rebel Witch: The Crimson Moth: Book 2

### TWELVE

### GIDEON

*PRINCE SOREN TO MARRY HEIRESS-IN-EXILE!*

*Prince Soren Nord and Lady Rune Winters, a witch recently escaped from the New Republic, wish to announce their engagement. The couple are keeping the wedding's date and location secret, citing privacy concerns, but hinted that the ceremony will occur within the month. The announcement comes hand in hand with Prince Nord's proclamation last night in Caelis, at the Royal Ballet, where he made it clear he supports Queen Cressida's claim to the Roseblood throne and will do whatever is necessary to help her secure it.*

SO, THE HAPPY COUPLE were in the capital.

If there was one thing Gideon knew about Rune Winters, it was that she loved fashion. As an aristocrat, Rune felt the need to keep up with whatever styles were currently in vogue.

And if there was one thing he knew about Soren Nord, it was that he liked to flaunt his things.

Suspecting the prince would want to indulge his new fiancée—and in doing so, show her off to the upperclasses of Caelis—Gideon headed for Caelis's wealthier shopping district to hunt for them. There, he planted himself against the wall of a tailor shop and waited, scanning the weekend crowds from the shadows.

It didn't take long before Gideon spotted them, and soon he was following the couple at a safe distance. He watched Soren escort Rune into a shop while the prince's bodyguards took their positions outside the door. In the window, faceless mannequins wore wedding dresses edged with lace and pearls.

Should he wait for Rune to exit and take his shot? Or was it better to get her alone? To do this somewhere private and escape undetected?

In the end, Soren chose for him. A few minutes after entering the shop, the prince emerged without Rune. Perhaps he considered it taboo to see her in a wedding dress before the ceremony. Or perhaps he intended to purchase his own matrimonial attire while Rune was trying on hers.

Whatever the reason, the prince stepped out, said something to the bodyguards, and continued down the road, taking one with him. The other stayed to guard Rune, keeping his eyes on the street merchants and their customers.

Gideon relaxed. One guard was easier to deal with than two.

*Time to get this over with.*

He headed for the shop. Unsure if the soldiers would recognize him, he swiped a fedora off a hatter's display and pressed it onto his head, hoping it matched the suit he wore.

Tipping the brim forward to shadow his face, he stepped straight past the guard and through the door.

A bell dinged overhead.

The guard briefly glanced at him, then returned to his scan of the street.

"Can I help you?"

The shop matron stepped out from behind the counter, clutching a cane, as the door shut behind him. Her silver hair was done up in an extravagant bun.

"G'day, ma'am." He scanned the shop and found it empty. *Rune must be trying something on.* He nodded toward the back, where a mirror stood with fitting rooms on both sides. "I'm looking for my fiancée. She's trying on a dress."

The matron looked Gideon's suit up and down. Her eyes narrowed, deepening her crow's-feet.

The suit had belonged to his father. His parents had been known as the Sharpe Duet, once famous dressmakers employed by the witch queens. Their garments were rare, and therefore priceless—or so Rune had once explained to him.

This shop matron seemed to disagree. Or perhaps she didn't recognize the designer. From the curl of her mouth, she thought Gideon's suit belonged in a discount charity store.

"You must have the wrong shop. Only one young woman is trying on dresses right now." Her tone said: *And she's well above your caliber.*

Gideon flexed his knuckles, trying to rein in his annoyance.

"I'm certain I have the right shop." He started around her.

She stepped to block him, holding out her cane like a scepter. For a woman so advanced in age, she moved unnaturally fast.

"Listen to me, boy. I don't put up with thieves."

A nerve in Gideon's jaw ticked. *A thief, am I?*

"If you don't leave at once, I'll call for the brute standing outside the door."

Gideon glanced across the shop. The fitting room curtains were all drawn back except one—where Rune was trying on dresses. Beyond the fitting area, there was bound to be a door. These buildings all had access to the back alleyways.

He considered retreating to the alley, finding the door, and using it to sneak back in. Except it was likely locked from the outside.

"Did you hear me, son?"

The bell over the door dinged again and a crowd of fashionable young women surged in, speaking in excited tones, their silk gloves fluttering as they spoke. The matron released Gideon from her hawklike gaze and drew her cane away, leaning on it once more.

She greeted the girls with a cheerful smile. She wouldn't want to be seen arguing with Gideon. Riffraff was bad for business.

The girls flocked toward the dresses on display.

*Out*, she mouthed to Gideon.

He tipped his fedora to her, stepping backward, and headed for the front door until the *clack clack clack* of her cane retreated to the other side of the shop.

“What I can help you with, dearies?” he heard her say.

He opened the door. The bell dinged again. But instead of stepping out, with the matron’s attention fixed on her new customers, Gideon quickly doubled back. Heading straight for the only occupied fitting room. He touched the pistol in his jacket but didn’t draw it. It was too soon.

*Don’t think, this time. Just shoot.*

As soon as he did, he’d bolt for the back door and use it to escape into the alley. Grabbing the fitting room curtain, he threw it back.

Rune was inside, wearing a white lace dress. Gideon didn’t have time to pull his gun on her, because she already had one of her own.

It was aimed straight at his forehead.