



## The Royal Rogue

**Elizabeth Carlton**

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*The Royal Rogue is an imaginative series-opening fantasy novel in which unlikely companions come together for a consequential quest.*

As introspective as it is adventurous, Elizabeth Carlton's fantastical romance novel *The Royal Rogue* opens the door to a world full of magic and responsibility, duty and destiny.

Apathetic Prince Jaycent rejects his crown after his parents succumb to an illness with no known cure. His cousin Rayhan takes to the throne in his stead as the official steward of Nevaharday, and Prince Jaycent becomes a recluse.

Months later, as Jaycent's dreams grow worse and encroach on reality, leaving real wounds in their wake, he seeks help from Levee, an apprentice of the royal stables. Levee is one of the rahee or "horsefolk" who can communicate with horses; she uses these insights to work her way past Jaycent's emotional boundaries. Together, the pair discovers that the prince's parents were never ill and that the real culprit in their demise hides behind lies and magic, fomenting a sinister plot to overthrow the kingdom's ruling family.

The protagonists are developed in time with one another. Levee is emotionally intelligent and forthright, and she exercises patience in drawing Jaycent out of his shell to confront his demons. Jaycent, meanwhile, is closed off and mired down by his grief for much of the story. He also learns by Levee's example to be attentive and, in time, receptive to different kinds of intimacy. Indeed, he learns to ask for others' consent before pushing boundaries despite his assignation as the rogue of the tale. Still, despite their intelligent development, their voices are sometimes awkward, particularly when they are just getting to know one another.

This series-opening book introduces a complex, detailed world with its own landscapes and social norms. Descriptions of it create a solid foundation for the narrative as a whole, although some explanations—as with those pertaining to some of the creatures and their capabilities and mannerisms—leave too much room for speculation. Conversely, some of the protagonists' obstacles are overcome with less of a fight than expected, as when a useful batch of scrolls surfaces to help them out of tight spots.

Action sequences drive the story forward, their movements clear and precise. They help break up the book's long stretches of exposition, which are written in a quite formal style. Adding further variety is the developing romance between Levee and Jaycent, which grows in the moment and is well grounded. And this volume closes with some questions resolved and others left open ended to generate interest in the coming installments.

An action-packed yet heartfelt fantasy novel, *The Royal Rogue* involves a romance between two people who find a purpose bigger than themselves.

KATELYNN WATKINS (March 9, 2026)

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