

Free excerpt of

DETERMINED

Bealevon Nolan

BookRix GmbH & Co. KG
81675 Munich

About **DETERMINED**

Prince Liam of Broskoe will no longer bow to his mother's outrageous orders. Because of his speech impairment, the result of a childhood illness, most people—including the queen—believe him to be a half-wit. Neglected in his upbringing, Liam has learned to take what he wants, by whatever means necessary, be it a lover, an education, or secret training as a spy. Forced into hiding, he flees to neighboring Doros and gets work in the kitchen of the castle keep.

Finley, Duke of Doros, finds himself between a rock and a hard place. The King of Carsson has once again demanded an increase to the annual levy, and Doros's resources are dwindling due to a poor harvest, worsened by early snows. Not even he, the mightiest of warriors, can stop winter from coming early, but he will not stand by and watch his people starve.

Two men—two lonely hearts—meet under the strangest of circumstances. Each learns to grapple with formidable enemies: not only the forces of Mother Nature, but the darker aspects of human nature. They must overcome greed, lust, loneliness, and betrayal, as well as their own insecurities, if they are to find that one thing that makes life worth all the trouble.

DETERMINED is a romance inspired by the nineteenth-century German tale *Allerleirauh*, written by the brothers Grimm. The most common English translation for this title is *All-Kinds-of-Fur*.

WARNING: In addition to depictions of violent combat and death, which some readers may find objectionable, this book contains graphic sex scenes and is unsuitable for underage readers.

Copyright © 2015 Bealevon Nolan

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior permission of the author. Please do not participate in or encourage piracy of copyrighted materials in violation of the author's rights. Purchase only authorized editions.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

Edited by Jonathan Penn (Romantic Penn Publication Services)

Cover art by Nordicfotos.de

Cover Photography used under license of Shutterstock.com

First Published December, 2015 by BookRix

Dedication

For my son.

You are an only child because no sibling could have lived up to your standards.

You are the best.

Determined

ONCE UPON A TIME, in a land far, far away, there lived a handsome young prince with an ugly voice. In fact, some believed he had no voice at all...



Chapter 1 – An Interrupted Night

PRINCE LIAM stepped into the servants' supply passage and closed the narrow bedchamber door behind him. His manner was guarded as he set his stockinged feet on the cold stones.

Step.

Step.

Pause.

At each intersection in the dimly lit corridor, he stopped to carefully crane his neck around the next corner.

No one in sight.

This modern palace included a tiled oven in every stateroom, and these hidden hallways had been built to allow the servants to fire them without disturbing the noble family or their guests. They were an ideal way of sneaking around unseen. They also made it easy for Liam to eavesdrop on his host, the Count of Sorren. Liam knew it was not *nice* to spy on his gentry, but it was informative. As his spying mentors had pointed out, tackling a small problem in time could spare a lot of headache later.

He neared the dining room from which he had excused himself but a quarter hour before, and was relieved to hear that the count still occupied it with his son, Steven. There was no mistaking the count's booming voice. It sounded as if they were indulging in some after-lunch port without the ladies. A few more steps and Liam crouched next to the wicket that opened the back of the oven for the servants to feed it. On this late-summer's day, the tiles were cold.

“...takes an afternoon nap? That boy is weak, I tell you!”

Pretending to take an afternoon nap, Dear Count!

“Father, why are you so upset with Prince Liam? I grew up with him in court, and he is a nice person.”

Thanks, Steven.

“I fear for our country when he becomes king. Just look at him: Clothed like a peacock— and that long hair! He is tiny and fragile, and his childhood illness left him almost mute. And those flapping hands.” Here the count *tsk-tsked*. “I hate to say it, but I wonder if his mother is not right in her assumption her only son is an imbecile!”

In his safe hideout, Liam raised his eyebrows.

“If you would look closer, Father, you would recognize how ingenious the prince is in the way he communicates with his gestures. He not only brings his points across, he can be funny at times. And you know he can speak. He just needs to prepare for it, and as it hurts him, he chops things off into short sentences. You know, like you do when you have a sore throat? I am sure he would get better if he’d use his voice more often.”

Huh? You think so? Hmm, perhaps I should give that a try.

“Concerning his hair and his clothes,” Steven continued, “I know for a fact that Queen Isabella insists he never cut his hair, because it shows his royal lineage. And she personally chooses his clothing, as she still thinks he is a dimwit and not capable of making reasonable decisions. That woman has no idea how much he takes in. People make assumptions about his lack of intelligence— like you just did— so they talk more freely in his presence. I wouldn’t be surprised if he already has a very good understanding of politics, despite the queen’s refusal to give him any kind of training.”

You’re on track, my friend!

“That’s my point, boy! If he doesn’t get an education, how shall he be leader of our kingdom and our troops?”

“He has well-trained soldiers like me, and other noblemen’s sons, to look after the army. And he will learn in time— remember when you told me how much Queen Isabella fumbled in the beginning? When she took over the regency after King Edward died in the last war with Carsson, she didn’t have a clue, either. You and the other counselors will have to help him, just as you helped her.”

Yes, Steven, I’m counting on them as well. As much as I learn listening in on their conversations, much of the information they base their decisions on is hard to come by.

The voice of the old Count took on an exhausted tone.

“He seems so disinterested, always having flings with men of every rank, and you know there are rumors of him being seen in the old part of the capital— amid a den of thieves and drug users.”

Uh-oh! I need to be more careful!

“I don’t believe him to use drugs or overindulge in drinking, he has a fine body— you haven’t seen him naked.”

“What? Did he bed you as well?”

Liam almost snorted. *Me and Steven? Never in a hundred years!*

A familiar snicker was audible before Steven answered.

“No, he never tried. He only makes advances if the other man first indicates an interest. But we grew up together and played the usual sports. Liam may be short, as you say, but he has a very fit body— he runs and rides with the best of them. Sometimes he is so reckless I believe he knows no fear!”

Thanks. I wish it were so, my friend. Liam’s throat closed as he remembered others reacting to his failed attempts at speaking.

Some hours of a pleasurable visit later, Liam descended the front steps of the mansion to bid the count and his wife farewell. His earlier good-bye to Steven had been their typical nonverbal banter, Liam using gestures as usual— but he had prepared his vocal cords for the moment of taking leave from his counselor. Liam looked Count Sorren straight in the eyes and said, in his gravelly voice, “Thank you... For your hospitality.”

“It— it was my pleasure, Your Highness.”



THREE HOURS later, when Liam dismounted in the yards of the royal summer palace, he was still grinning inside over the memory of the astonished Count.

Leading his horse around to the stables, Liam was met by the riding master who took the reins of the tired, steaming steed. Liam nodded to the familiar face— the man had taught him riding as a boy.

“How was your trip, My Prince?”

Still cherishing his small victory over Count Sorren, Liam tried to answer without first loosening his vocal cords. Instead of words, a loud croaking sound emerged.

Some seasonal helpers, working within earshot in the stable, snickered loudly. “Somebody did an awful job kissing that frog.”

Clenching his teeth, Liam turned back to his horse to hide his blushing cheeks. He fumbled with the cinch and worked his throat before he turned back to the riding master, rasping, “Fine... Just fine.” Straightening his spine, he dusted off his brocade riding coat and strode toward the kitchens. He didn’t turn around, but the sound from behind him was unmistakable— the old man cuffing the ears of the disrespectful stable workers.

The familiar cacophony of clattering crockery, chopping cutlery, and yelling cooks surrounded Liam like a warm blanket. He drew a deep breath and took a look around. Many of the female staff, and several of the males, greeted him with smiles. Out of habit, the prince nodded back politely, checking out the younger men in the room at the same time.

Disappointment. No new likely conquests in sight. Sighing internally, he greeted the yipping, tail-wagging dog that hurried toward him. Kneeling, Liam stroked the silky brown-white coat, making soothing sounds in the back of his throat.

His childhood illness had brought him close to death, and had left him incapable of speaking more than a few words at a time. He had taught himself to loosen his vocal cords to reduce the pain when he forced out short sentences. He got by with gestures, and those close to him knew every nuance of his expressions. Still, even his chamberlain and close friends couldn't keep the pity from showing in their eyes. Those who didn't know him tended to treat him like a simpleton.

Animals were the only ones who never judged him, and Liam loved them for it. Especially his tiny partner in crime, Sunny, who wiggled around his bent knees, enjoying the attention of her favorite person in the world. Some scraps had miraculously appeared on the table next to Liam, and he used them as rewards for the tricks he made Sunny perform over the next few minutes. When he was satisfied with her training, Liam rose and smiled at the near-toothless cook, who had often slipped him cookies when he was a growing boy, and who now provided the same for his four-legged companion. Liam left Sunny on her blanket, snatched some cookies, and ascended into the palace.

Considering his prospects for a suitable nighttime companion, Liam walked through the halls toward his room. Deep in thought, he registered belatedly the inviting gazes of the latest additions to the guards of honor, who were standing outside his bedchamber door. As soon as he had passed them, however, they made it to the top of his short list of options for the night, and he

couldn't suppress an expectant grin. Both soldiers were huge studs with short dark hair, dressed in impeccable uniforms— Liam's complete opposite.

Closing the door behind him, Liam licked his lips and undid the few pins that remained in his hair after his wild afternoon ride. He discarded his clothes, throwing the stained garments over the back of a chair. Being allowed to disrobe alone had been a major victory in Liam's constant struggle for independence. He had stubbornly dismissed the valet whom his mother had ordered to serve his every whim. At last he compromised by allowing one cleaning of his room per day, but otherwise he was gloriously alone and never happier about it than in situations like this. After brushing the dust out of his long tresses, he entwined them again into a braid. A slight tremor went through him as he imagined certain pairs of big hands holding on to it in the very near future, while riding him.

Having been robbed of any seducer's most basic weapon— speech— Liam had learned early on to accomplish his conquests via body language, using more or less subtle signs. After splashing some water onto his face and body, he chose a wide-cut silk sleep shirt that barely skimmed the crease of his protruding backside, showing off his sleek legs, which were well versed in wrapping around a partner. As he turned down the lanterns, Liam's bare feet sank into the exceptionally plush carpet he had insisted on for his bedchamber— his knees had thanked him many times for that decision.

Now, let's see if these guards are truly interested.

On his way to the door, Liam turned back the covers on his huge four-poster and relaxed his vocal cords to activate his hoarse voice. He turned the doorknob.

“Hello there...”



ABOUT TEN minutes later, both of the soldiers' uniforms were in severe disarray, and Liam was about to loosen the second pair of breeches bulging before his face, when a sharp knock at the door interrupted the proceedings.

“My Prince? Your mother wishes to see you.”

Sighing with disappointment, Liam closed his eyes and sat back on his haunches. Upon the silent nod they received from their disgruntled sovereign, both soldiers began to rearrange their clothing. Throwing on his dirty riding clothes over his sleep shirt, just to spite his obsessively neat mother, he stepped into the corridor and met the messenger— the castle's chamberlain, Pierre. With a sweeping motion of his hand, Liam put an end to the servant's bow. Straightening up, Pierre didn't bat a lash as the two disheveled soldiers emerged from his crown prince's sleeping chamber.

One look at Pierre's face, though, made Liam's stomach clench. The older man always wore a smile around Liam, even back when Pierre was one of the few people ever to visit a very lonely and ill boy in the palace's hospital wing. Pierre had found ways to cheer him up— in the beginning with hand puppets, and later by teaching Liam to play the mill game and checkers. Today Pierre's furrowed brows indicated a serious problem. Liam didn't ask, though. The man was discreet and would never take the liberty to speak out of place. Liam steeled his nerves and tried to remember any transgressions on his part that might have caused his summoning. Had some nobleman's son who'd shared his bed complained to the queen? But for something trivial like that, Liam wouldn't have been beckoned to the state chamber, where his faithful servant led him this night.

Pierre swung wide the massive double doors to admit Liam and then bowed, stepping backward as he pulled them closed on his way out. Liam took a look around the grand marbled room. He rarely saw the state chamber, as his mother never invited him to appear at her side. Other than the noblemen's sons and the palace domestics he grew up with, he was virtually unknown to the populace.

But someday, mother will ask me to attend— surely.

Queen Isabella, clothed as usual in full regalia, was sitting on the massive throne in the middle of the dais. The cold glittering of the jewels she wore in abundance reflected her personality. She was in deep discussion with the three eldest council members and Sir Forrest, the commandant of Her Majesty's troops. Liam was instructed to wait near the entrance, and he let his mind wander back four years, to the time when he had last interacted with this rigid soldier.



SIR FORREST, clad in civilian clothes, ushered the almost-sixteen-year-old Liam into the back room of a seedy inn. A rough-hewn table, four chairs, and a flickering lantern seemed to be the only concessions to comfort in this shack. Liam threw a disapproving glance around, until he met the eyes of the cavernous room's only other visible occupant. He was a short man like Liam, but much older— surely more than forty years— dark beard, dark eyes; he looked worn but confident. His clothes were old and were patched in many places, quite unremarkable. The older man's face broke into an amused smile as he returned the favor and checked the prince out, taking in the overdone rich clothes Liam's mother made him wear. Sir Forrest, noticing that no beverages were provided, mumbled under his breath and stepped out to procure something.

Left alone with the stranger, Liam toyed with his shirt cords, unsure how to proceed. But why not try out his newly acquired tactic of seducing his opponents to keep them off balance? He had used his good looks with increasing success in recent months. Liam let his long lashes flutter, half hiding his gray eyes before he flashed a coy glance, his fingers stroking slowly along the V of his shirt opening. Two things happened simultaneously: the older man before him laughed out in amusement, and for the first time in his life, Liam felt a cold and very sharp blade at his throat.

A rough hand pulled his ponytail, stretching his neck, and a low murmuring voice inquired from just behind his ear, "You want to wake up tomorrow, don't you?" After a careful nod of Liam's head, the voice hissed, "Then I advise you to leave him alone— he is taken."

His stretched vocal cords hurt more than usual as the prince nodded again and forced out, "Remove... The blade?"

A second later his head was free to move again, and he was able to distinguish his attacker in the dim light. A young man in his twenties— of the same height as his companion, but willowy, with light hair and eyes— gave him a disparaging look before he joined his older companion who was still chuckling. Slipping a hand around the waist of his younger friend, the dark man pulled him nearer.

"Down boy." He grinned before he pressed a tender kiss to the corner of his partner's lips.

Carrying a huge tray laden with mugs of beer and some food, the commandant returned and placed everything on the table. His eyes darted between the room's occupants, and he harrumphed.

"May I introduce Zarret." Sir Forrest pointed to the older man. "And this is his partner Tady. They have hinted they would be interested in taking on an apprentice." Liam acknowledged them with a short nod, his skin still tingling where the blade's point had pricked.

The commandant addressed the two strangers, “My friend here has asked for a military education. Usually that includes basic training as a soldier, wielding a sword, shooting the bow, digging trenches, functioning in a formation with his unit, and so on. But his height and—hmm—some other difficulties prevent that kind of training. As he insists on a chance, I thought of you two.”

Sir Forrest turned to Liam.

“Zarret is the reason we beat the Carssonian army so thoroughly ten years ago. Since then he, and later Tady as well, have been obtaining enemy intelligence for the army by performing reconnaissance in enemy territory and infiltrating the opponent’s headquarters. Whatever is needed in wartime, they can do it. In peacetime they work freelance for the watchmen to protect the monarchy and look out for any culprit who makes too much trouble.”

The prince considered the inconspicuous pair and raised his eyebrows in surprise. Zarret took one mug off the tray for himself and passed another to Tady. “Officially we are jugglers and musicians, we do magic tricks and some dueling demonstrations. One of those is always welcome, be it in an army camp or a castle.”

“And as soon as we are inside,” Tady added snuggling into Zarret’s side, “there is always a way to get the information or the item we need.”

Liam looked at Sir Forrest, whose gaze was fixed upon a spot on the ceiling, his face blank. “I shall become... A spy?”

Zarret’s brows narrowed to a V. “Don’t think this is quick or easy to learn boy! You will have to train more than you expect, and more often than not you will be alone on your mission. No comrades to bail you out—it’s your wit against the enemy.” Liam took his time considering, swallowing some beer. Until recently, he and all the noblemen’s sons had performed the same duties as pages at court. But now the others had started their military training, and his mother

had absolutely refused to let him join the army. She still thought him feeble minded. Instead the queen ordered him— something that galled him to this day— to take music lessons, of all things! On her insistence, a harp had been procured and a music teacher came to him twice a week. After two months he had mastered the basics, seduced the willing teacher, and gotten bored. Dissatisfied with his situation, he had cornered the commandant and pressed him for his help. As Liam's insistence had included a thinly veiled threat against the commandant's future career, the older man had arranged this appointment.

“What will you... Teach me?”

“Everything we know how to do, and most of that's illegal: sleights of hand, breaking and entering, how to win a fight by any means, poisons, and how to apply them, and so on. But for a complete education, you will need more than we have the capacity to teach. And as these other activities are legal, you will need to find other ways to learn them. For example, you will need to know how to entertain a group of people. Singing doesn't seem to be possible, so you might want to learn some instrument” —Liam's expression instinctively soured— “and make sure to take part in all the usual boy's competitions at court: lots of running, riding over rough terrain, climbing on trees and houses, shooting with a bow and arrow, fighting hand-to-hand. Your body needs to be fit and functioning. You might want to look for a personal dog.” Zarret took notice of Liam's lifted brows and explained, “You'll need somebody with better senses than yours.”

“Anything else?”

“We should meet at different places thrice a week, the first time will be tomorrow, here in the backyard.”

After a short pause, Liam nodded his consent. “Agreed.”

The old commandant had listened to the conversation with growing alarm, watching in disbelief as the prince he privately sneered at committed to a dangerous job.

“You mean, you want to do this?” He confronted Liam, who raised a narrow brow in inquiry.

“But— I thought, you would never, I mean...” Sir Forrest looked taken aback.

Tady’s eyes narrowed suspiciously, and his hand went to the small dagger at his side. “Why wouldn’t he do this— you said he asked for it?”

“Yes, but... but... he is the prince!” Both jugglers gasped, but the commandant continued, much too shaken to notice his slip, “I never thought he would take your offer...”

A carnal smile crept over Zarret’s weathered face, “So you are the little slattern we have heard so much about.” He put his mug down and stepped close. He stroked a warm thumb over Liam’s bottom lip in a slow, sensual movement and narrowed his eyes to watch the prince’s reaction. Feeling his lust awakened by this sensuous caress, an involuntary shudder hit Liam, and he opened his mouth in surprise. Zarret noticed the unconscious tremor and smiled in satisfaction while he turned around and held out a hand to Tady. “Honey, imagine how much fun we will have together!” The answering grin on Tady’s face sent an anticipatory tingle down Liam’s spine, and an instant later he felt a pair of hot hands on his buttocks. “Indeed, we will teach him well.”

Liam disregarded Sir Forrest’s growing disapproval as dirty hands slipped under layers of silk, and calloused fingers opened velvet laces to the enthusiastic response of the future monarch. Visibly torn between outrage and embarrassment, Sir Forrest snatched up his hat and sketched a short bow which went completely unheeded by the three participants.

“I leave you to your task, My Prince.”

Liam didn’t notice the door closing.

Get the full story at:



...and many other shops!

Other Works by Bealevon Nolan



[Hello My Prince](#)

A classic fairy tale finds new life as an m/m romance novel



[Romeo and Julian – Free Fall](#)

Free read! A World War II gay romance short story



[The Essential Treasure](#)

A short story in the Discovery: QSF's Second Annual Flash Fiction Contest

About the Author

Reading, reading— what's more beautiful than a book? Between the covers of each one lie many worlds to explore! Having spent her youth in an array of libraries, it's no wonder the attic of Bealevon's home is filled with crates full of books.

Due to the small size of the German romance book market, fast-reading Bealevon was forced to turn to English-language originals at last. This improved her English so much she worked for several years with a German publisher as an English reader in between other jobs. Her first love, m/f romances, burnt out in the mid-nineties after a decade of mind-clouding stories, and she turned back to her hobby of reading about historical events.

Delighted by the invention and spread of the ebook, she tentatively tried some free ones. One of those happened to be an m/m romance, and she was caught: hook, line, and sinker. Discovering books that were diamonds among the coal shaped her taste. Aside from fluffy fantasy and fairy tale, she likes action and fighting in her books. And there are definitely not enough of those books on the market!

For years, she dabbled in fanfiction and enhancement of existing stories for her own enjoyment, continually pulled between reading more and writing. As soon as her son moved out, she grabbed the opportunity of self-publishing at last, sat down, and wrote— in English— although her high school English teachers probably turn over in their graves, as she was a mediocre pupil at best. She gets much-needed solitude for working out the details of her chapters while walking her dog twice a day. No effort is spared to make sure her stories are logical and believable. Yes, even the fairy tales!

She lives with her husband and her dog in northern Germany and loves to hear from her readers!

email her at: bea@b-nolan.com

visit her on the web: <http://b-nolan.com/>

follow her blog: <http://blog.b-nolan.com/>

Would you like to take a look at the pictures that inspire her books?

<http://www.pinterest.com/bealevon/>