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## CHAPTER ONE

# NORTH LONDON 1909

“Princess, *please*, don’t lean out of the window like that! You’ll fall out!”

Fifteen year old Princess Anna continued hanging out of the second floor window. Her long wavy chestnut hair fell over her shoulders as she craned her neck to get a better view. Her green eyes were scouring the horizon.

She was of average height, but to see further had pulled herself onto tip-toe, which lifted the hem of her cream summer dress to reveal pale pink tights and ballet-style pumps. Her face was perfectly symmetrical, with a little button nose, and slim, having lost all signs of puppy fat the previous summer. Her skin was pale, a sign of her aristocratic status. She was a girl who spent time indoors studying and who was urged to carry a parasol against the sun whenever she was outside.

Although on the cusp of being a young lady she still had the frame of a girl. Her figure was slight, with narrow shoulders and hips, a small bust and a tiny waist that she emphasised with a fashionable blue ribbon for a belt.

“Princess, *please*,” repeated the middle aged man.

Princess Anna ignored her tutor and continued leaning out.

“They’re coming! They’re coming!” she cried, pressing her hips against the sill. By hanging right out of the window, and looking to the left, the princess could see an open-top automobile at the far end of the muddy lane. “Mama! Hello! Poppa! Hello!”

Anna was waving frantically at the vehicle slowly driving along Totteridge Lane, passing the dozen or so buildings that made up the village. The man was wearing a driving jacket, goggles and leather gloves. A blonde woman was sitting beside him in a lilac jacket, a matching hat and a long silk scarf that was blowing so violently in the breeze it was in danger of catching in the wheels. The car pulled into the Manor House and parked on the gravelled drive. The woman lifted her head and, smiling, returned a regal wave. Anna spun round to her tutor, Mr Anderson.

“My parents are back from Russia,” she said triumphantly.

“Then perhaps now we can concentrate. Princess, on your sixteenth birthday - which I am sure you don’t need reminding is two days away - you will prick your finger on a needle and we will all fall asleep for one hundred years. We are not prepared,” said Anderson, clearly annoyed.

“Well actually I have been preparing,” announced Anna, moving towards her desk and picking up a huge leather-bound book.

“You have?” questioned Anderson.

“Yes. This is the Almanach de Gotha,” said Anna, waving the book. “It’s a list of every royal family in Europe.”

“I fail to see how that’s of any help to us,” said Anderson.

“I’ve found three Princes who I like,” continued Anna, excitedly.

“For goodness sake!” said Anderson, exasperated.

“Look, here, the German Crown Prince William,” said Anna, reading from the Almanach. “Born on the 6th May 1882 so he’s 26. He’s the eldest son and he’s going to be the next Emperor of Germany. He looks nice.”

“Anna, I know the spell says you will be woken up by a prince kissing you, but in 100 years time Crown Prince William will be dead,” Anderson pointed out.

“But his great great grandson will be young, hopefully handsome and the future Emperor of Germany,” replied Anna.

“And how does that help us prepare?” Anderson feared the answer.

“Because, we send a message to the Crown Prince William, and the other two princes I like, Greece and Russia, and they make sure one of their great great grandsons is here to wake me up!” said Anna as if it were obvious.

“That’s absolutely impossible. Your father, the Grand Duke, would never allow it. We have no desire to alert the world to our plight. Furthermore, and I may be speaking out of turn here, we have no idea if the German Empire, or the other monarchies, will even exist in 2009.”

“Of course they will,” said Anna, shocked at her tutor’s bizarre ideas.

“Princess, have you looked at a map lately, other than those in the Almanach de Gotha? Most of the world is part of the British Empire. How much bigger will that Empire be one hundred years from now? Germany, Russia, Greece may well be part of Great Britain.”

Anna was appalled.

“So we’re just going to wait for any prince, who happens to still exist, to be riding past, and wake me up?”

“Princess, this is out of my hands. It’s up to the fairies. All I know is you will wake up in the absolute centre of the modern world and you must take your place in it as a modern princess. You must be prepared for the challenges ahead.

Would you like us to look at the prophecy once more?”

“Oh yes, because that always goes well,” said Anna, sarcastically.

“Then may I suggest we concentrate on geography, maths, science, and your English grammar? Which is what I have been trying to do for the past eleven years, since your family left Russia, came to England and engaged me to prepare you for the future,” replied Anderson curtly.

The Princess was leaning with her back against the window pane. The sun’s rays surrounded her with a golden light, like an ancient painting of a saint. Anna, however, did not look holy. She was biting her lower lip and fixing her gaze on her tutor. The heel of her foot thudded the floor. The tension was diffused by a knock at the door.

“Come in.” It was the Princess who gave the command.

A young girl of about the same age was curtsying in the doorway. Her brown hair was scraped back into a bun and she was wearing a grey work dress tied with a white starched apron.

“What is it Olga?”

“Pardon your highness, the Grand Duke and Duchess, your parents as is, wish to see you and Mr Anderson in the drawing room.” The girl’s eyes did not once glance up from the floor as she delivered the message.

“Thank you Olga, you may go now.”

Curtsying once more, Olga backed out of the door, closing it with an awkward movement in front of her.



Anna was running across the drawing room towards her mother, who was walking in the direction of Anna with arms outstretched. They met halfway and were hugging, the diamonds on Grand Duchess Marie’s fingers glistening as she wrapped her hands around her only child.

“Darling! Darling!” she cried.

“Well, what did they say?” asked Anna with an urgency in her voice.

“Oh, everyone says “Hello”, your grandmother sends her love.” The Grand Duchess was smiling at Anna but her eyes were darting around the room.

“Poppa?” The princess had turned to her father.

Grand Duke Alexander was pacing to and fro on the Turkish carpet in the centre of the floor, his hands in his trouser pockets, eyes focusing on the patterns at his feet.

“Well, we consulted in great depth with The Powers That Be,” he said gravely.

“The fairies. Well you may as well call them by their name Alexander,” interrupted the Grand Duchess. “That is what they are, they are the fairies. You can’t seriously talk about witches unless you are prepared to acknowledge the balancing power. The fairies.”

“The fairies cannot help us,” said the Grand Duke, looking directly at Anna.

“They can’t do anything?” asked Anna, clasping her hands together as if in prayer.

“Darling, they have done a lot already,” said the Grand Duchess, trying to soothe.

“Oh yes, they made the curse so much better. I’m not going to die I’m now just going to fall asleep for one hundred years. What a lot of help!” exclaimed Anna.

“You are not alone, darling, we are all going to sleep for one hundred years.” The Grand Duchess was attempting to embrace her daughter, but was rebuffed, as Anna flung herself face down on to the sofa. Marie threw a glance at her husband who, taking a deep breath, knelt down beside the weeping child.

“I promise you, Anna, we will get through this,” he whispered, stroking her hair. “I’m not pretending that it’s going to be easy. But we will wake up together. We are part of the Russian royal family, we will have help, and we will build

a new life in a new century.” Anna was sitting up, facing her father, wiping her cheek.

“I’m going to be sixteen in two days time. Sixteen! My life is just beginning. I’m too young to “die” for one hundred years. I want to go out to balls, horse racing and the ballet. I want to wear beautiful clothes. I want to travel, and drive an automobile. I want to try champagne and fall in love and marry someone...handsome and noble who loves me too.”

“Of course you do,” said Marie, sitting next to Anna and putting her arm around her waist. “All girls want those things and it will still all be here for you. The prophecy has taken care of that. A handsome prince will wake you up with your “First Kiss”. You are going to fall in love, darling, and I’m sure the prince will take you to many amazing places and be everything you dream.”

“And I’m supposed to just lie around waiting for him to rescue me?” asked Anna.

“We will all be waiting darling,” observed her mother.

The Grand Duke had got up from the floor and was standing again in the centre of the room. “There is one complication which I need to tell you both about.”

“Oh great, because everything was going so smoothly up until now,” said Anna pointedly.

“Anna, please. Anderson you should be aware of this too,” said the Grand Duke nodding towards the tutor, who had been standing by the door all this time. “The witch who performed the original spell is now very old and will herself die soon. But she is angry and bitter that the curse was altered. She wanted you to die on your sixteenth birthday, the fairies changed that and she wants revenge. I’m afraid she will try and exert her power when we wake up.”

“But Poppa she’ll be dead.”

“Black magic is a powerful force that can cross time. She may even use her own great great great grandchildren to do her bidding. We may find we are still in danger when we wake up.”

“This is unbelievable,” said Anna, astounded by the sudden twist of fate.

“I’m sorry Anna. The fairies are trying to balance out whatever evil plans may have already been made,” said her father.

“How?” asked Anna.

“They are going to choose one of their number, a fairy, disguised as a person, to act as guide to us once we are awake,” answered the Grand Duke.

“Who? Which fairy?” asked Anna, determined get some facts.

“The chosen fairy hasn’t been born yet and unfortunately her powers will be limited. She won’t be able to offer us any direct help. She’ll only be able to try and guide us if we’re in danger. And once she’s in disguise we’ll have no way of knowing that she is the fairy.”

“Alexander, you surely don’t mean we really won’t know. That would mean any woman we meet could be the fairy. We won’t know who to trust,” asked the Grand Duchess. She had hit the nail on the head.



After the Grand Duke’s bombshell the atmosphere in the Manor House changed from one of slight hope to resignation. The rest of that day, and the day after, it was as if they were all waiting for a death sentence to be executed.

The Grand Duke was locked in his study with Anderson, where they disappeared behind a massive pile of papers. The job of sorting, organising, and filing various legal and financial documents ready to be stored for 100 years seemed never ending.

“It’s important to me that when we wake up everything is in order,” said the Grand Duke standing by a desk covered with paperwork. The carpet too was a sheet of white paper.

“Yes, Your Highness,” replied Anderson.

“I want to be able to get all of our money and carry on with our lives, legally,” the Grand Duke continued, looking towards Anderson for reassurance. “I want to be in control, as much as possible, of our destiny.”

“With all due respect, Your Highness, that is the one thing none of us can have, control of our destiny.”



The Grand Duchess was equally busy. She was with her lady-in-waiting in her bedroom. Every surface, including her bed, dressing table and floor rug, was littered with the most fabulous clothes, jewels and shoes. There were dozens of dresses in various stages of wrapping, folding or hanging, all around the room. Any space was taken up with volumes of tissue paper ready to wrap the most delicate fabrics.

“What are we going to do with all this Natasha?” asked Marie, exasperated.

The lady-in-waiting was standing with her arms outstretched as the dresses were piled on, one after another, until she was disappearing under the weight of them.

“Your Highness, maybe you shouldn’t keep them all. I mean fashions change, who knows what they’ll be wearing in 100 years time,” Natasha suggested.

“Of course we have got to keep them, they are worth a fortune,” retorted the Grand Duchess turning away from Natasha.

She caught sight of a pair of diamond earrings with a matching necklace lying on the dressing table. She picked them up and put them on, looking at herself in the mirror. “Besides, these will certainly never go out of fashion, believe me.”



Olga was knocking on the door of Anna’s bedroom. “Your

Highness I've brought you some hot chocolate.”

“Olga it's August, I need ice cream not hot chocolate, and I don't even want that. Go away!”

She was lying motionless on her four poster bed staring at the canopy above her head. But then it occurred to her that's how she'd be spending the next one hundred years. She dragged her legs off the covers and began mooching around the room.

An illustrated book of fairy tales she had been given as a child grabbed her attention. It was one of her favourite books, the pictures were beautiful. She felt as if she could touch the characters. She turned to the drawing of the prince kissing the princess in Sleeping Beauty. It always made her want to cry. Anna ran her fingers over the drawing of the prince. She touched the blonde hair which fell across his face, slightly obscuring his blue eyes, as he lent forward to kiss the princess. And she found herself wondering, for the first time, if they really had lived happily ever after.



It was a beautiful late summer morning. August 24th 1909, Princess Anna's sixteenth birthday. The fierce sun was peeping through the heavy curtains which were still drawn closed in her bedroom. Anna, wearing a white cotton nightdress, was curled up asleep on top of the bed covers. It had been too hot to sleep under them. The banging on the door became louder and louder and she was forced to open her eyes.

“What time is it?” she asked wearily.

“Happy Birthday, Your Highness, it's nine o'clock,” said Olga speaking through the door. “Your parents are in the breakfast room waiting for you.”

“Oh come in then,” said Anna reluctantly.

Olga opened the curtains and the sunlight came streaming in.

“There are a lot of cards on the hall table and some beautiful flowers have been delivered. If it pleases Your Highness I could fetch them for you?” Olga’s head was bobbing from side to side and she was smoothing the folds in her apron.

“Yes, let’s pretend it’s a normal birthday,” said Anna with a forced joyfulness.

Anna was standing by her bed in a cream silk dressing gown, with matching slippers, her chestnut hair freshly brushed and hanging loosely round her shoulders, when Olga returned. The girl was carrying the most enormous bouquet of red roses wrapped in white tissue paper. It was barely possible to see her as she struggled with the oversized gift.

“I love roses! Who sent them?” asked Anna, genuinely pleased.

“I don’t know Your Highness, there was no card.”

“Here let me hold them,” said Anna taking the bouquet, smelling the perfume, and touching the velvet petals. Suddenly she screamed. “Aaargh!”

“What’s the matter, Your Highness?”

“My finger, I pricked it on a thorn. Ouch! Ah! It’s not a thorn!” exclaimed the princess, pulling out, from the centre of the bouquet, a long needle which had been hidden among the flowers. “What’s this? It’s a ...” The princess was falling, as if she was fainting, backwards onto the bed.

“Aaargh!!” It was Olga’s scream that echoed throughout the house.