

TWO BRAND-NEW BOOKS!

ADVENTURES FROM
THE LAND OF STORIES



**QUEEN RED
RIDING HOOD'S
GUIDE TO ROYALTY**

**THE MOTHER
GOOSE DIARIES**



CHRIS COLFER

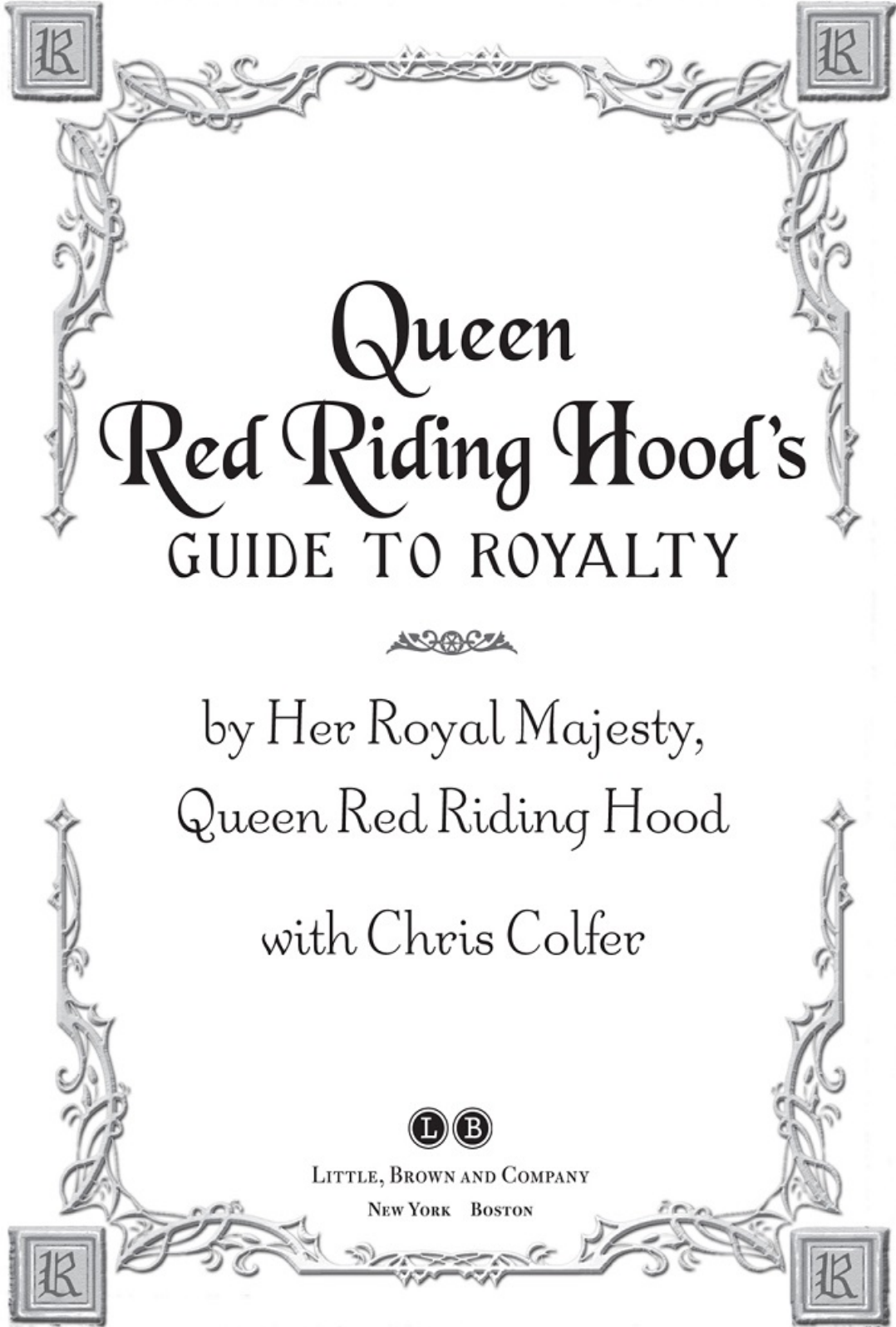


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Queen
Red Riding Hood's
GUIDE TO ROYALTY



by Her Royal Majesty,
Queen Red Riding Hood
with Chris Colfer



LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY
NEW YORK BOSTON



To my beloved Charlie:

*Little girls are told if they kiss a frog, they may get a
prince.*

I kissed a prince and wound up with a frog.

Then again, I've never been good with instructions.

But I wouldn't have it any other way.

I love you.





Introduction



The Prince and Me

Fellow Hoodians, admirers, royal subjects, and royal rejects. Thank you for choosing my first book, *Queen Red Riding Hood's Guide to Royalty*, as your reading selection. I can't imagine the anticipation, enthusiasm, and admiration coursing through your feeble bodies as you hold your very own copy. Before you excite yourself to the point of needing medical attention, I must thank you for the hours and/or days I assume you waited in line to purchase it. And to ease those uncontrollable thoughts of unconditional gratitude, just know the pleasure is all mine!

I'm certain your simple minds are all wondering the same thing. "Why would our astonishing queen go out of her way to write a book?" I thought the same thing when I first sat down to write it. The truth is, wherever I go, there are always crowds of devoted followers asking me the same questions: "Your Majesty, how do you do it? How do you manage to govern a prosperous kingdom, endure countless adventures, and maintain such beauty and poise so effortlessly?" Since I do not have the time (or the patience) to respond to each individual, I decided to compile my numerous secrets into this book to answer all your pressing questions at once. You're welcome.

The idea first came to me one evening while I was lounging in my newly refurbished library. I had just finished a charming and silly little play called

Hamhead by William Shakyfruit—excuse me, *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare. I was looking for another humorous read from the Otherworld when I came upon a delightful book called *The Prince* by Nicole Macarena—or was it Niccolò Machiavelli? Well, whatever her name was, I thought it was a splendid story! In summary, *The Prince* was a guide to *monarchy*! Isn't that marvelous? It gave helpful hints on managing a government, making the proper alliances, and keeping respectable appearances. The best part of reading the book was realizing *I've been doing everything correctly since my coronation!* Although I doubt that surprises you.

However helpful Ms. Machiavelli's words were, I couldn't help feeling her book was a little outdated. It may have had its purpose at one point in time, but it isn't relevant to politics today—just like ruffled bloomers (more on that in my next book, *Queen Red Riding Hood's Guide to Style*).

Since I am the beacon of ideal leadership, I felt it was my duty to give the seminal classic a makeover! Who else could possibly be qualified for the job? For the next several minutes, or however long it takes to write a book, I will combine the concepts of *The Prince* with the constant requests of my people and create my own guide for future royals to follow and future royalists to treasure. Again, you're welcome.

History will see this guide as one of the greatest literary achievements of our time, because as queen, I have control over what history remembers. So, curl up with your copy in a cozy corner of your own library. Give your servants a list of meaningless tasks so that you aren't bothered. If you have children, tell your nannies to keep them at a ballroom's-length distance. Give your House of Parliament, Congress, or Progress the day off. Relax and enjoy this historical triumph!



Chapter 1



Beneath the Hood

I believe that, before taking advice from someone, it's important to know exactly whom you're taking the advice from. So before we dive into matters of economy, politics, image, charity, and all the other nonsense a king or queen deals with, it's important that I introduce you to the real me.

Naturally, this may confuse your delicate heads. After all, my profile is engraved on every coin, statues of me stand on every street corner, and I'm certain my portraits decorate your modest homes. You couldn't be unfamiliar with me if you tried! However, the familiarity I speak of has nothing to do with my exquisite appearance: I'm talking about the woman *beneath the hood*.

For the first time in my reign, I'm going to give you, my people, a glimpse into my personal life, my mind, my heart, and my impeccable soul. My past may be one of the greatest stories ever told, but rarely do I speak about it myself—unless you work at the castle; then you may hear me reminiscing two or three times a day.

There is more to my story than you realize, and once I share it with you, I believe you'll admire me even more than you do now. Yes, it's possible.

This will be hard to believe, but I was once as you are now. Just like Cinderella, I was an exceptional young girl cursed by *humble beginnings*. I was born to two simple farmers in the Northern Kingdom, long before the C.R.A.W.L. Revolution separated us from the north (more on that in a moment—please stay focused!). My parents mistreated me horribly, which is why I’ve chosen to distance myself from them today.

It saddens me to tell you that my childhood was filled with misery. Every morning I was forced out of bed before noon and ordered to do horrific tasks like *chores* and *schoolwork*. I was assaulted by *rules* and *standards*. I was restricted with *curfews* and *bedtimes*. Every day, my mother and father would say horrible things to me, like “you can’t have that” and “no.”

Despite my declarations that I deserved much better treatment, my parents ignored me, and the nightmare continued. As an only child, I had to endure it all alone. My parents must have known deep down I was extraordinary, because whenever I asked if I was going to have any brothers or sisters, they’d reply, “You’re enough.”

Unlike Cinderella, I did not let my unfortunate origins affect my sanity—you’ll never see me talking to mice! Despite the mistreatment I received from my parents, I never stopped believing I was meant for bigger things (and I’m not talking about that summer when I gained weight and needed new clothes).

My weekend visits to my granny’s house were my only sanctuary from my terrible home life. Granny never treated me like a servant or a prisoner but saw me as the exceptional human being I am. She treated me to candies, toys, and naps. She offered me the compassion and respect my early years were missing, always saying encouraging things like “have another cookie” and “yes.” I honestly don’t know how I would have survived without her.

Granny made my first hooded coat. She chose a fabric the exact color of my name and christened me *Little Red Riding Hood*. I think the coat helped her

remember who I was when I showed up at her house. Poor Granny has never had the best memory.

In a serendipitous twist of fate, the people of my future kingdom were also suffering. The villages and farms of the Northern Kingdom were constantly under attack by wolves, with no salvation in sight. Queen Snow White's stepmother was on the throne at the time. She was so busy with her magic mirrors and attempted murder, she ignored her people's requests for protection—hence the name she is now remembered by: the Evil Queen.

When the Little Boy Who Cried Wolf was murdered, it was the last straw. The villagers and farmers banded together and started the C.R.A.W.L. (Citizens' Riots Against Wolf Liberty) Revolution with their sights set on establishing their own kingdom away from the Evil Queen's jurisdiction.

My granny was very active in the revolution and caught a nasty cold during one of the demonstrations—a hunger strike, if I recall. We knew she needed to get her strength up, so my mother packed a basket of goods and sent me to deliver it to Granny's house on the other side of the woods.

I would like to take a moment to reiterate this: *My mother sent her only daughter into the woods alone in the midst of wolf attacks and a revolution!* See what I mean? Terrible parenting! It was during this journey to Granny's house when I infamously encountered the Big Bad Wolf himself, and the rest of my extraordinary story took place.

While we're on the subject, I have something to get off my chest. Over the years, I have been criticized for telling the Big Bad Wolf that I was headed to my granny's house, followed by directions of how to get there. However, this should not be a testament to *my* judgment, but once again to *bad parenting*. My mother and father never sat me down and said, "Red, if you meet a wolf in the woods, don't give him your itinerary." If they actually cared about my well-being, they would have properly warned me.

And another thing! As I said earlier, my granny was involved in several revolutionary protests in those days—she was always dressing up in weird outfits! So when I walked into her bedroom and saw the Big Bad Wolf lying in her bed, I had no reason to believe it wasn't her! Any logical girl would have thought the same thing.

Phew! I'll sleep much better knowing I've put that in writing. I assume you know what happened next, but I'll tell you anyway.

The Big Bad Wolf gobbled me up in one bite and I met up with Granny in his stomach. We spent two days inside the wolf's belly, but it really wasn't as unpleasant as one would imagine. Once we got used to the smell, it was rather warm and comfortable. Luckily, Granny had managed to grab a deck of cards as the wolf swallowed her, so we improved our gambling skills as we awaited rescue.

Eventually, my parents grew concerned and asked a hunter to help them look for me. The hunter found the wolf at Granny's house in the exact spot he had eaten me. Apparently Granny and I were too much for him to digest and he was experiencing a miserable food coma. The hunter killed the wolf with one slice of his axe, and Granny and I fell out of him like candy out of a piñata.

By the time we were saved, the C.R.A.W.L. Revolution was over. The villagers and farmers had successfully separated from the Northern Kingdom. All they needed now was a name for the kingdom... *and someone to lead them!*

Word quickly spread through our unsupervised and unnamed kingdom about Granny's and my brave encounter with the Big Bad Wolf (probably because I told everyone who would listen). We were called before the C.R.A.W.L. Committee—which consisted of a farmer, a shepherdess, three village elders, and a chicken (I'm still not sure how the chicken was appointed). They were mesmerized by our story and felt we embodied the

kingdom's struggles, so they asked Granny to be queen.

"Who? Me?" Granny said. "I'm not sure I'm up for all that pomp and circumstance. I don't have the hips for it."

"Then what about Billy Bopkins?" the farmer asked the committee. "He's got great leadership qualities and he's more respected than anyone else in my village."

"Billy Bopkins is a goat," the shepherdess said.

"Since when do we discriminate?" the farmer said.

"Perhaps someone *young*?" Granny suggested. "Forming a kingdom is going to take a lot of energy."

It was one of those moments that exist only in legends, fables, and Shakyfruit plays. The committee all turned and looked at me in unison, as if their eyes were drawn to me by a higher power. And by the way, it wasn't because I was jumping up and down, waving my arms above my head, and shouting, "*Pick me! Pick me! Pick me!*" That is a vicious rumor I would like to put to rest.

I knew I had to act fast before the committee put the kingdom's fate in the wrong hooves. I stepped forward, placed one hand over my heart and raised the other into the air, and recited my sacred oath as queen.

"I, fabulous Little Red Riding Hood, solemnly swear to govern this kingdom, to serve its people, and to guide it to prosperity, so help me God."

The committee stared at me with very blank expressions. I may not have been their first choice, but all of them were in awe of my natural instinct to take initiative. Clearly I was born to rule.

“All in favor of Queen Red Riding Hood, say aye,” the shepherdess said.

The committee members looked at one another and shrugged. They couldn't name another candidate, because I was undoubtedly the best option.

“Aye!” the committee said in unison.

From that moment forward, Little Red Riding Hood ceased to exist. I became *Her Royal Majesty, Queen Red Riding Hood!* The world has been a better place ever since.

“What were you planning to name the kingdom?” Granny asked the committee.

“Well, it's in between all the other kingdoms, so why not call it the In-Between Kingdom?” the farmer asked.

“Absolutely not!” the shepherdess argued. “It should be called the C.R.A.W.L. Kingdom.”

The rest of the committee liked this idea, except the chicken. I wasn't thrilled with the idea, either, so I politely cleared my throat before any eggs were laid in objection.

“Since I'm queen, shouldn't it be my decision?” I asked. “Hold on—I'm *the queen!* I don't need to ask your permission. I'll name the kingdom myself!”

Naming the kingdom was the hardest decision I've ever had to make as queen. I wanted our home to have the most magnificent name in the world. I wanted it to be something the people could be proud of and inspired by, something that could make all the other kingdoms envious.

“I’ve got it,” I said. “We’ll name it the *Red Riding Hood Kingdom!*”

The committee scrunched their brows, opened their mouths, and stared at me with large eyes. Obviously they were so impressed it rendered them speechless! Even my harshest critics couldn’t deny the *Red Riding Hood Kingdom* had a nice ring to it. (The kingdom has since been renamed a few times, but we won’t get into that.)

My first hours as queen were highly efficient. First, I assembled a group of royal subjects to assist me during my reign—the third Little Pig, BaaBaa Blacksheep, Miss Muffet, Jack Horner, the Three Blind Mice, the Little Old Woman from the Shoe Inn, and Granny, of course! Second, I demanded a wall be built around our kingdom so my people would never have to live in fear of wolves again (that one was Granny’s idea).

Unfortunately, no proper venues had been built to host the coronation yet—so it took place in an old barn. Instead of jewelry and robes, I was crowned with a bucket and a dog’s blanket. Instead of adoring citizens shouting “long live the queen,” my crowning was followed by approving *baas*, *neighs*, and *moos* of the sheep, horses, and cows living in the barn. A lesser monarch would have let the experience belittle them, but it only influenced my third and most important act as queen: *building the home and the wardrobe I deserved!*

The best builders and designers were brought in from all over the kingdom and created my glorious castle and fantastic clothes. I finally lived and looked like a queen should. Peasants traveled from miles around just to get a glimpse of their beautiful ruler and pay their respects, not to mention shower me with compliments!

At last, I was leading the life I was destined for! Unfortunately, not *everyone* was as enthusiastic.

“They elected you *what?*” Father asked when I broke the news.

“Dad, I just told you I’m the queen now!” I said. “And from now on you must address me as *Your Royal Majesty, Queen Red Riding Hood* when you’re in my presence.”

“I don’t understand,” Mother said. (Then again, she never did.)

“Mom, I’m wearing twenty pounds of jewelry and arrived in a golden carriage. What part of *queen* don’t you understand?”

“Are you still going to live with us?” Father asked.

“Of course not,” I said. “They’ve built me a castle in the center of town.”

“So are we coming to live with you?” Mother asked.

“Why? So you can continue your exploitation?” I said. “Absolutely not. As queen, I can’t waste an ounce of my strength battling your mind games.”

“*Mind games?*” Father said. “Red, we love you, but you’re too young to be a *queen*.”

It was the single most hurtful thing anyone has ever said to me in my entire life. There I was, standing before them as their chosen sovereign, gracing their presence as a courtesy, and they only considered me a *child*. My disdain was evident by the scowl and stomps that followed.

“All right, Red. You’re *the queen*,” Mother said with air quotations I didn’t appreciate. “But when you’re done, dinner is at seven o’clock.”

I headed out of the house but paused in the doorway. I looked back at my parents, hoping to see a sign of remorse or hear an apology for all the heartache they had caused me over the years. No such indication came.

“You shall never clip my wings again,” I said. “I’ll send one of my handmaidens to collect my things—that’s right, I have *handmaidens*.”

I never saw my parents again—well, besides the third Sunday of every month when they come to the castle for an awkward dinner with Granny, but that’s practically *never* in royal standards. I’ve lived peacefully in my castle, free from their damaging clutches, ever since. (Except for those brief times I wasn’t queen and lived elsewhere, but we won’t get into that, either.)

There you have it—my complete story from my own lips. Your queen has lived a difficult and challenging life, but she’s only become stronger, wiser, and prettier because of it. Now that you’ve heard my inspiring story of survival, you should have no reservation about following my advice in the rest of this guide.

My God, I’ve been at this for hours! Don’t expect the following chapters to be as long as this. I still have a kingdom to look after, you know. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’m going to treat myself to a nice hot bubble bath.

Reminiscing is exhausting, especially when you’ve lived a life as significant as mine. It’s just like Shakyfruit once wrote: “Uneasy is the head that wears a hood.”



Chapter 2



Image Is Everything

Without question, the most important and sacred thing to a ruler is his or her *image*! Any monarch who says “the well-being of their people and kingdom is what matters most to me” is only saying that to gain approval and avoid a revolution. Trust me—*I’ve been there!*

Don’t be fooled by the poor saps who claim “what’s inside your heart is what truly matters”—that is an absolute lie! The *outside* definitely outweighs the *inside* when you sit on a throne. You must be taken seriously if you want to survive as a monarch, and that starts with your appearance. No one is going to respect or admire a pudgy slob. You must look and act the part if you expect to get anywhere... or simply stay exactly where you are.

To your people, you represent God, because she chose you to lead them. (One might argue that a farmer, a shepherdess, three old folks, and a chicken chose me; to that, I say, “God works in mysterious ways!”) Therefore, you must represent God by being nothing less than perfection in the public eye. In a way, you must be God-like yourself.

I believe anyone can achieve this immortal facade with three easy steps I’ve

created. I call them *the Royal APP: appearance, performance, and perception*.



Appearance

Sometimes a king or queen is the only glimpse of a kingdom the outside world is privy to. Consequently, the condition of your government, economy, and citizens will be assessed on your looks alone. In other words, your book will be judged by its cover, *so make it pretty!*

Let's have a moment of honesty. I'm the queen of a farming country; if I accurately represented my kingdom, I would be walking around in a bonnet with rural animals running in circles around my feet. *Not going to happen!* Luckily, as queen it's my duty to bring class and respectability to my kingdom's image. I can't let the world think we're a bunch of staff-carrying pig breeders—even if we are. That's why I've chosen to shape my appearance after my kingdom's *potential*, not its truth. And I strongly recommend you do the same.

I believe the Red Riding Hood Kingdom will live up to its name and become a beautiful, wealthy, and cosmopolitan nation. So *that's* how I dress, and it's benefited us greatly. My sense of style is why our kingdom has such good relations with the neighboring countries. Everyone who sees me imagines the kingdom is as strong, rich, and sophisticated as I am. (And the fact that we grow over two-thirds of the world's food doesn't hurt, either.)

The better I look to the world, the better my kingdom looks to the world, and the better my kingdom looks to the world, the better I look to my own people. It's a wonderful and enjoyable cycle that furthers my superiority.

So, as anyone can see, my need for nice things is entirely selfless. The gowns, the jewelry, the castles, the parties, and everything about my lavish lifestyle are for the prosperity of my people. I endure it all for *them*.

Performance

Every ruler must learn to act sooner than later. As difficult as it may be, you must never seem tired, angry, hungry, envious, or anything but perfectly comfortable. Any trace of humanity will be seen as weakness, and visible weaknesses can be dangerous to a ruler.

Never say “I have to use the little girls room” or “I need a nap” or “I’m going to start throwing the babies I get asked to kiss if I don’t get out of here!” All statements can be replaced with the simple phrase “Now I must be alone to think about matters of the kingdom.” Or, if you’re really desperate, like when a villager won’t stop talking, you can interrupt them with “Pardon me, I forgot about a very important matter I need to address this moment.” No one can ever fault you for saying this, and it’s a guaranteed way to get some much-needed alone time.

Of course, we both know the truth of our humanity. There are some days we can’t help looking like the humans we are. Even God’s chosen ones become ill, fatigued, or puffy from time to time. Thankfully, I have a solution for these times of need: *jewelry!*

Save your finest and shiniest jewels for the times you aren’t feeling your best. When people are blinded by your diamond necklace, they’ll never see the circles under your eyes. No one can say you look any less like a million gold coins if you’re wearing something literally worth a million gold coins.

Perception

This is the most important part of the Royal APP. If you play your cards right, a solid *perception* will make your *appearance* and *performance* much easier to manage.

One out of ten citizens may have the privilege of seeing me in the flesh during their lifetime. So how do you make your presence known throughout your kingdom when physical encounters are rare? The answer is simple and rulers have been doing it since the beginning of time: *tributes!*

There's a reason monarchs display so many portraits and statues of themselves throughout their kingdom. *Narcissism*, obviously—but if they're smart, they'll use their narcissism *strategically*. The trick is getting people to know “you” without ever meeting *you*. I use the adorable quotations because the “you” that you want known may not be who you actually are. I'll explain....

A respectable and admirable public opinion is achieved by a light dose of brainwashing. Harsh, but true—just like overhead lighting. But don't worry, the peasants are so wrapped up in their peasantry they have no clue it's even happening. Getting them to understand the concept of *washing* has been a challenge alone; I doubt their tender minds could recognize the subliminal messages strategically staged around the kingdom to subconsciously alter their judgment. I don't even understand what I just wrote.

It's not a secret that most kings and queens force artists to alter their appearance in artwork. You should see what real monarchs look like in comparison to their portraits. *Woof!* If the art was truthful, once the artist finished their noses there would be no paint left!

But besides improving their attractiveness, most leaders use art as a way to bend the truth of their *political* status. A cowardly leader might request to be painted with a menacing facade. A ruler in debt may demand to be surrounded by wealth in a painting. A self-consciously short king may have a tall statue of himself built in the center of town. A queen who hates the

snot-nosed brats at a local orphanage may have a portrait made of her embracing them.

These are all important measures a monarch must take to control *perception*. So whatever you're lacking as a ruler, whether it be bravery, wealth, height, or compassion, make your portraits and statues show the opposite and no one will ever be the wiser.

Naturally, I wouldn't know about it personally. This is one of the many instances where my citizens are lucky to have a genuinely beautiful and brilliant queen. I don't think an artist could *improve* me if they tried. It's known throughout my kingdom that I'm much more beautiful than my paintings and sculptures imply.



There you have it: the Royal APP explained! If you practice it routinely, you will convince not only your people of your perfection, but also yourself!

It's a lot of pressure to put on one's shoulders, but to quote Queen Snow White's friends at the dwarf mines: "Pressure is what separates the dirt from the diamonds."

Only once you've perfected your image would I advise moving your attention to a secondary priority, like your kingdom and people's needs. Remember, there is no kingdom without the *I*.



Chapter 3



Be Cautious of Compliments

One of the first things they teach a new leader is to beware of flattery. Someone may be using praise and compliments as a way of gaining your trust, only to betray you in the end. You must guard your heart and keep a lookout for people with alternative motives.

While I'm sure this is a great lesson for *ugly people* in positions of power, I can safely say it doesn't apply to me. As you know, I'm overwhelmingly beautiful. If I distanced myself from every flatterer, I would have to live in total solitude. In fact, it's more concerning when someone is in my presence and they *don't* compliment me. *Those* are the people I need to keep an eye on.

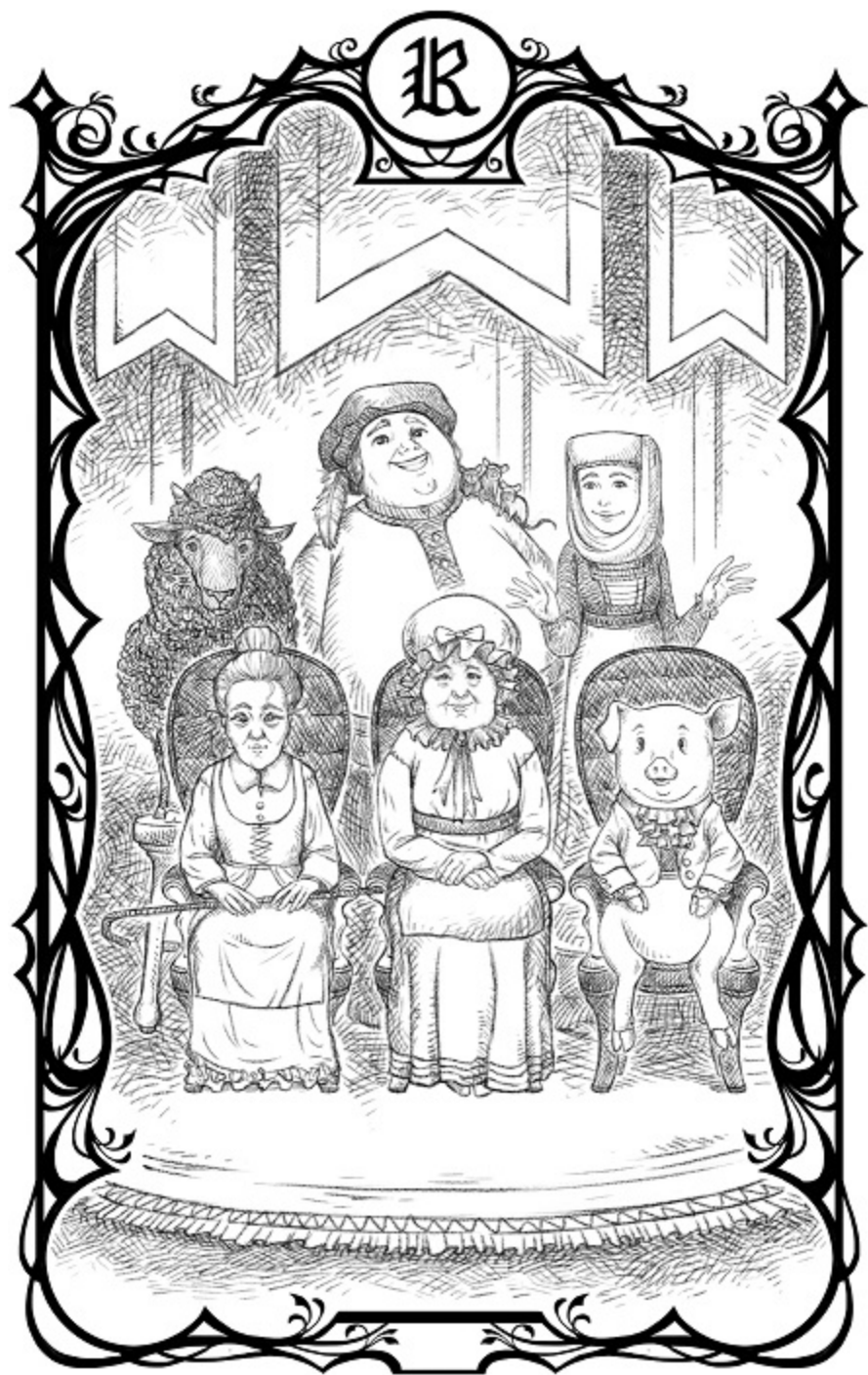
Thankfully, I don't have to be suspicious of praise like some rulers do. Anyone who pays me a compliment is just stating a basic fact. To say I'm brilliant or beautiful is like saying the sun is bright or the grass is green. And *facts* have never influenced my decision making in the slightest.

Unfortunately, so many leaders must be cautious of compliments because they are not blessed with my attractiveness. It takes all the fun out of being a monarch, if you ask me. If a king or queen cannot enjoy someone basking

in their glory from time to time, then what is the point of wearing a crown?

Thanks to my fortunate looks, I believe I've unintentionally come up with a solution for this matter. No matter how unattractive you are, *create a law that forces your people to compliment you!* Make everyone in your presence praise you at least three times an hour. Even compliment *yourself*—don't get out of bed until you've told yourself how wonderful you are! Drown yourself in praise so the harm-doers are muted. If *everyone* is praising you, the people plotting against you will have to find another way into your head. And if *everyone* is getting to you, *no one* can.

Sometimes the best way to prevent a burn is by lighting yourself on fire! (In one of his edits, Charlie has informed me I need to be very clear that this is a joke. Please do not treat burns with fire.)



Chapter 4



Appointing Royal Subjects

It's difficult to trust people when you're a monarch—that's why it's of grave importance to appoint people you can depend on into your circle of royal subjects. You mustn't be too hard on yourself if you discover one of them is plotting your downfall, as this is a common occurrence. The good news is, if a royal subject betrays or disappoints you, you can have them killed. That's why we rulers invented the wonderful term *treason*. It keeps everyone on their toes!

The person you appoint must be a good fit with the position you bestow. Whatever you assign someone to do, everyone in your kingdom must agree that they are the best person for the job. Luckily, since I established a new government, I was able to make up the titles as I went. For your reference, here is a list of my royal subjects and why I decided to appoint them to the position they hold.

The Third Little Pig, Chief of Staff

You need someone very responsible to spearhead all your political endeavors. They must come to the table already proven of wise decision

making and the capability of handling stressful situations. I thought no one in the kingdom had done this better than the third Little Pig. He's famous for making good choices! His smart idea to build his home with bricks instead of other materials saved his life from the Big Bad Wolf. Since then, he's helped my reign with his meticulous organization skills and subtle advice when I'm faced with a hard choice myself. He's my rock—or *brick*, rather.

Lady Muffet, Secretary of Defense

After her famous encounter with a spider, Lady Muffet vowed that would be the last thing to “sit down beside her” without her consent. Lady Muffet manages the kingdom's defense exactly as she manages her own—by always keeping one eye open on the environment she's in and removing herself from all signs of danger. The poor thing is a curds-and-whey addict, but thankfully it hasn't interfered with her work.

Sir BaaBaa Blacksheep, Secretary of Treasury

Sir Blacksheep is the most optimistic animal I know, which is a very important quality for the lamb in charge of the kingdom's money. Just as he famously budgeted his wool, Sir Blacksheep always manages to keep us from falling into debt. Every time I ask him if the kingdom's financial state is positive, he replies, “Yes, ma'am, yes, ma'am. Three banks full.” (Sir Henny Penny was my previous Secretary of Treasury, but he was too much of a worrywart. Government is no place for a nut who constantly thinks the sky is falling.)

Sir Jack Horner, Secretary of Nutrition

A fed kingdom is a happy kingdom, and Sir Jack Horner is a genius when it comes to handling our food supply. Even in the middle of a famine, he'll

work tirelessly with farmers until they come up with enough food for everyone. He can stick his thumb into almost anything and pull out a plum. That reminds me, it's gotten a little inappropriate recently.... I really should talk to him about it.

Three Blind Mice, Supreme Court Justices

Justice is blind, and so are they! This was an easy decision to make. The Three Blind Mice never judge someone based on their race, gender, orientation, or background, but instead base their verdicts solely on the evidence brought to the court's attention. With that said, I'll admit they're a little harder on certain *species* than others—in particular, the feline population. It's resulted in the biggest cat emigration in history, but no one in the kingdom has really missed them.

The Little Old Woman from the Shoe Inn, Chief Historian

It's good to have a living history book on your side to remind you of all the mistakes your predecessors have made. I thought the Little Old Woman was the perfect person for the job. After raising a dozen children and hundreds of grandchildren, what *hasn't* she seen? It's a miracle her mind is in the condition it's in. It's remarkable how easily she can reference something from the past. Getting her to *shut up* about history has been tricky.

Granny, Chief Advisor

Last but certainly not least, my chief advisor could be no one else but my beloved granny. The chief advisor is the most important person to a monarch; you must trust them with your life, and they must have *your* best interests at heart. Granny is always good about doing the things I cannot

before making a crucial decision, like *research*. I couldn't run my kingdom as successfully if it weren't for her. To be honest, I'm not sure Granny even realizes she has an official title—she may just be opinionated.



Chapter 5



Peasants Are Like Pets

Similar to creating your image, it is very important to establish a *relationship* with your people. On top of knowing *who* you are, it's good for them to know what *type* of ruler they're dealing with.

It's widely believed that there are only two options a leader can choose from: being a *tyrant* or a *caretaker*. As Nicole Macarena famously asks in her book *The Prince*, "Is it better to be *feared* or *loved*?" or something like that. I'm paraphrasing, obviously. I'm running a kingdom and writing a book; there is no time to reference things.

This is a decision kings and queens struggle to make, for every monarch views his or her institution differently. Kings often choose the tyrant path. They command their kingdoms like captains on ships, barking orders and forcing respect by instilling fear. Usually, queens take a more maternal approach. They treat their people like their own children and hope for admiration in exchange for their compassion.

Personally, I don't see how either of these works. Too much fear could lead to resentment, while too much love could lead to vulnerability. It's not a question of "cruelty versus mercy" as Macarena suggests but finding the

right balance of cruelty *and* mercy. So now I would like to make history by presenting a *third* option. Luckily for you, I have perfectly characterized what the ideal relationship between a ruler and their citizens should be!



Peasants Are Like Pets

Obviously I'm aware that comparing my people to animals kept on leashes will raise a few eyebrows, so allow me to defend this philosophy. Here are a few examples that will undoubtedly convince you:

1. Just like pets, peasants must be fed, given shelter, awarded when good and disciplined when bad, and cared for emotionally.

You can't possibly argue with that, so I'll continue.

2. Dominance must be established. Pets must always know you are in charge and that if they cross you they'll be punished. (Come to think of it, this is the basis of *all* my relationships.)

Are we still in agreement? Good!

3. If your pet gets into a neighbor's yard, you become responsible for whatever damage is done. And if they bite someone, you'll have to put them down.

I'll explain further: If one of my citizens went into a neighboring kingdom and caused harm, it would reflect poorly on *me*—especially if I did nothing about it. A war might break out if rulers didn't distance themselves from crimes committed by their people.

Just last week, Queen Rapunzel sent an arsonist from her kingdom to the gallows for trying to set an estate in the Charming Kingdom ablaze. She had no choice—if she didn't take action, the Charming family would have been offended. (I even heard the noose was made of Rapunzel's hair, but that sounds a little too desperate—even for Rapunzel.)

In short, keep an eye on your citizens. The wall around my kingdom wasn't built only to keep the wolves out; it's also to keep the troublemaking idiots inside. Shall I proceed?

4. You must entertain your pets. A restless pet is more likely to lash out at their master than a well-exercised one is.

This is why it's very important to create traditions and celebrations for your people to participate in. Throw a parade, host a ceremony, give them a holiday once in a while! Make your people feel good about being your citizens so they never gang together and plot your downfall. Make sense? Terrific!

5. You must be very clear with your pets about what is and isn't acceptable behavior: A) They must be shown the proper places to use the restroom. B) Guests are not to be jumped on. C) They must be taught that chewing, barking, and humping your leg will not be tolerated.

I wish the traits mentioned above applied only to pets, but we have our fair share of bizarre people in this kingdom—it's a long story. *Moving on!* Last but not least:

6. In moments of weakness, you can distract your pets with shiny objects.

If there is any confusion regarding how this applies to peasants, please see

the part about jewelry in chapter 2.

As I've brilliantly laid out, it's not about being feared or loved but how you define a combination of the two. In my opinion, imagining yourself as the caring but authoritative master of a doe-eyed helpless creature is the most effective way to run a kingdom. Am I good, or am I good?

If you're timid about this philosophy, I recommend adopting a pet. I've learned more about governing from my overgrown canine, Clawdius, than from all the current and previous rulers in history.

However you decide to label your relationship with your people, it's very crucial you do it quickly. The earlier you set guidelines and boundaries, the sooner they'll adapt and grow accustomed to them.

You NEVER want to surprise your people! A *surprising* monarch may come across as an *irrational* one; irrationality leads to hatred, and hatred leads to a revolution, and a revolution leads to dirty villagers running amok in your castle. And if there's one thing I hate more than anything, it's uninvited guests.

A ruler must be pleasantly predictable at all times, yet also exercise spontaneity when it's safe. There's a thin line between predictability and repetition, and being repetitive could lead to disappointment. In that regard, reigning is like cooking a lamb stew: Only spice things up when you're certain it won't result in heartburn or indigestion. No one wants to live in a gassy monarchy.



Well, I've used a lot of big words and clever metaphors in this chapter. I'm very proud of myself. Being a political genius is exhausting, so I think I'll put my quill down and call it a night.

I have to get up early tomorrow and *walk my kingdom!* Get it? *Because peasants are like pets....* Yes, good night.



Chapter 6



Making a Scandal Work for You

Nothing can damage a monarch's reputation like a scandal. Your enemies will constantly be on the lookout for something they can use to tarnish your name, whether it's political or personal. Since a scandal is bound to surface during your reign, I wouldn't waste your time trying to prevent the inevitable—that would be *exhausting*! Instead, save your energy for when a scandal presents itself and then put all your effort into *making the scandal work for you!*

A couple years ago, I was on the brink of a humiliation that almost cost me the throne. Luckily, I brilliantly spun the situation to work in my favor and make my criticizers look like terrible and heartless people. Remember, when someone points a finger at you, they point three at themselves (unless they have hooves; then ignore this expression).

You must develop a talent for finding what your enemies' opposing fingers are pointing at! Anyone willing to openly criticize you will undoubtedly have something for you to criticize back! I'll explain....

One afternoon, I treated my royal subjects to a delightful lunch at the castle. Everyone was there—Granny, the Little Old Woman from the Shoe Inn, the

third Little Pig, Sir Jack Horner, Lady Muffet, and Sir BaaBaa Blacksheep. But the Three Blind Mice showed up late because their nephew, Hickory Dickory, had gotten into some trouble with a clock again. (Where is Puss in Boots when you need him?)

We were having a wonderful time gossiping about notable people in the kingdom. We laughed over our suspicions of what really happened between Jack and Jill on the hill, if Humpty Dumpty's widow had anything to do with his death, and if Georgie Porgie's current relationship would outlast the previous disasters—the usual topics.

Suddenly, the Little Old Woman blurted out, “Did you hear the chatter about *Queen Red*?”

The poor dear is hard of hearing and has gone senile in recent years (I probably would, too, if I lived in a boot with 150 grandchildren). She had obviously forgotten she was in my presence. Other monarchs may have taken offense to this, but it's actually the reason I keep the Little Old Woman around. If you want *unbiased social insight*, I recommend befriending an absentminded old lady with nothing to prove.

“Can't say I have,” I said through a pained smile. “*Please share.*”

The other subjects were mortified. They gestured for her to be quiet, but the Little Old Woman thought they were just eager to hear.

“The rumor in our sewing group is that she's shacking up with a large amphibian!” she said with excited eyes. “It's a *cross-species catastrophe!*”

I turned pale and my chest felt very tight (my corset didn't help). I was shocked, not because it was an outrageous lie but because it was *true*—I just had never thought of it that way! The public is excellent at making things seem as bad as possible.

“You mean *Charlie*?” I said. “But he isn’t *just* a frog—he’s a prince on the inside!”

My subjects batted their eyes pityingly at me. The third Little Pig patted my shoulder sympathetically.

“Love is in the eye of the beholder,” he said.

“No, I mean he’s *LITERALLY* a prince!” I said. “He was cursed to look like a frog by a witch when he was young! I would never be interested unless I knew there was a royal somewhere inside him!”

“Well, I suppose it’s what’s inside that counts,” Granny said.

Regardless, this was terrible news! If the kingdom elders were talking about it as they crocheted tea cozies, the *rest* of the kingdom was surely talking about it, too! It would only be a matter of time before my relationship with Charlie was deemed *unnatural* or *demonic* and I would be labeled a *freak* and *unfit to lead*! I had to do something drastic. And I had to do it *fast*!

The next day I called the entire kingdom to the castle. I stepped out onto the balcony and announced the following to the crowd below:

“Fellow Hoodians, because of your adorable obsession with me, I trust you’ve all heard the rumor about my relationship with the frog man. At this time, I feel I must tell you that this rumor... *is absolutely true!*”

A collective gasp swept through the crowd. I tend to be dramatic when addressing my people, but it’s very important to entertain them. The more stimulating you are, the more people show up when you summon them.

“I recently heard our relationship referred to as a *cross-species catastrophe!* This was very troubling, and it concerned me so much I lost twenty minutes

of sleep last night. You see, this frog man is an amphibian only on the outside. *Inside*, he's the long-lost Charming prince who was *curse*d to look like a frog many years ago. I've chosen to love him despite his flaws, just as I love you."

(Do you see what I did there? I replaced their mistrust with sympathy! *Goooooo, Queen Red!*)

"Even though people have spread word of our relationship in an attempt to hurt me, I already forgive you for believing it. It takes a person of impeccable judgment to look past a person's appearance, so I would never expect you to see him as I do."

(When you can, guilt people into loving you! It's as effective as it is fun.)

"However, what troubled me the most was not that it was characterized as a *cross-species* relationship, but that everyone's immediate reaction was to shun it as an offense against nature. *Are we still living in the Dragon Age?* I would hope by now we're sophisticated enough to realize love is love, regardless of age, color, gender, and yes, *species*. That is why I would like to publically declare that, as long as I am your queen, everyone in my kingdom will have the right to love whomever they wish!"

The declaration was met with an enthusiastic round of applause. I even had to clap for myself—I turned a scandal conspired against me into something my people could respect and admire me more for. *I'd like to see Cinderella top that!*

A farmer in the front of the crowd raised his hand.

"Yes, noble farmer?" I asked. "What is your question?"

"Does this mean I can marry my cow?" he asked.

I definitely wasn't expecting this.

"That depends," I said. "Does your cow love you as much as you love it? Do you miss each other when you're apart? Does your cow embody your happiness? Do you look into each other's eyes and know you've found your other half?"

The farmer shook his head. "No, she just eats grass all day."

"Does she even talk?" I asked.

"No," he said. "She's a simple cow."

At this point, I couldn't hide my annoyance. "Then *no!* You can't marry your cow. And you're ridiculous for asking."

"Your Majesty?" a woman asked. "Then what's the difference between loving a cow and loving the frog man?"

"Seriously, people?" I asked. "Do I really need to spell this out for you?"

Judging by the blank doe-eyed expressions on the dirty faces throughout the crowd, I *did*.

"There is a major difference between an animal who can communicate and reason, and one who grazes all day," I said. "No one should marry anything they can't share a conversation or a mutual hobby with."

"But what if *I* liked to eat grass all day, too?" the farmer asked. "Are we allowed to love each other if there are similar interests?"

It was one of the first times I wanted to take off my tiara and throw it at someone. Now do you see why *I'm* the queen?

“As long as both parties can definitively express their happiness and desire to be with the other, *fantastic!* Otherwise, *no!* Those are the best guidelines I can give you.”

“Fair enough,” the farmer said, and the rest of the crowd nodded along with him.

“Would you recommend being in a cross-species relationship?” the woman asked. “Like, if I haven’t found the right human yet, should I broaden my search?”

“I’m not saying one is better than the other,” I specified. “I’m just saying we should all have an open mind when it comes to love. You’ll never really know what you’re looking for until you find it. Trust me, I spent years pursuing the man I thought was *the love of my life*. He was the closest thing to perfection I had ever known, besides myself, so I was certain we were meant for each other. Thankfully, I learned I was wrong before it was too late. I found true happiness with someone who was the opposite of what I was looking for. He’s not the definition of perfection, but he’s perfect to me.”

“Are you talking about Jack?” the farmer said. “Is he the man you pursued?”

“Of course she’s talking about Jack!” another woman said. “Everyone knows she was madly in love with Jack!”

“Hold on a second!” I yelled. “*Everyone* knew that?”

The crowd nodded in unison.

“Didn’t Jack choose an outlaw over you, Your Majesty?” a child asked. “At least, that’s what all the children at school say.”

My face suddenly felt very warm and my jewelry felt extra heavy.

“Well, I think that’s enough groundbreaking history for one afternoon. Now, I must be alone to think about matters of the kingdom. *Enjoy the rest of your day!*”

There you have it: a travesty avoided! I masterfully went to the root of the issue and turned a weed into a beautiful flower! Not to mention making history in the process—and all before afternoon tea! I sure pity the monarchs who will succeed me; no one will be able to hold a candle to my reign!



Chapter 7



Avoiding Hatred and Villainy.

Nothing in politics is black and white, but we do live in a world obsessed with labeling people as *heroes* or *villains*. Any leader who falls into a “gray area” is rarely remembered. In fact, I can’t think of a single leader in history who was just *decent*. My tutors must have skipped the lessons about *Anne the Ample*, *Stephen the Simple*, and *Mary the Mediocre*.

Unfortunately, *great* or *terrible* are the only options if you want to make a splash. It’s a slippery slope to Herotown, and all the shortcuts usually lead to Villainville, so never rush your reputation. Remember, every reign has bumps in the road, so don’t panic if you go through a “disliked” phase. This phase will turn into a legacy only if you grow impatient. Citizens always see through their leaders’ pathetic attempts to regain respect. (Except for my citizens—it usually goes right over their heads. *Lucky me!*)

In my opinion, being classified as a villain is just the result of a mishandled scandal. (Fortunately, I’ve already taught you how to manage that in the previous chapter.) Despite popular belief within my kingdom, we can actually learn from other people’s mistakes! So rather than distancing yourself from someone’s downfall, I recommend putting yourself in their shoes (even the ugly pairs).

By evaluating how some of the poorest saps in history conducted a situation, we can learn how to productively assess our own rough patches in the future. Besides, it's just fun to judge people!



The Evil Queen

Snow White's stepmother is remembered for lounging around her luxurious palace and staring into mirrors all day. I do the exact same thing, so why am I so beloved, while the Evil Queen is not? It's because I let my people know *why* I do it (please see chapter 2).

The Evil Queen didn't care what her people thought, so they drew their own conclusions and she never recovered. Ultimately, I think the Evil Queen's *lack of communication* and *inability to think things through* led to her downfall.

Here's what I think she should have done differently:

1. The Evil Queen should have been honest from the beginning about her past. By the time the truth came out (her boyfriend was imprisoned in a mirror *blah blah blah...* she was only vain so he didn't forget her *blah blah blah...* she had a heart of stone *cue the violin...*), it was too late! People's opinion of her was already sealed! Had people known the truth, she would have her own holiday right now, not be trapped at the bottom of a dump. (It's a long story, so if you have questions, ask a friend.)
2. I'm not promoting violence, but the Evil Queen could have come up with easier ways to kill Snow White. For instance, they lived in a HUGE palace with lots of stairs and windows. Had Snow White just

“accidentally tripped down steps” or “fallen out a window,” no one would have suspected foul play! Also, Snow White was so pale she was practically see-through. Had the Evil Queen just locked her outside during a blizzard, no one would have found her until spring!

3. When the Evil Queen was accused of killing Snow White, she had the opportunity to come up with a great defense. For example, “Wait a second. You’re telling me my stepdaughter ran away from home, shackled up with seven strange men for a few months, and now she’s accusing me of trying to kill her with *a poisoned apple*? And you think *I’m* the imbalanced one?”

We can learn three things from the Evil Queen: Always be honest so you aren’t misunderstood, do your dirty work behind closed doors, and if you’re not smart enough to devise a good alibi, don’t commit a crime!

The Wicked Stepmother

In retrospect, Cinderella’s stepmother makes Snow White’s stepmother look like *mother of the year*. I’ve never understood why people dislike her so much. I mean, many stepparents don’t get along with their stepchildren. Had I been Cinderella’s stepmother, I would have stated one of the following in my defense when the kingdom turned on me.

1. “Yes, I gave Cinderella chores to do around the house. Just like every parent *ever*.” (For the record, if your child is obviously common, like Cinderella, I support the assignment of chores. I only have a problem with it when the child shows a higher level of potential, such as I did.)
2. “I didn’t want Cinderella to go to the ball, because *Cinderella talks to mice*. Would *you* let that kind of crazy out of the house?”

3. “I can’t be much worse than her real mother. Cinderella’s mother named her after *dirt*.”
4. “Of course I tried tricking the prince into marrying my daughters. Have you met my daughters? They’re awful. Would *you* want to be stuck with them for the rest of your life?”
5. “Obviously I never wanted Cinderella to be queen. Cinderella wore glass shoes to a dance party. Do you consider that leadership material?”

Clearly, the Wicked Stepmother had many logical points with which to defend herself. Instead, she stayed quiet and sequestered herself from the kingdom, only making herself look guiltier. This teaches us that *the right to remain silent* isn’t always the *right move*.

The Sea Witch

Proof we can learn something from all of God’s creatures—even a foul-smelling sea-lice-covered crustacean can teach us something. The Sea Witch has a unique status; she’s considered a villain even though she’s never really committed a crime. She never *forced* anyone to make a trade with her; the Little Mermaid willingly sought her out to make a trade. It’s the morbid way the Sea Witch goes about her business that gives her such a villainous reputation.

Example 1: In exchange for legs, the Sea Witch cut the Little Mermaid’s tongue out of her mouth. *What is wrong with this woman? What does she possibly need a tongue for? Would a nice shell not have been sufficient?*

Example 2: When the Little Mermaid decided to be a mermaid again, the Sea Witch traded a magic dagger in exchange for her sisters’ *hair*! (Makes me glad to be an only child!) She then instructed the Little

Mermaid to stab the man she loved in the heart to reverse the spell.
Um... gross! Was this REALLY necessary?

I've had the misfortune of meeting the Sea Witch—what she really should be trading for is some scented candles! Which brings me to:

Example 3: Her home is decorated in dead body parts! She uses a whale's rib cage as a staircase! *Would it kill her to have nice floral wallpaper or a few accent pillows?* People will judge you on how you choose to present yourself. If you have macabre tastes, save them for behind closed doors.

Overall, the Sea Witch is *disgusting and complicated for sport*. She enjoys being grotesque and difficult, which is very unnecessary. If you're blessed to have the upper hand in a situation, don't choose to slap people with it. They might slap you back on your way down.

The Snow Queen

The Snow Queen is the ultimate *ice queen*. I don't care how cold your lifestyle is—no one has an excuse to be as bitter as she is.

The Snow Queen was once the most feared weather witch throughout the kingdoms. She used to rule the north until Snow White's father reclaimed it and founded the Northern Kingdom. Since then, she spends her days pouting in isolation and sends violent blizzards through the Northern Mountains whenever she wakes up on the wrong side of the bed. She was also so upset about losing power that her eyes froze with tears and then melted away!

How pathetic is that? The lesson here is to *handle your defeats with dignity*. No one is going to respect or admire a gloomy and jaded old queen.

The Giant

Tantrums make everyone look small, especially giants. I understand why the Giant was angry. Jack snuck into his home, stole some money, and rescued the enchanted (and terribly annoying) harp. The Giant felt belittled.

However, if the Giant had just taken a deep breath and counted to ten, rather than chased a boy one-sixteenth his size down a beanstalk in a rage, he would still be alive today! Like my granny always says: “Don’t get mad—get even!” When retaliating, make sure you’re practicing *intelligent revenge* so you don’t overreact and cause yourself more harm.

The Giant’s downfall (literally a *downfall!*) teaches us to *have some self-respect* and not to *sweat over the small stuff*. Which I suppose is everything when you’re a giant.... (Fun fact: *We also learned giant carcasses make excellent fertilizer!*)

Ezmia the Enchantress

Now, here’s a villain for the ages! This fairy gone rogue redefined the word *selfish!* All the royal families including myself were dragged for miles by vines because of her! I refuse to defend her, so I’ll dive right into my evaluation.

Ezmia’s biggest problem was that she had absolutely everything she needed: power, beauty, intelligence, and an adorable sidekick—yet she still wanted more! She was a colossal brat and as shallow as an ant’s teakettle! Her soul was like a bottomless pit that could never be filled. Being spoiled and greedy is a dangerous combination! Not all of us can manage it as well as I do.

Her ego was out of control! It blinded her judgment, making her vulnerable in ways she didn’t think were possible. In the end, a couple snarky

comments from a teenage girl were what defeated her. I saw it happen! Sticks and stones didn't break her bones; it was *words* that hurt her!

Almost the opposite of the Snow Queen, the Enchantress is a good example of someone who let their *success* get to their head! It made her careless and opened her up to weakness. Believing you are too big to fail will only result in failure!



Well, this has been a delightful chapter to write! Dissecting the flaws of famous people is one of my favorite hobbies. If only this book had been published earlier, history's most hated figures might have been remembered differently.



Chapter 8



Pebbles in Your Shoe

Since this is our eighth chapter together, I'm going to tell you a little secret: I despise orphans. I mean, what good are they? When is the last time an orphan asked you how *your* day was? Can you name one "exceptional orphan" you've met?

I just read the previous paragraph aloud to Charlie and his mouth dropped open. He's informed me I need to explain myself better so I don't come across as heartless.

The "orphans" in the Red Riding Hood Kingdom did not lose their parents—they're all alive and well. The children living in the orphanages are the bratty, mischievous, and greedy delinquents who were too much for their parents to raise, so they became the government's problem.

This was entirely my fault and I take full responsibility. When I first opened the orphanages, there was a minor miscommunication with the scribe I was dictating my plans to. I said the orphanages were for "the children of *deceased* parents," but that idiot wrote down "children of *distressed* parents." I should have made him read it back to me, but I had scheduled an important nap to take afterward. By the time the typo came to my attention,

the decree had already been posted all over the country. The next thing I knew, mothers and fathers from all corners of the kingdom had dragged their rambunctious children into town and left them on my doorstep.

Since then, those terrors have caused us nothing but headaches! They're constantly sneaking out at night to play pranks around the kingdom! They put soap in the Little Boy Who Cried Wolf Memorial Fountain. They stained the wool on Little Bo Peep's sheep, causing a tie-dyed-coat trend that winter. They've locked cats inside henhouses, glued cows' hooves to the ground, and even filled Lady Muffet's mailbox with spiders. The list goes on!

However, despite loathing them, I can never let my detestation show. It's very important a monarch never reveal a *pebble* in their shoe, for their enemies may turn it into a *boulder*!

So, to keep up appearances, I spend one day every year with the orphans to disguise my disgust. During which the orphans and I play games like "tie the queen up," "tiara Frisbee," "guess what's under her dress," "Will she sink or swim?" and my favorite, "Is that a wig?" The kingdom thinks I'm being generous, the orphans think I like them, and no one is the wiser.

The only thing that gets me through the day is knowing that when they become adults, I'll get to tar and feather them. This visual has saved me from losing my temper on several occasions when I'm forced to be with people who annoy me.



Chapter 9



Hosting Other Royals

If there's one thing I enjoy, it's a good party! I'm always looking for an excuse to throw one. Whenever one of my friends or relatives has a birthday or celebrates a special occasion, I put together a huge extravaganza in their honor. And sometimes they even attend!

Having a party on the horizon is a great way to get through a difficult situation. Every time I get kidnapped or narrowly escape death (which happens so often you'd think they were my hobbies), I plan a special event in my head. Just knowing you'll be surrounded by friends, music, games, food, drinks, and matching furniture can bring a little sunshine to the cloudiest days.

This trick was tremendously helpful when the Enchantress kidnapped me. There I was, strapped to a wall by enchanted vines with all the other royals. The fear of death wasn't even the worst part; we had to suffer through hours of a repetitive soliloquy as the Enchantress bragged about her universal domination—it's a wonder our ears didn't bleed!

As I looked around at all the gloomy faces, a little voice in my head whispered, "*Wouldn't it be fun to have an 'I survived the Enchantress' party*

when this mess is over?" Instantly my frown was turned upside down and the party-planning gears in my head rotated at full speed. I was so excited I almost forgot I had been kidnapped at all.

What kind of party did I want it to be? Being held prisoner always gives me an appetite, so I figured a dinner party would be the most fun to think about. *Where did I want to have the party?* I had just remodeled my castle, so naturally I wanted to show it off. *Who was I going to invite?* All the captive royals around me looked like they could use a party. I figured it might be nice to spend time together by *choice* for a change. Maybe it would make the next time we were imprisoned together more enjoyable.

With my plans in motion, I began passing out verbal invitations while the Enchantress was on another tangent of self-congratulations.

"Psssst, Snow White," I whispered. *"Snow White, over here!"*

Snow White was a little wrapped up in the situation, so it took a while to get her attention. *"What is it, Red?"* she whispered back.

"I want to invite you and Chandler to my castle for dinner!" I said, and gave her a thumbs-up.

"Um... sounds nice..." Snow White said. She wasn't as enthusiastic as I'd hoped, but I couldn't blame her given what we were going through at the time. Not everyone knows how to handle a crisis as well as I do.

"Hey, Sleeping Beauty!" I whispered, but she was either too far to hear or just ignoring me. *"If you can hear me, you and Chase are invited to my castle for dinner once this ordeal is over!"*

"Red, what are you doing?!" Rapunzel whispered to me.

“I’m inviting everyone to my castle for a party,” I said.

“The Enchantress is about to kill us! We’re not going to have a party!” Rapunzel snipped.

“Not with that attitude,” I said. *“You’re not invited if you’re going to be such a downer!”*

Rapunzel was probably just upset I hadn’t asked her first. I turned my head to Goldilocks and Jack, who were pinned to the wall next to me.

“Goldilocks, you and Jack should come to—”

“We already have plans,” Goldilocks said before I could finish. Typical! You’d think a fugitive would be more fun.

While I’ve never been the biggest fan of Cinderella’s, it would have been rude not to include her, since I was inviting everyone else.

“Cinderella!” I said, and we made eye contact. *“This probably isn’t the best time, but I’m going to host a dinner at my castle. I would love to have you and Chance come if you’re not busy. No children, though, so get a sitter for Hope—sorry about her getting kidnapped, by the way! Worst week ever, am I right?”*

“Uh-huh,” she mumbled.

In the end, everyone had panicked for no reason. The Enchantress was defeated, we were all freed, and life returned to normal.

The Enchantress taking over the world was *nothing* compared to the stress of planning the party! I’d never realized how much pressure comes with hosting a party for royals until I got into the thick of things! I regretted

inviting them the minute I started making plans. But to no surprise, I rose to the occasion and planned a lovely and successful evening!

Here are some recommendations should you ever host one yourself—especially if I’m invited.



Impressing from the Start

Remember, unlike your friends and relatives, royal families are accustomed to exquisite things. It’s almost impossible to impress them! So here’s my method of planning: Picture an evening from start to finish filled with things that would impress you—*now double that expectation!* Now take that image and add as many shiny objects as you can visualize without having a seizure. That will *still* underwhelm them, but stop there. Anything more than that will seem tacky.

I was worried they might have forgotten about my party after that whole “end of the world” thing we survived. So I sent two dozen horn players and a minstrel to each of their palaces to perform a musical invitation as a subtle reminder.

It took me two weeks of meticulous planning to make our evening a spectacular event to remember. The dining room was decorated in gold tablecloths and gold candlesticks. I had twelve of my favorite portraits of me hung so we would have something pleasant to look at while we ate. I also had all the floors recarpeted, all the art cleaned, and all the furniture reupholstered in the other rooms just in case someone wanted a tour.

Not only did the castle have to look its best, but also the kingdom needed to look better than ever. I traveled around the kingdom and ordered my people to clean up their yards, paint their barns, and keep their unattractive family

members indoors. On the day of the dinner, I made my citizens line the streets in their best clothes—bonnets and bowties, I said. They smiled and waved at the royals as they entered our kingdom and traveled to my castle.

I waited on the landing of the grand staircase in the entrance hall, dressed in my best gown, hood, gloves, and jewels, and greeted each of the monarchs as they arrived. It's important to be playful when welcoming other heads of state. There's nothing worse than hosting a stiff dinner.

“*Cinderella*, you look wonderful! Who says you need a Fairy Godmother's help to put a look together?!” “*Sleeping Beauty*, my, how rested you look! I wish someone would curse me to sleep for one hundred years!” “Darling *Rapunzel*, I love what you've done with your hair! Is the rest of it still making its way out of your carriage?” “Oh my, *Snow White*! Are you all right? It looks like you've seen a ghost!”

Snow White looked at me oddly and then finally sighed. “Oh, it's a joke... because I'm so pale... *Funny*.”

“I hope you all had pleasant journeys! How do you all like my kingdom?” I asked.

“It's... *cute*,” Cinderella said. “Do your people always line the streets and wave at your guests?”

“Were they doing that again? Oh, those silly dears. I told them it wasn't necessary! They just love welcoming people to their beautiful home.”

“I wouldn't say it was *welcoming*,” Sleeping Beauty said. “It was a little unsettling, actually, like something in a nightmare. I was afraid they were going to attack our carriage.”

All the royals nodded along with concerned eyes. Perhaps the citizens were a bit much.

“Well, with the amount of time you’ve slept, I’m sure everything reminds you of a nightmare.” I laughed awkwardly. “*Who’s hungry?*”

Making Special Accommodations

Royals like feeling special (it’s in our genes), so it’s your job to make them feel special while they’re in your home. This can be challenging when hosting multiple guests who wear crowns. Don’t worry, it doesn’t have to be an obnoxious display of affection (although one wouldn’t hurt if I’m in your home). All we need is a little something to show that you put our personal needs into consideration.

For example, as I escorted my guests to the dining room, I made a point to show Cinderella where all the exits were.

“Why are you showing me these?” Cinderella asked. “Do you want me to leave?”

“Of course not!” I said. “It’s just in case you need to make a mad dash at midnight. We all know you’re usually the first one out the door.”

“That’s *kind* of you,” she said, “but I’m not planning to leave earlier than anyone else. The Fairy Godmother is watching Princess Hope tonight, so there’s no curfew! I’ll happily sit at your side until the evening comes to an end.”

“Oh, you were planning to sit with us?” I said. “I had them set a special place for you with the servants downstairs. I figured you’d be more comfortable given your history of service.”

Judging by her face, this was more kindness than she was willing to accept. I assured her it would be no trouble to have them set an extra place in the dining room. I think I gained major points with Cinderella that night. We

might even be considered *friends* now! It's amazing what a little hospitality can do.

Before the appetizer was served, while Charlie was entertaining the men and Granny was showing the women my portraits, I pulled Snow White aside.

"Just to let you know, I made sure tonight's meal would be entirely apple-free," I said with an adorable wink. "I didn't want you to be worried about dietary restrictions tonight."

"Oh, thank you," Snow White said. "But just so you know, I'm not *allergic* to apples. The one my stepmother tried to kill me with was *poisoned*—it could have harmed anyone. I actually like apples."

"Ah," I said. "That's what I meant. I told my chef, 'absolutely no poisoned apples tonight!' We'll send those to the orphanage."

Snow White never laughs at my jokes. I have a feeling my humor is above her comprehension, the poor thing. I even had the chef bring out an apple with a small sign that read NOT POISONED. She didn't laugh at that, either.

Roughly halfway through the first course, Sleeping Beauty gently tapped me on the shoulder.

"Red, out of curiosity, why is there a pillow next to my place setting?" she asked.

"I had that placed there in case you needed to take a rest," I explained. "Don't worry, I won't be offended in the slightest. I can't imagine how the curse affected your sleep cycle."

"Thank you, but I won't be needing it," she said defensively. "Now that my

kingdom has been restored and the Enchantress is gone for good, I've been sleeping quite regularly.”

The poor thing must have been in denial about it. Later in the evening, during one of my longer toasts, I caught her dozing off for a bit. (Now that I mention it, Granny and Charlie had fallen asleep, too. There must have been something in the soup.)

Conversation

A gathering is only as good as the chemistry between its guests. It's wise to come up with a list of topics beforehand to keep your company stimulated. I wanted to discuss intelligent matters that would spark everyone's interest. Dinner conversation isn't fun unless everyone can partake and enjoy it. So this is the list I came up with, which you may use as a template:

1. How has Queen Red influenced you the most?
2. What is something about the Red Riding Hood Kingdom you wish you could do with yours?
3. Which of Queen Red's dresses is your favorite?
4. Why is *your* Prince Charming the most charming?
5. How has Queen Red recently impressed you?
6. If my prince hadn't rescued me, I would probably be _____ right now.
7. Which great leader, living or dead, does Queen Red remind you of?
8. Mermaids: Fish or Mammals?

9. If you had Rapunzel's hair, what's the craziest thing you'd do with it?
10. Damsels in distress: Are cries for help really just cries for attention?
11. What's one of Queen Red's qualities you wish you had more of?
12. Describe your ideal happily-ever-after.

Be Prepared for the Worst

Usually, the more important an occasion is, the more likely something will go terribly wrong. That's just the way it is. So if you're going to host a dinner for royalty, you need to be prepared for *ANYTHING*.

As you plan your event, carefully assess everything that could go wrong. By the time my guests arrived, there wasn't a single disruption I hadn't planned for.

- Although Snow White wasn't on the throne during the C.R.A.W.L. Revolution, I didn't want any hard feelings to surface between us. So, every time Granny brought up "the war against the north" (which is quite a bit when she gets around new people), I instructed a server to interrupt her with the next course.
- Unbeknownst to my guests, my pockets were full of bones to toss at Clawdius in case he got into trouble. The closest call was when I caught him chewing on Rapunzel's hair under the table. Luckily she didn't notice the large chunk he had eaten. (That couldn't have been easy to digest!)
- A butler was standing in the hall with a bucket of water during the

entire meal should anything or anyone catch on fire. After my first castle burned down, I learned I had *flammable* taste.

- The knights' armor that decorated the corners of the dining room actually had soldiers inside them should a war or a revolution break out before dessert.
- I had the chef prepare an extra plate if someone brought an unexpected guest without telling me. My hunch proved to be right, because as the main course was being served, Cinderella found one of her pet mice had snuck into her pocket before leaving the Charming Palace. A normal person would think the dinner table was an inappropriate place for a rat—*not Cinderella!* She requested the extra plate and the rodent ate an entire rack of lamb by itself. Apparently, you can take the girl out of service, but you can't take the service out of the girl.
- I even had exit routes planned in the event of a natural disaster. There was no earthquake, flood, fire, or famine that was going to rain on my parade!

All in all, thanks to my extraordinary coordinating skills, the dinner was a huge success! There wasn't a single hitch! Each king and queen left much happier than they arrived and we made a plan to make plans of doing it again at someone else's palace.

I haven't heard from any of them, but that doesn't dishearten me. Obviously, my dinner was such a smash, they were all too intimidated to follow it! You know, if this queen thing doesn't work out, I think I have a great backup career. Perhaps *Queen Red Riding Hood's Guide to Event Planning* should have been my first book.



Chapter 10



Recommended Reading

Since reading this book is probably the first time most of your brains have been so stimulated, I thought it would be kind to provide a list of titles I highly recommend reading after you conclude my book. It's very important to continue your "mush into matter" effort beyond this publication. Don't worry, I've summarized each book on your behalf and pointed out what you should learn from them. Reading comprehension takes a lot of energy, so don't overdo it and pull a thinking muscle.

***Queen Red Riding Hood's Guide to Royalty* by Queen Red Riding Hood**—Don't flip the book over to double-check the title—*this is in your hands!* I added my own book to this list for three reasons. Number one: It's by far the best political book out there—trust me, I've read most of them. Number two: It'll benefit you greatly to reread it in case you missed anything the first time around. Number three: Doesn't it make you feel accomplished knowing you've taken a step in the right direction?

***The Prince* by Nicole Macarena**—This is the book that started it all! If you're curious to see what inspired my masterpiece, definitely check this out! I must warn you, it's not as delightful as my book and it's hard to read. To be honest, I didn't know what she was talking about most of the time.

However, it won't be hard to recognize the ideas that I've so brilliantly updated. NOTE: When she talks about "principles," she isn't referring to the head of a school. I learned that the hard way.

***Hamlet* by William Shakyfruit**—This selection is purely selfish because it's one of my favorite stories. To put it simply, it's absolutely hysterical. I mean, *everyone is royal, but they're all miserable!* Isn't that so amusing? And as punishment for their ridiculousness, they have obscene and theatrical deaths. There is a lot of political wisdom hidden throughout the silly plot, so much so that you forget it's a comedy at times. *Hamlet* is a script, so it can be a group activity if you'd like. I make my royal subjects come to the castle every Thursday afternoon and perform it for me.

***Utopia* by Sir Thomas More**—Make sure you have a handkerchief handy, because this one is a tearjerker. It takes place on a miserable island where *everyone is treated the exact same—even the rulers!* It really makes you respect the monarchy and understand the importance of a class system. *Utopia* cleverly displays how too much equality can be a very dull thing.

***The Mother Goose Diaries* by Mother Goose**—Remember that lesson about learning from other people's mistakes? This book proves that more than anything I've ever encountered. While I love Mother Goose dearly, much can be learned as you read about her interactions with rulers throughout history. Never take advice from an old woman who uses an overgrown farm animal as transportation. I thought that was a given, but I was wrong.

Outroduction



A Few Final Words

Unfortunately, all good things must come to an end, and I'm afraid this book is no exception. This may be the only time you'll come in contact with such profound wisdom, so do not be surprised if you experience a period of mourning and/or depression upon finishing it. But before you dive into the depths of withdrawal, let's celebrate the time we shared by reviewing what I've taught you:

You learned the extent of my bravery and brilliance as I told you my heroic tale, and hopefully it inspired you to be courageous in your own life.

I taught you the importance of image and the proper methods of gaining and maintaining respect and admiration from your people.

You were warned to be cautious of flattery, for it may be laced with deception.

I told you how to carefully choose the people who work for you and to appoint only people who are perfect for the position.

I explained that the ideal relationship between a monarch and his or her citizens resembles that between man and man's best friend.

When your enemies drag your name through the dirt, you can emerge covered in roses if you look for the flowers hidden in the field.

I showed you how learning from other people's mistakes is just as important as learning from their achievements if you want a successful reputation.

I taught you that if you keep your annoyances close to your heart, you can use them as a shield.

You learned the necessary steps of planning for and hosting important figures, which will lead to prosperous relationships with your neighbors.

I've given you a list of literature I recommend so you may continue your education of politics and royalty.

Finally, I will leave you with the best piece of advice I've ever been given, and the source will surprise you. Cinderella once told me, "Remember, Red, it's impossible to please everyone, so never make that a goal."

I'm embarrassed to admit I actually agree with the rat whisperer. But if there's one thing I've learned from my own balance of power and politics, of success and failure, of approval and disapproval, of luxury and responsibility, it's this: *You can't please everyone, so make sure you please yourself!*

Acknowledgments



So many people to thank, such little time! I would like to thank Charlie and Granny for editing my book and changing all the words I made up. To my darling Clawdius—*Mommy loves you!* A special thank-you to my friends Alex and Conner, whom I would love to see in an environment free of danger just once.

To all the wonderful people in my kingdom, I couldn't be queen without you—literally! A big thanks to my royal subjects: the third Little Pig, Lady Muffet, Sir Jack Horner, Sir BaaBaa Blacksheep, the Little Old Woman from the Shoe Inn, and the Three Blind Mice. Thank you for looking after the kingdom so I could write about looking after the kingdom. Also, thank you for letting me pass the law to make buying a copy of this book mandatory to everyone in the kingdom—that will definitely help with sales!

I suppose some thanks should be given to the Big Bad Wolf himself. None of this would have been possible if he hadn't tried to eat me all those years ago. He was a great villain but is an even better rug.

And, of course, I'd like to thank *myself*. Very few monarchs have the brilliance, the beauty, the patience, the charisma, the bravery, and the tiaras to inspire history. Bravo, me!

Praise for
Queen Red Riding Hood's
Guide to Royalty

“By far the first book Red has written.”

—Red’s granny

“Red uses her unique voice to share clever political insight in a style no one else but the queen can get away with.”

—Prince Charlie “Froggy” Charming

“Of all the political advice books inspired by previous works of social commentary, this one made me laugh the most.”

—Alex Bailey

“I didn’t think Red could write, but she definitely wrote this.”

—Conner Bailey

“Just like Red, her book is a piece of work.”

—Goldilocks

“Red never ceases to amaze me.”

—Jack

“Great book, great coaster.”

—Mother Goose

“Two hooves up.”

—The third Little Pig

“*Woof.*”

—Clawdius

The Mother Goose Diaries

by Mother Goose
with Chris Colfer



LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY
NEW YORK BOSTON

*To Lester, for being the best gander
a gal could ask for. Your landing
technique still needs work.*



Forewarning Foreword




Well, the time has come. The confidentiality agreements have expired, the cease-and-desist letters have stopped coming in, the dynasties I've been avoiding are dying out, and all the old mob bosses I owe money to are behind bars. Look out, world; *Mother Goose is finally publishing a memoir!*

I've never been a big fan of autobiographies. If I wanted to hear a bunch of whiny stories from insignificant, attention-seeking know-it-alls, I'd just have lunch with Little Miss Muffet. It takes something special to capture my attention. I'm talking unbelievable adventures with remarkable people, fascinating places in chaotic times, unusual predicaments and sequences of events, and highly questionable evidence to back up the author's accountability. I guess that's why I decided to reread my own diary!

Boy, am I glad I kept one! I had forgotten most of the crazy shenanigans I got into over the years. That's what one too many pub brawls with talking animals and late-night ragers with enchanted silverware will do to your memory.

It's been a hoot reliving some of my best and worst moments. So entertaining, in fact, I felt guilty *not* sharing it with the rest of the world. It won't do anyone any good if I keep them to myself, and Lester is tired of hearing them over and over again. By popular demand, here is a selection of my favorite memories plucked straight from the fading parchment of my crumbling diary. (You know you're old when you've outlived leather.)



Now, just like everything I'm involved with, this diary should come with a warning. People tend to be picky when it comes to "history," so if you're

going to be a snob about “accuracy,” find something else to read. And if there are any so-called “scholars” out there who doubt me, let me be very clear: I was there, I know what I saw, and I know what I lived through. If my memories contradict the history you’ve been taught or the history you teach, that’s not my problem.

Just like they say, “*History is invented by those who outdrank the other witnesses.*” Or maybe I’m the one who said that? Anyhoo, I’m sure all your questions will be answered in the pages ahead. Enjoy!



100 DA (DRAGON AGE).



Dear Diary,

Today marks the hundredth anniversary of the dragons taking over the planet. It also happens to be my thirteenth birthday, and it's the worst birthday I've ever had. Two months ago Mom and Dad ran off to pursue their dreams of becoming musicians. They said they wanted a better life for me than one on the road, so they sent me to live with the fairies in the Fairy Palace.

Sometimes living with the fairies feels like I'm living in a glittery, smiley, rainbow cult. Everyone in the Fairy Kingdom is obsessed with white magic and doing good deeds. I'm like the black sheep of the Fairy Palace, and they hate me for it. They're always teasing me in the halls and throwing crumpled up pieces of paper at me during magic lessons. I wish Mom and Dad had left me with the trolls and goblins—at least I wouldn't get into trouble for putting a bully into a headlock there.

It's been really hard making a friend here, hence why I've started journaling. There's one girl who's a little older than me who I guess is okay. Everyone really likes her a lot around here; they say she'll be running the joint when she gets older. She really likes me for some reason and has been looking out for me. I don't know her name, but she stands up for me every time she sees someone picking on me.

She was the only person who remembered it was my birthday today. She made me a cake, but then lectured me about how much of it I was eating.

"Careful," she said. "You'll make yourself sick."

"Don't mother me," I said. "We're practically the same age."

“I don’t mean to *mother* you, but someone has to look out for you,” she said. “Consider me your *godmother* while you live with the fairies.”

“You want to be my *fairy godmother*?” I asked.

“Fairy godmother?” she said and scrunched up her nose. “That sounds silly.”

It was the only time I had seen her dislike something, so naturally I had to tease her about it. “Too late, that’s what I’ll be calling you from this moment on!”

The “fairy godmother” just laughed. “Whatever it takes to be your friend,” she said.

I’ve never been used to *kindness*. It’s always given me a weird feeling in the pit of my stomach, just like mermaid stew.

“Why are you so nice to me?” I asked. “All the other fairies can’t stand me, so why are *you* trying to be my friend?”

“I can’t explain why, but I’ve always loved taking care of people. It’s sort of a hobby,” she said. “What do you do for fun?”

“I like playing cards and picking the locks of liquor cabinets,” I said. “So I don’t think I’m the kind of girl you want to be friends with.”

“Are you kidding? That’s *exactly* the kind of friend I want!” she said. “You’re different, and different is good! The more different you have in your life, the more exciting it is! People around here don’t understand that. I’m so bored of all these perfect and colorful fairies flying around—they’re no fun! I’d give anything to do something thrilling and spontaneous!”

“I know what you mean,” I said. “I’ve been thinking about sneaking away from the Fairy Palace and capturing a dragon! Want to come with me? It could be the thrilling and spontaneous thing you’re looking for.”

Her eyes lit up like it was the best idea she had ever heard. “Let’s go!”

I never did catch her real name, but I think this “fairy godmother” girl might be the closest thing I have to a friend. Maybe my birthday wasn’t such a bad day after all.

100 AD (AFTER DRAGONS)



Dear Diary,

It's been one hundred years since the dragons went extinct, and I'm starting to miss those scaly suckers. Don't get me wrong: Things were terrible while they were in existence. Everything was burnt to a crisp! The air was always filled with smoke! Peasants were constantly running for their lives—even when they didn't need to be! The dragons made them so paranoid, they ran in circles around their villages all day, just in case one attacked it. No one knew how to relax with those overgrown reptiles flying around.

It was a lot of work getting rid of them, but thankfully the fairies and I managed. Since then, we've tried restoring some sense into the kingdoms. But I can't help wondering if getting rid of the dragons was a good idea. Things have become so dull I'm starting to go stir-crazy!

Obviously I don't miss getting burned by their breath or whipped by their tails or the constant pandemonium they caused, but at least we had some fun slaying them! Sure, it was a dangerous and scary time, but it was *stimulating*. Not to mention all the money I made from wrestling the smaller ones in sold-out arenas.

Nowadays, we're so hit up for entertainment we obsess over every ditz who needs a rescue or a makeover. First it was Cinderella, then Sleeping Beauty was all anyone could talk about, next Snow White came onto the scene, and now it's some girl named Rapunzel's turn in the spotlight. I can barely keep track of them! You'd think the Charming brothers were in a competition to find and marry the neediest woman.

By the way, who is naming these people? *Snow White* is not a name, that's a description! *Cinderella* is just cruel and *Rapunzel* sounds like something that happens to fruit when it's left in the sun. Do famous people name their kids ridiculous things just to tick off the rest of us?

It's not just the damsels in distress that are all the rage. Have you noticed every village idiot with a quirk becomes national news? Jack and Jill fell down a hill—*so what?* Little Bo Peep lost her sheep—*how is that my problem?* Hickory, dickory, dock, the mouse ran up the clock—*call pest control, not me!*

We're inherently teaching our children that the bigger a numbskull you are, the more attention you'll get. In my day, it was the *knights in shining armor* and the *valiant leaders* who got the respect. You actually had to do something significant to earn notoriety. Just because times are simpler now doesn't mean we should celebrate every moron under the sun!

The Fairy Godmother tells us we've entered a "Golden Age." I say we've entered a "snooze fest." Everything is so peaceful and happy it's driving me nuts. Too much smiling can't be good for the soul. And if I hear one more schmuck say the phrase *happily ever after* I'm going to beat them with the heel of my buckled shoe. Who came up with *that*? And why do we have to say it at the end of *everything*?



The phrase was so catchy, the Fairy Godmother established the *Happily Ever After Assembly* with the Fairy Council and the current kings and queens of the kingdoms. I wanted nothing to do with it, but she insisted I join. Now I'm expected to contribute to the *progress* and *prosperity* of our world, when I'd rather just mock it from afar.

I'm not sure why she wanted me around, but I owe the Fairy Godmother one. I've felt terrible ever since I turned down the chance to be her apprentice. I've never met someone who cares so genuinely about making life better for the people and creatures in our world than the Fairy Godmother—I could never fill her shoes!

The Fairy Godmother's a great gal and an excellent friend. We've been close since we were kids. We're always there for each other, through thick and thin. I held her hand when she gave birth to both of her sons, and provided a shoulder to cry on when her husband died. In return, she's always posted my bail and testified as a character witness—you *don't get closer than that!*

The Fairy Godmother has always seen something in me that no one, including myself, has seen before. Despite all my mistakes and bad habits that the other fairies are so quick to berate me for, the Fairy Godmother defends me and has my back. She says I bring a lot of good into the world, whether I believe it or not. I just hope I never disappoint her.

Once again, she was the only person who remembered it was my two hundredth birthday today. She made a huge obnoxious cake like she does every year. There were so many candles, it almost set the Fairy Palace on fire. I suppose it's sweet of her, but no woman wants to be reminded they're two centuries old. Maybe that's why I woke up so grumpy?

Well, I've got to do something before my bad mood becomes permanent. I just need a change of pace, a change of scenery, and definitely a change of people! Unfortunately, that isn't likely to happen anytime soon. I better find something to do with my time or I'm going to be in trouble.

Maybe I'll start up a hobby. Does ale tasting or gambling count? I want to start with something I'm good at.

5 GA (GOLDEN AGE)



Dear Diary,

Well, gambling didn't help matters. Now on top of being annoyed by everyone around me, I owe most of them money, too. I've lost practically all the earnings from my wrestling days. I tried to start a comeback by wrestling unicorns, but it didn't have the same draw that the dragons had. No one wants to pay admission to see an old lady put a snooty horse in a headlock.

I did manage to score *one* good win in a card game last week—a *golden egg!* Now, as everyone knows, golden eggs are usually made of solid gold. But if you're lucky, it'll be fertilized! Which means a magic goose will hatch that *lays* golden eggs!

As luck would have it, on my way home from the card game I felt something moving inside the egg! *It was definitely fertilized!* I was going to be rich! I'd never have to worry about gambling debts again! Finally, after helping so many idiots achieve a happily-ever-after, I was going to get my own!

I was terribly paranoid that something would happen to the little zygote, so I made it as comfortable as possible until it was ready to hatch. I carefully wrapped it in blankets and rested it by the fireplace to stay warm. I even cradled it and sang soothing songs to it. (Actually, I don't have a good singing voice, so it probably thought it was on a sinking ship.)

Eventually, the little chick started pecking at the shell. *This was it!* With every piece it chucked away I thought of another extravagant purchase I was going to make with its future eggs. A beach house in Mermaid Bay, a

country estate in the Charming Kingdom, a cabin in the Dwarf Forests—the possibilities were endless!

Unfortunately, wealth wasn't in my immediate future after all. A *gander* hatched out of the egg! That's right—a *useless male goose!* I could kiss my expensive dreams good-bye.

I thought I was disappointed to see him, but you should have seen the look he gave me! The goose looked me up and down and shook his head judgmentally. He squawked at me, and although I'm not as fluent in bird as I am in other animal dialects, I could have sworn he said, "No, this isn't right. You can't possibly be my mother."

"You think *you're* disappointed? You were supposed to be my retirement fund! Now what am I supposed to do with you?" I said.

The gander eyed my stomach and squawked again, as if to say, "*Judging by your midsection, I'm afraid to ask.*"

"I'm not going to *eat you*, smart aleck," I said. "You look far too gamey for my taste. I might get the runs just from looking at you!"

His beak dropped open as if it was the most offensive thing he had ever heard—and I had to remind myself that it probably was, since he was only a minute old.

He squawked again and headed for the door as if to say, "*I just hatched out of a golden egg! I will not put up with this treatment.*"

"Don't let the door hit your tail feathers on the way out!" I yelled after him. "Good luck lasting outside! There are plenty of hungry creatures in the woods that would *love* a gamey snack!"

The gander slammed the door and left my house. He was surprisingly strong for an infant. I didn't let it upset me, though. It takes more than a feathered tantrum to grind my gears.

I poured myself a glass of bubbly and cozied up in my favorite rocking chair. I was looking forward to a nice quiet night alone, but I couldn't stop thinking about the little guy.

What had I done? He wasn't even an hour old yet and I let him waddle into a forest with no protection. I couldn't just sit there—I had to find him! I just hoped it wasn't too late.

I ran outside into the woods with a lantern raised above my head. Thankfully, it had snowed the night before, so I was able to follow his tiny webbed footprints into the forest. I found the little bugger standing in a

clearing in the middle of the woods. Thankfully, he was alive... *but he wasn't alone!*



A giant wolf with matted black fur and red eyes was walking in circles around him. The poor goose was trembling and, from the way he covered the nostrils on his beak, I'm assuming the wolf had terrible breath.

"Poor, poor little birdy," the wolf said. "All alone in the woods without a father or mother goose to protect him. Do you know what happens to little goslings when they're all by themselves?"

The wolf grinned, exposing his sharp, pointy teeth. The little gander squawked, as if to say, "*I seriously regret asking you for directions.*"

"Hey! Get away from him!" I demanded.

"Who are you?" the wolf asked.

"Consider me the *mother goose!*" I said. "And I don't like the way you're taunting my kid."

"Your *kid?*" the wolf laughed, not intimidated by me in the slightest. "Silly old woman! Go knit something before you become dessert."

Knit something? Old woman? Clearly this mutt had a death wish.

"I'm not the knitting type, *pup,*" I said and pulled up my sleeve to show him my forearm. "Do you see this scar? I got it from wrestling a dragon three times your size—and that was for *fun!* So unless you want me to knock all the teeth out of your ugly muzzle, I suggest you find a nice fruit salad to prey on and leave my goose alone!"

The wolf growled at me and then ran into the trees, leaving the gander and me alone for good. The gander sighed with relief and there was a thankful twinkle in his eyes. He waddled up to my feet and squawked at me, as if to say, "Mother Goose, *huh?*"

I never would have considered myself the maternal type, but it did have a nice ring to it. I figured if I was going to adopt, I'd better do it in my early two hundreds while I was still vital. Besides, the goose's options were limited.

"I'm probably the best mother you're going to get around here. I doubt anything else is going to tolerate you long enough to take care of you."

The gander shrugged. Even he couldn't deny he was a pain in the backside.

"So what are we going to call *you*, mister?"

He squawked again. "*What about Enrique Rodriguez?*"

"I like *Lester,*" I said. "I promised an old tavern buddy I would name my firstborn after him. I think you're the closest thing I'll ever get to that."

The gander rolled his eyes and sighed. “Fine,” he squawked. “*Lester* it is—can we go inside now? No one told me outside was going to be so cold.”

Over the last week, Lester and I have gotten to know each other and are slowly getting used to living together. We’ve had all the conversations new roommates typically have, like *Don’t leave your feathers in the sink*, *No regurgitating at the table*, and *The floor is not a toilet* (he’s not the first roommate I’ve had these conversations with, but that’s a long story). It’s been challenging, but I think we’ll iron out all the kinks in time.

Mother Goose has really grown on me, too. Everyone on the Happily Ever After Assembly thinks it’s adorable that I’m taking care of Lester, so my new nickname is the only thing they address me by anymore.

It’s a good thing, too, because with all my recent gambling debts, I needed a new name....

7 GA



Dear Diary,

Things haven't been great between Lester and me lately. We're constantly arguing about how he needs to do something with his life, but there's not an ounce of ambition in his hollow bones. All he does is sit at home and eat junk food all day while I'm at work. He's gotten so fat he's practically the size of a horse. So, I decided to *use him like a horse!*

For years, my main method of transportation has been magical teleportation, and I've never been good at it. I always end up inside a wall or a cabinet—especially when I have a hangover. So, one afternoon I brought home reins and a saddle and strapped up m'gander! I was going to make use of him if it killed me.

Lester wasn't thrilled by the idea. He had one look at himself in the mirror and shook his head. "You've got to be kidding me," he squawked.

"Come on, let's do a test flight before the winds change!"

Our first takeoff was pretty easy. Lester insisted he needed a running start with my added weight, but I think he was being difficult on purpose. Turns out Lester is a decent flyer, although I would never tell him that because it would go straight to his head. He didn't take directions well, so I just jerked on the reins until he listened. I'm surprised they didn't break off.

Believe it or not, Lester's not the first winged creature I've piloted. During the Dragon Age, I used to fly a dragon named Schnapps. Boy was he ugly! He had the face of a boar, wings like a bat, the body of a salamander, and the temper of a wet cat. I had to give him up after he ate one of my coworkers—you know, workplace politics.



I had forgotten how wonderful it felt to fly. The best part of riding Lester was that everyone looking up from below just thought he was a regular bird in the sky. They had no idea this wacky old lady was riding on his back. This will be useful the next time a bounty hunter is tailing me.

Landing was not Lester's strong suit. After our first flight, he hit the ground so hard I was thrown off his back and somersaulted through a muddy strip of land. I think it was calculated on his part. I've never heard a goose laugh so hard.

Our second landing was even worse! We crashed into the roof of a schoolhouse, terrifying and emotionally scarring two dozen schoolchildren. It was a mess! There were feathers and pencils everywhere. I've been getting nasty letters from their parents all week. I'm sure we'll get blamed for every issue their children have in the future.

We've had a rocky start, but we'll get the hang of it!

10 GA



Dear Diary,

What a day! I thought Humpty Dumpty's death was going to be the biggest shock of my year, but boy was I wrong. The Fairy Council and I finally found out why the Fairy Godmother has been acting so strange lately —*and it's a doozy!*

It all started when she called an impromptu assembly meeting at the Fairy Palace. I begrudgingly got out of bed and dragged Lester out of his, and off we went. We flew to the palace, landed on the mattress the fairies placed in the garden for us, and met the other fairies in the great hall.

Usually she only calls us there when something *wonderful* has happened we all need to know about, so I wasn't exactly thrilled to be there.

"Well, what is it this time?" I asked them. "Let me guess, Suzie Daffodil was rescued from a tower by Prince Bright Teeth? Or did Johnnie Alibi finally find his herd of scapegoats?"

"We don't know," Emerelda said. "We're still waiting for the Fairy Godmother to arrive."

That wasn't a surprise. The Fairy Godmother had been late or absent to all the assembly meetings that month. On the rare occasions we saw her, she always came in a huff and left in a hurry. Like I said, we knew something was wrong, but no one could get ahold of her long enough to ask what was going on.

A quick gust of sparkling wind blew into the great hall and the Fairy Godmother appeared. She always arrives in style, I'll give her that.

"Sorry I'm late!" she apologized. "I hope I didn't keep you waiting

long.”

Her cheeks were rosy and she was out of breath. She looked exactly like she used to after a long night of dancing when we were teenagers.

“Is everything all right, Fairy Godmother?” Xanthous asked. “You seem a little... *distressed*.”

“Well, *distressed* isn’t the word I would use,” she said. “I have something I need to tell you. It’ll be hard to believe at first, but it’ll explain why I haven’t been myself lately.”

“I know what it is,” I said with a sly grin. “You got a *boyfriend*!”

“*What?*” everyone said in unison, as if I had said something offensive.

“Oh, come on,” I said. “She’s *old*, not dead! Lots of men are dating older women these days. Besides, this is exactly how she acted when she met her late husband.”

“Um... *no*, Mother Goose,” the Fairy Godmother said. “I don’t have a boyfriend.”

“It’s okay, FG,” I said, trying to coax it out of her. “No one here is going to judge you! Your husband has been dead for years—it’s perfectly acceptable to move on. Just tell us who he is! Is it King White? The Shoemaker? *The Traveling Tradesman*? Like I said, no judgments!”

It was obvious from the look she was giving me that a boyfriend hadn’t been distracting her. It was something else entirely of a very serious nature. What a shame; I was hoping her boyfriend would have a friend.

“I’ve discovered another dimension,” the Fairy Godmother blurted out.

Everyone in the room gasped. Lester let out a prolonged squawk. I started laughing but quickly stopped when I realized she wasn’t joking.

“*Another dimension?*” Skylene asked.

“*You must be joking!*” Tangerina said.

“*How is that possible?*” Rosette said.

“I don’t know, but I assure you it’s real,” the Fairy Godmother said.

At first, I was convinced she was hitting the pixie dust. She couldn’t have actually discovered another dimension! That’s crazier than a chicken with its feet glued to the ground! But being *late* and *absent* was one thing; *exaggerating the truth* was something the Fairy Godmother never did.

“How did you discover it?” Emerelda asked.

“Well... it was shortly after Cinderella’s wedding,” the Fairy Godmother explained. “After seeing how much a little magic changed her life, I was

inspired to help people more than ever. So, I decided to cast a spell that would take me to whomever needed magic the most. I waved my wand over my body, and the next thing I knew, I was someplace no one from our world had ever been before.”

“What’s it like?” Violetta asked.

“Horrible,” she said. “Just like the Dragon Age, only the destruction is caused by man. It’s a world of vastly different cultures in vastly different terrains, all fighting one another for dominance.”

“Were you scared?” Coral asked.

“I was horrified,” she said, “but not as frightened as a little boy I found hiding in the rubble. He was trembling and starving. Barbarians had destroyed his village and killed his family. I gave him some food and took him to safety. However, the only thing that lifted his spirits was when I told him the stories of Cinderella and Rapunzel.”

I couldn’t help rolling my eyes at the sound of their ridiculous names.

“Why did that cheer him up?” Xanthous asked.

“Because in the other dimension, or the *Otherworld* as I call it, there is no magic,” the Fairy Godmother said. “Hearing how magic helped and influenced the people in our world let the poor boy forget his troubles for just a moment. It brought him a little peace during the worst time of his life.”

“Is the little boy all right now?” Coral asked.

“Yes—but that’s the strangest thing about the Otherworld,” the Fairy Godmother said. “I found an elderly couple who agreed to look after the boy so I could return to this world. I was only here a week or so, but by the time I returned to the Otherworld to check on him, the boy had become a *man*! He had a wife and children of his own.”

“A *man*?” Tangerina said. “Do they grow faster in the other dimension?”

“The Otherworld moves much faster than our world does,” she said. “A day for us may be months to them. A year could be a century.”

“Remarkable!” Skylene said.

“The man said my stories saved his life and they gave him hope after a devastating time. He passed them down to his own children and called them *fairy tales*. I’ve been returning to the Otherworld every chance I get to spread our stories to other children in need.”

“That explains your recent behavior,” Emerelda said.

“I apologize for my negligence,” the Fairy Godmother said. “Every time I travel to the Otherworld it’s in much worse shape than the time before. There are more and more children who desperately need something to believe in. Which brings me to the reason I asked you to meet me today. I’ve seen firsthand what a difference these stories have made in the children’s lives, but I can’t continue doing it alone. The more of us there are, the more likely I think the stories have a chance of being heard. So, I’m hopeful you all will join me in spreading the stories of our world around the Otherworld.”

The great hall became very quiet, like when a friend who owes you money asks for more. It was so tense, I openly took a swig from the flask I hide in my bonnet—I didn’t even try to sneak it.

“Show us this world,” Xanthous said. “How can we get there?”

“The magic of traveling between worlds is so unique, I believe I’m the only one capable of it,” the Fairy Godmother said. “But I’ve managed to put that magic into a portal. Follow me, I’ll show you where it is.”

The Fairy Godmother led us to the south tower of the Fairy Palace. The room was circular and empty except for an archway that had been built in the center. The Fairy Godmother pulled a lever on the wall and a blue curtain appeared under the arch. Beyond the curtain was a very bright room.

“This is one of many portals I plan on creating if you agree to help me,” she said. “The Otherworld is just through this curtain—but brace yourselves, the journey may be a shock.”

She stepped through the curtain, and we followed her. I told Lester to stay behind—he gets gassy when he’s overwhelmed.



I was wrong about the other side of the curtain; it wasn’t a room of light, but a *world of light*! For a moment I thought I was the one on pixie dust! We fell through a bright, never-ending space for what felt like forever. I saw the other fairies spinning and circling around me. There didn’t seem to be an end in sight until all nine of us landed in a damp grassy field.

I got up and looked around at the Otherworld with my own eyes. It was

even worse than the Fairy Godmother described.

“*What a dump!*” I said.

At first, I thought an amazing party had happened the night before, because there were hundreds of passed-out men scattered around the field. The fairies screamed when they saw the men. I took a closer look and realized the bodies weren’t unconscious but *dead!* A terrible battle had happened here, not a party. And if the smell was any indication, it had happened a while ago.



“What a terrible place,” Tangerina said.

“I’ve never seen such a sad sight,” Violetta sniffed.

“This isn’t even the worst I’ve seen,” the Fairy Godmother said. “Women and children are also slaughtered in times of war. Mercy is a very rare privilege in this world.”

In the distance, there were people taking the armor, the weapons, and any goods they could find off the bodies. Tears came to the fairies’ eyes. If I were in touch with my emotions, mine would have welled up, too.

The Fairy Godmother led us to the closest village, and our spirits sank even more. There was poverty everywhere you looked. With no homes to go to, mothers sat on the side of the road cradling their crying infants. Children begged for food and money from everyone they saw. We gave them everything we had—although none of them wanted my bonnet, which was a little offensive. Apparently beggars *can* be choosers.

“Do you understand why I’m so passionate about helping the people here?” the Fairy Godmother asked. “We’ve made our world a safe and peaceful place, and now I believe magic has brought us here to do the same. Will you help me help them?”

The fairies looked at one another in a very determined manner.

“I will,” Emerelda said.

“As will I,” Xanthous said.

“Absolutely,” Skylene and Tangerina said together.

“You can count on us,” Violetta said, and Coral nodded.

“With you one hundred percent,” Rosette said.

Everyone turned to me because I was the only one who hadn’t agreed to it yet. I hesitated because I was scared. I could barely help the people in our world. How was I going to make a difference in a place like this?

“And what about you, Mother Goose?” the Fairy Godmother asked.

“Okay, I’ll join, too,” I said. “I just hope I don’t make things worse.”

Lesson learned: *Be careful what you wish for.* When I hoped for a place to escape to now and then, I never thought I’d end up in the likes of the Otherworld. What have I gotten myself into?

1349, LONDON (OTHERWORLD)



Dear Diary,

Today was my first solo trip into the Otherworld, and, boy, was I dreading it. For months I've been listening to the fairies brag about all the children they've been helping and it's intimidated my socks off. Their stories are so touching and heartfelt, I knew I could never have the same impact.

For starters, the fairies really look the part. They're always dressed in bright, shimmering, colorful clothes, like they're performing in an obnoxious parade. I get headaches if I look at them for too long, and children love that gimmicky crap.

Another thing: I've never been good with kids. They never appreciate my humor. They say I talk funny and smell weird, which stings when it's coming from a kid with a lisp who's covered in chocolate. Every baby I've ever been in contact with has peed or thrown up on me—even when I'm not holding it! It's like I'm a walking hazardous wastebasket to them.

Needless to say, I was very nervous about the whole thing. I seriously regretted signing up for it.

I crossed through the portal and ended up in a town called London in a country called England. I've heard the fairies speak so highly of it, but it was miserable! Or at least the condition I found it in was.

The city was like a big foggy maze, and there were rats everywhere! The streets were filled with people lying on the ground who coughed and moaned horribly—like I do on the mornings after I've had too much bubbly. But these people weren't recovering from a night of careless

drinking, they were *sick*—the sickest I’ve ever seen!

Their skin was pale and there were dark circles under their eyes. Their glands were so swollen they protruded out of their necks and down their bodies. Their fingers and toes were black, as if their bodies had begun rotting while they were still alive.

I use the term *alive* loosely, because many looked like they were already dead. I couldn’t help but scream when I turned a corner and found a large pile of bodies stacked right in the middle of town. The liveliest person I saw was a man wearing a birdlike mask who was pulling a wagon of more dead bodies, which he dumped with the others.

“Excuse me, sir.” I said. “I’m new in town. What’s going on here?”

“Madame, you mustn’t be walking the streets without a mask on!” he said. “You’ll catch the *Black Death*.”

“Black Death?” I asked. “Where I come from, that’s a wrestling move I invented. What does it mean here?”

“It’s a terrible plague,” he said. “It’s taken more than half the lives in this country, and even more throughout Europe.”

“A *plague*?” I said in disbelief.

Of course! There *would* be a deadly epidemic the first time I came to the Otherworld by myself—it was just my luck. How was I supposed to help anyone under these circumstances? If I wasn’t nervous before, I definitely was now. I needed a drink.

“Is there a tavern around here?” I asked him.

“What’s a tavern?” he asked.

“You know, a place that serves alcoholic beverages,” I explained, but that didn’t register with him, either.

“Alcohol?” he asked.

“Yeah, the sterilizing liquid originally invented for medicinal purposes but was later developed into a variety of consumable flavors for consumers to abuse.”

Still, it wasn’t ringing a bell.

“I’ve never heard of a *tavern*, but it’s a fine idea,” the man said.

“Never mind,” I said. “Do you know of any children in the area who could use a hand?”

He pointed down a winding street. “There’s a church down this road that’s housing orphans, but I wouldn’t go there if I were you. All the

children are infected.”

“Trust me, it’ll take more than a plague to poison the blood in my veins,” I said. “Thank you for the directions.”

I traveled down the road and stopped at a building that had several tiny coffins stacked outside it. I figured this must be the place. It was an eerie sight, and my heart began to race. Thankfully I found my backup flask in my hat and took a swig from it.

I knocked on the door and a nun wearing a mask answered. I could only see her eyes, but the dark circles under them were just as bad as the people’s outside. However, hers weren’t from illness but exhaustion.

“Can I help you?” she asked me.

“I was wondering if I could help *you*,” I said. “I was in the neighborhood and thought I’d ask if you needed any assistance with the children.”

“God bless you,” the nun said. She was so relieved I thought she might kiss me. “I’ve been taking care of the orphans for two days straight without sleep. Please come in.”

The nun led me inside the church and took me into a back room. There were a dozen beds but only three were occupied with children: two boys and one girl. They had terrible coughs and were just as pale and swollen as the people outside. One of the boys was so ill he could barely keep his eyes open.

“The plague took their parents,” the nun said. “A week ago we were turning children away, and now these are who remain...”

“Why don’t you get some rest,” I said. “I’ll look after the kiddos.”

“Thank you,” the nun said and went into the next room. She was so weary, she didn’t even think to ask who I was or if I was qualified to look after children. The orphans, however, weren’t so shy about vetting me.

“Who are you?” the conscious little boy wheezed.

“Where I’m from, they call me Mother Goose,” I said.

“Do you have children?” he asked.

“Nope,” I said. “But I do have a pet gander who acts like a child—though don’t tell him I said that. He’ll get very upset.”

“Geese don’t get upset,” the little girl said.

“You’ve never met Lester,” I told her.

“He has a name?” the boy asked.

“Sure does, although he tells me every day he wants to change it to something more dignified.”

“He can *talk*?” the girl asked.

“Getting him to shut up is the trick,” I said.

“But animals can’t talk,” the boy said.

“Where I’m from, lots of animals talk,” I said. “They wear clothes, have jobs, and are respectable members of society. We have lots of things you don’t have in this world, because in my world there’s lots of magic.”

“Magic?” the girl asked, as if she was afraid of it. “Do you work for the *devil*?”

“Depends on who you ask,” I said. “But you have nothing to worry about. I work for the Fairy Godmother. She’s a wonderful woman who sent me here to help you.”

The orphans began to cough and looked at each other sadly.

“You can’t help us,” the boy said. “No one can. Soon the Lord will take us to be with our parents.”

I didn’t know what to say to him. Who would?

“I may not be able to help your bodies, but maybe I can put your minds at ease,” I said. “Would you like to hear a story?”

The orphans just looked at me. They didn’t say no, so I figured this was my chance. I had no idea which story I was going to tell them. What could I possibly tell them to make them feel better? I anxiously took another swig from my flask and began telling them the first tale that came to mind.

“*Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall; all the king’s horses and all the king’s men couldn’t put Humpty back together again,*” I said and hiccupped.

“Why are you rhyming?” the girl asked.

“Oh no, was I rhyming?” I asked—I hadn’t even noticed. “You’ll have to forgive me. I tend to rhyme when I’ve had too much to drink. It’s a nasty trait I get from my father—it runs in the family.”

“I like it,” the boy said and smiled, probably for the first time in a long while. “My parents used to tell me rhymes before they died.”

They seemed like such sweet kids. I didn’t think there was anything I could say to comfort them.

“You know, I was an orphan, too, once,” I said. “My dad was a warlock and my mom was a fairy. They had me very young, probably before they

wanted to. They left me on the doorstep of the Fairy Palace and ran off to pursue their dreams of becoming musicians. But their musical aspirations were crushed when a giant stepped on them.”

“That’s rough,” the girl said.

“It could have been worse,” I said. “The fairies raised me, but I was a bit of a troublemaker. I got passed around from home to home until I could take care of myself. I was always using my magic to play pranks and rig horse races.”

It was the first time I had ever told anyone that story, and I had told it to the right audience. Both orphans were smiling at me.

“I’m sorry you lost your parents,” the boy said.

“Me too,” I said. “You’d think people with their heads in the clouds would have seen a big foot coming.”

Wouldn’t you know it—I *made them laugh!* It was the most heartwarming sound I’ve ever heard. It reminded me that I had a heart, and judging from the warmth filling my chest, I must have had a big one.

“Mother Goose?”

I turned my head and saw that the other little boy was now wide-awake and sitting up in bed, as if their laughter had brought him back to life.

“Will you tell us another story?” he said. “Rhymes make me happy.”

After hearing this, I realized my tear ducts still worked after all. I took another big swig from my flask and told them another story.

“Little Bo Peep has lost her sheep, and doesn’t know where to find them; leave them alone, and they’ll come home, wagging their tails behind them.”

“We used to have a farm with sheep before the plague,” the girl said. “Please tell us another one.”

“Little Miss Muffet sat on a tuffet, eating her curds and whey; along came a spider, who sat down beside her, and frightened Miss Muffet away.”

“A spider?” the boys laughed together. “Please don’t stop!”

“Jack and Jill went up a hill to fetch a pail of water; Jack fell down and broke his crown, and Jill came tumbling after.”

I spent the rest of the night telling them rhymes about the ridiculous people from my world. I had sobered up entirely but kept a loose facade to keep them happy. They had me repeat their favorites, and then we recited them together. The orphans added tunes to the poems and we sang them to one another until they began to fall asleep.

“Mother Goose, will you be here in the morning?” the girl asked.

“You betcha,” I said. “Now you kiddos get a good night’s sleep, and we’ll rhyme more in the morning.”

I sat with them until the sun rose, but the orphans never woke up. Just like the boy said, the Lord took them to be with their parents. When she was done resting, the nun came into the room, said a prayer for their souls, and covered their bodies with their bed sheets.

Naturally, a part of me was devastated. But knowing I managed to supply those kids with a little happiness in their final moments was the best feeling I’ve ever felt, and perhaps the single greatest act I’ve ever done. For the first time, I truly understood why the Fairy Godmother was so passionate about helping people. There’s nothing like restoring the light in someone’s eyes and helping them forget their pain, even if it’s just for a moment. It’s magic at its finest.

I went into the Otherworld hoping to make a difference in someone’s life, but the true difference was made in mine. I had been so skeptical of myself before, but making those orphans laugh in such a miserable time had a profound effect on me. Maybe this old lady *could* help that world after all.

...

1428, FRANCE



Dear Diary,

Today, I was back in Europe spreading stories and rhymes around France. What a mess this war between the English and French has been! Every time I return to the Otherworld *it's still going on*. I swear it's lasted at least a hundred years.

There's so much commotion in the streets, you can barely hear your own thoughts. I needed a quiet place to rest, but that almost seemed impossible to find with all the soldiers running amok. I passed a cathedral just on the edge of town and decided it was probably my best bet.

I was right; the cathedral was heavenly inside. It was so quiet, you could hear a feather float! There wasn't a soul in sight—except for the paintings and statues of all the Catholic saints, obviously. I lay down on the first pew I found and had a quick snooze.

I was having a wonderful dream about mud-wrestling ogres in a massive sold-out arena when something awoke me. A teenage girl was kneeling in the center of the cathedral, obnoxiously praying aloud. Although my French isn't as good as my German, I could make out what she was saying.

"Please, Lord, send me a sign like you did when I was a child," she pleaded. "Tell me how to recover France from the English and put Charles VII on the throne."

Are all teenagers incapable of having internal thoughts? Can't they have feelings without letting the whole world know about them? When I was a teenage girl, I always kept to myself. Granted, I was in a witness protection program, but that's a story for another time.



What this girl should have prayed for was new clothes and decent soap. She was filthy, she wore boys' clothes, and her hair was more tangled than a rat's nest—total tomboy. She wasn't going to get Charlie's attention looking like a pig wrangler.

It took me a minute to realize she must have been that local loon everyone was always talking about in the taverns—which, by the way, are *everywhere* now! You're welcome, Europe!

They said she's super-pushy and entitled and annoys the heck out of everyone in town. That sounds like *every* teenager where I'm from; I don't know why they're making her so significant. The people in this world are weird about whom they do and don't talk about.

Her name is Joan something—was it *Joan of Snark*? Or maybe it was *Arc*? Well, whoever she was, she was seriously getting on my nerves. I had to get her out of there so she'd stop disturbing my nap.

"Please, heavenly Father," Joan prayed. "I am your humble servant. Give me guidance so I may satisfy your will!"

"*Joooooaaan, JOOOOAAAAN!*" I moaned dramatically.

Joan rose excitedly and looked around the cathedral. "Is that you, Lord?" she asked desperately.

"*NOOOO,*" I said. After all, pretending to be God in his own house was just plain rude.

"Saint Margaret?" Joan asked. "Have *you* come to bless me with some guidance?"

"*YEESSSS! 'TIS I, SAINT MARGARET!*" I moaned.

"Oh, Saint Margaret!" Joan said and clutched her hands over her heart. "Thank you! Your wish is my command!"

"*THANK YOU, MY CHILD. I KNOW I CAN ALWAYS COUNT ON YOU. OUT OF EVERYONE FROM ARC, YOU ARE MY FAVORITE. NOW, YOU MUST RAISE AN ARMY AND DEFEND FRANCE, JOAN!*"

"Of course, Saint Margaret!"

"*LIBERATE FRANCE FROM THE ENGLISH!*"

"Whatever you say, Saint Margret!"

"*HELP GOD PLACE CHARLES VII ON THE THRONE!*"

"Oh yes, Saint Margret!"

"*BUT WHATEVER YOU DO, JOAN...*"

"What is it, Saint Margret? Please, tell me!"

“YOU MUST LEAVE THIS CATHEDRAL AT ONCE AND LOCK THE DOOR ON YOUR WAY OUT!”

“Anything you want, Saint Margaret!” Joan said. She leaped to her feet and ran out the door like a horse out of a burning barn.

I had a good long laugh to myself and then finished my nap. Poor Joan. I almost felt bad for misleading her. Clearly she wasn’t the sharpest knife in the drawer. She’ll be all right, though—hormones bring out the worst in every teenager.

1503, ITALY



Dear Diary,

I never thought these words would come from my mouth—but I’m *in love*! His name is Leonardo da Vinci, but I call him *Leo* for short. He’s a painter, sculptor, musician, mathematician, architect, engineer, inventor, and writer! He’s what they call a *Renaissance man*!

I have to say, of all the trends I’ve started around Europe, I’m most proud of the Renaissance. Without it, someone like Leo may not have had the chance to show off his talents. He probably would have been burned at the stake, just like all the people in this world who think outside the box.

I was getting so tired of all that medieval craziness—it was all *pillage this* and *torture that*. It got old really fast, so I finally said, “Come on, guys, let’s spice some things up around here. Let’s create some new philosophies! Cook some decent food! Hang some drapes! Learn to *enjoy* life a little bit!”

They really took my suggestions to heart, because the Renaissance was in full force by the time I came back to the Otherworld. Every day they built better buildings, created better music and art, and discovered advances in science and medicine! And of course, the man leading the world into this new era was none other than my Leo.

We first met in a tavern—even those had improved! He bought me a drink and said, “I’d give my left arm to paint a beautiful woman like you.”

He was so charming, I melted on the spot. “Save your arm and just treat me to dinner,” I said.

Leo took me to his favorite spot in Florence and we hit it off right away. We had so many similar interests—which wasn’t a surprise, because Leo

was interested in *everything*. We had so much in common, too. He also had a rocky childhood and knew what it was like to be ahead of the world he lived in. He was fascinated with my stories of the fairy-tale world and thought what the fairies and I were doing was very noble.

Leo is more than one hundred and fifty years younger than me, so I felt a little insecure. But we were so intellectually in sync, you'd never know there was that big an age difference.



On our second date, Leo invited me to his place and painted my portrait. It was so difficult to sit still because he kept making me laugh. When he was finished, he claimed it would one day be known as his masterpiece.

“I’ll call it the *Mona Goosa*,” he said.

“Oh, don’t name it that,” I said. “Just in case a warlord comes looking for me, I wouldn’t want you to get involved—it’s a long story.”

“Then how about the *Mona Lisa*?” he asked.

“Beautiful!” I told him. It takes a real gentleman to be so sensitive to a lady’s needs.

The next time I went into the Otherworld, I brought Lester with me so he could meet Leo. Lester wasn’t as taken with him as I was, but geese can be so territorial. Truth be told, I think Lester was a little jealous there was someone else in my life.

Leo loves going on flights with Lester and me. He enjoys it so much, he started sketching plans to build a *flying machine* so Lester doesn’t have to carry both of us on his back. Lester really appreciated this, and I think Leo won him over.

I know I’ve been making fun of those *happily ever after* idiots back home for years, but that’s because I’ve never felt like *this* before. Now I get why everyone is so smiley all the darn time. Leo makes me feel so complete, protected, and unstoppable—like I could take on the whole world if I had to! And if I don’t stop gambling with warlords, I just might have to!

Who knows, there just might be a *Father Goose* in Lester’s future.

1519, ITALY



Dear Diary,

I'm not going to lie, today is a sad day. Forbidding the trolls and goblins to leave their territory in the fairy-tale world has been keeping the fairies and me from traveling to the Otherworld as regularly. By the time I returned, Leo had passed away.

I don't know how I let it happen. I've always been aware of the time difference between worlds—I guess I just forgot. But that's love for you. It makes you careless and forgetful. It fools you into thinking the people you hold dear will be around forever, so you take them for granted.

I'm used to losing friends—that's what happens when you live as long as I have—but losing Leo stings worse than anything I've felt before. I don't think I'll ever find someone like my Renaissance man again....



1532, LONDON



Dear Diary,

Well, I've met someone! He's smart, tall, likes food, enjoys jousting, and comes from a good family. Okay, I'll just say it—*he's King Henry VIII of England!*

I know, I know—England is still recovering from his messy separation from Catherine of Aragon. Can you believe Henry is going to separate England from the Roman Catholic Church just to get rid of her? She must have been terrible! And have you met the daughter, Mary? Good luck marrying her off!

All my friends have warned me that Henry probably isn't the best choice for a husband. He's got major commitment phobia, he's always on the verge of bankrupting the country, he's got a bad temper, and he has more mistresses than he knows what to do with. But really, who doesn't have baggage?



Lester can't stand Henry. He says the king is just a "rebound" after losing Leo. The goose might have a point; not a day goes by that I don't miss Leo terribly. Luckily, the wedding plans have been a good distraction from that.

Of course, when you're marrying into royalty, you're bound to run into a little controversy. There have been a lot of rumors circulating court that Henry has a thing for my good friend, Anne Boleyn. I've assured everyone their relationship is completely platonic! The reason Anne is around so much is because she's actually going to be one of my maids of honor; she'd never betray me by seducing my future husband!

Gosh, all of Henry's friends are so judgmental. I suppose that's why they call it *court*! Now I better get back to planning the big day. There's nothing like planning a party with an unlimited budget!

1565, LONDON



Dear Diary,

Can you believe that backstabbing double-crosser Anne Boleyn? She stole my fiancé from me on the eve of our wedding and then had the nerve to name *me* as the godmother of their daughter, Elizabeth. It's all right, though; Anne got what she deserved in the end. People are still talking about that amazing party I threw on the night of her execution.

Regardless of her terrible parents, I ended up growing a soft spot for Elizabeth. She was such an intelligent, strong, and feisty child—she reminded me a lot of myself when I was her age. I knew the pressures of being a Tudor woman in a Tudor man's world, so I looked out for her when she was growing up.



Even though she was third in line for the throne, I always had a feeling Elizabeth would be queen one day. And thankfully for England, I was right.

I was in the London area telling some peasant children fairy tales, so she invited me over for brunch. I could tell she was a little stressed because her ruff was extra thick today.

“Liz, what’s wrong?” I asked.

“My advisors keep telling me I need to marry and provide an heir to the throne,” she said. “They say my position as queen won’t be secure until I do so.”

“That’s a load of goose droppings!” I said. “You’re the best monarch this country has had since William the Conqueror.”

“It’s not that I’m against marriage or children,” Elizabeth said. “But have you seen the options they’ve presented me with? And I thought *my* cousins were inbred!”

“Well, I may still be bitter and burned from everything I went through with your father, but I think marriage is the worst!” I said. “You’ve got a good thing going here, Lizzie. You don’t want a man coming in here and messing it up for you.”

“I suppose you’re right,” she said. “So, what am I to do? What should I tell my advisors?”

“Tell them you *are* married... *to England!*” I said. “Say you’ll consider marriage when and only when they can find you a suitable, smart, and handsome prince with no political agenda. Until then, declare yourself *the Virgin Queen!* Say you’re staying pure for God and for your people’s best interests. You’ll be a rock star!”

Elizabeth thought about it for a moment and then nodded her head—well, as much as that ruffled thing around her neck would allow.

“Now, enough virgin talk,” I said. “Tell me what’s been going on with you and Robert Dudley! Everyone knows he’s got the hots for you!”

1590, JAPAN



Dear Diary,

I'm sorry I've been missing in action for a while, but I've got a good excuse. For the last five years, Lester and I have been living in a secret ninja clan deep in the Kii Mountains of Japan. I know I've said this before, but that was just because I had missed a bunch of Happily Ever After Assembly meetings and the Fairy Council was ticked off. This time the ninja were real and I have the battle scars to prove it.

It all started when we visited the secluded village of Koka to spread fairy tales to the children living there. Had I known the village was secretly a training camp for ninja warriors, I would have worn more comfortable pants. From the way I dressed, the ninja instantly assumed I was a samurai spy, which I took as a major compliment given my age. They captured us and threatened our lives.

Our only chance of survival was pledging our sole allegiance to their clan. Yeah, I probably could have whipped all their skinny butts with my eyes closed, but after everything I went through with Henry VIII, it felt good to join a club.

We spent the next several months learning all the ancient traditions and arts of ninjutsu. We had espionage Mondays, assassination Tuesdays, combat Wednesdays, deception Thursdays, and finger painting Fridays. I guess ninja are really into finger painting—who knew?

Once I mastered the skills taught to me, I began teaching the ninja a few of my famous wrestling moves from back in the day. They loved hearing my stories about dragons, so I gained a lot of respect. They called me

Kunoichi Okāsan, which means *Mother Ninja*, and they called Lester *Debuna Yatsu*, which means *the fat one*.

We worked for the local landowners and used our skills against the corrupt samurai that were invading the land. These were some of the most intense battles of my life. Each time we went out on a job, not all of us returned. I'm not proud of everything we did, but at least I made some major dough.



Eventually, the samurai caught up with us. A samurai warlord known as Oda Nobunaga, or *Cowabunga*, as I called him, invaded our area and wiped out all the ninja clans in the providence, including Koka. The survivors fled to the Kii Mountains, and we've been here since. We spend each day plotting our revenge, but I think I'm beginning to lose interest.

It's been one heck of an experience—I never thought *ninja warrior* would be something I could add to my résumé—but I'm ready to go home. There are certain moments in your life when you look around and realize *you don't belong*, and this is one of those moments. It feels just like the time we joined Christopher Columbus's ship thinking it was a Mediterranean cruise.

I'm not sure Lester is cut out for a life of espionage anyway. All this ninjutsu seems to be going to his head. Lately, he's insisted I refer to him only as *the crane*. It'll be good for both of us to get out of this mountain air and get back to our day jobs.

1719, THE CARIBBEAN



Dear Diary,

Sometimes you just need a girls' weekend—or in my case, it was six months on the high seas aboard the pirate ship called *Revenge*. I was a cocaptain with my friends Anne Bonny and Mary Read, who I met in Jamaica a few years ago. We had all just gotten out of bad relationships and were looking for something spontaneous to do.

After a few rounds of drinks, we decided stealing a ship and setting sail around the Caribbean was exactly what we needed—and we were right! I'm glad they suggested it, because I was just going to recommend new haircuts.



There's nothing more healing after a breakup than pirating a ship full of men and bringing them to their knees. We stole our weight in gold and then buried it on exotic islands that only we knew existed.

We had some great times aboard that ship. We swore to one another we'd never return to shore and we'd live the rest of our lives on the water. Unfortunately, Anne's ex-boyfriend, the pirate John "Calico Jack" Rackham, eventually caught up to us (it was his ship after all). Naturally, he and Anne ended up getting back together, and our sisterhood was never the same.

Mary stayed with Anne and John, but I had to leave. I loved the ocean, but I needed to return to my normal dual-dimensional life. Believe it or not, I was starting to miss Lester and the fairies.

1774, VERSAILLES



Dear Diary,

Lester and I were at the most amazing party last night at the *Palace of Versailles*! You know you've had a good time when you wake up on a chaise lounge floating in a fountain and have zero recollection of how you got there. That Marie Antoinette sure knows how to have a good time! It's so sweet of her to keep inviting me to her parties, despite her in-laws' opinions of me.



The French royals and I have never gotten along. It all started a century ago, when I accidentally said, “Excuse me, ma’am” to Louis XIV. In my defense, the guy was wearing a long curly wig and high heels. Anyone would have made that mistake. Since then I’ve been put on the *do not invite* list.

Marie has always had a hard time getting the French’s approval, too; that’s probably why we bonded so quickly when we met at that opera in Paris. They blame her for *everything*, just like the Fairy Council is always so quick to point their finger at me.

Anyhow, I swam my way out of the fountain, found my shoes and hat scattered in the garden (don’t remember how that happened, either), and stumbled back inside the palace. Lester was still asleep on a couch inside; the gander would sleep through an asteroid hitting the earth if he was up too late the night before.

There was so much champagne and dessert left over from the night before; the maids were *still* cleaning it up. I wrapped up a couple of pieces of leftover cake to take home—there’s no cake like Versailles cake!

I found Marie in her chambers. She had been up for hours and her hair was already perfectly in place and soared two feet above her head. *Now that’s a party MVP!*

“Marie, I just wanted to thank you again for such a wonderful night!” I said. “I haven’t had that much fun since the Crusades.”

“Mother Goose! Thank God you’re alive! After you fell out the window last night, we thought you were dead!” Marie said.

“Well, that explains the kink in my neck,” I said. “From the looks of it, I must have continued the party in the gardens.”

Suddenly, a soldier ran inside. He was sweating and out of breath, but we didn’t think much of it at first. The Palace of Versailles is so big, everyone is usually sweating and out of breath by the time they got to Marie’s room.

“*Madame, the palace is under attack! Hundreds of villagers are storming the gates! They say they’re starving!*” the guard said.

“Oh no, what should we do?” Marie asked.

“May I make a suggestion?” I said. “You’ve got tons of food left over from the party. Why don’t you offer them some cake? I’m sure they’ll appreciate it—it was some of the best cake I’ve ever had!”

“That’s a wonderful idea, Mother Goose,” Marie said, and then nodded at the soldier. “Let them eat cake!”

I don’t care what those stiff French aristocrats say about Marie Antoinette—a queen who parties like her is a queen I can get behind!

1775, CORSICA



Dear Diary,

My suggestion didn't do Marie Antoinette any favors. Those French have really got it in for her! The whole country is a mess right now. They say a revolution is on the horizon. Everyone is so angry and pointing their fingers at everybody else. It reminds me a lot of the Salem Witch Trials—thank goodness I got out of *there* when I did!

I avoided all the chaos on the continent today and went to the island of Corsica to spread fairy tales. I knew I wouldn't find much there, but Mama needed some sun. All I found was a large fancy estate. I knocked and a bug-eyed housekeeper answered the door.

“Sorry to bother you, but are there any kids around here?” I asked.

“You must be the new tutor!” she said, then sighed with so much relief her posture sank a foot.

“Tutor? Nope. I'm afraid I'm not your girl,” I said.

“Are you sure?” she asked desperately. “It pays five hundred francs a day!”

“*Then I'm your girl!*” I said quickly.

The housekeeper led me inside the estate to a drawing room that had been set up like a classroom. There was only one desk, and a small boy was pouting at it. His arms were crossed and he was sticking his lower lip out. I could already tell he was going to be a little hellion.

“Master Bonaparte?” the housekeeper said cautiously, treating the kid like he was a dangerous animal. “Your new tutor is here.”

The boy instantly shot me a dirty look and I winced. He had a face only

a mother could love.



“We’ve had a difficult time keeping tutors,” the housekeeper whispered to me.

“No kidding,” I said. “I bet you have a hard time keeping the wallpaper with a kid who looks like that.”

The housekeeper left the room and promptly shut the door behind her. For a second, I was afraid I might be locked in. Had I been tricked? Was this kid about to eat me?

“So, what are they teaching you kiddos these days?” I asked him.

He just glared at me and stuck his lip out even more.

“You don’t talk much, do you, um... *Napoleon*,” I said, reading the nameplate on his desk.

Still, the kid didn’t say anything. I searched the classroom for something I could teach him and noticed a large globe of the Otherworld near the chalkboard. The boy dropped his arms and looked up at the globe mesmerized, like he had never seen anything so beautiful.

“How about some geography?” I pointed to France. “Do you know what this is, Napoleon?”

“*Mine?*” he said. I was surprised the little spawn could talk. He had a voice like an angry Chihuahua.

“*Close*, but you live *here* on the island of Corsica. Can you tell me what *this* is?” I said and pointed to Italy.

“*Mine?*” he said, and eerily raised an eyebrow.

“No,” I said. “That’s Italy. I had a good friend once who lived there. His name was Leonardo da Vinci. Maybe one of your old tutors taught you about him?”

The kid wasn’t interested in anything but the map, so I decided to stick to it.

“How about this country?” I asked. “I’ll give you a hint. It starts with an *E*.”

“*Mine?*” he said. Maybe his previous tutors had only stuck around long enough to teach him one word?

“No, that’s *Egypt*. What about this big one in the corner? Do you know what *that* is?” I asked, pointing to Russia.

A wicked little smirk grew on Napoleon’s face. “*Mine...*” he whispered sinisterly to himself. It was so trippy, I was afraid his head would spin next.

“You’d better start raising an army now if you expect the whole world to

be yours one day, Napoleon,” I chuckled.

I don't think Napoleon realized I was kidding, because he suddenly dashed out of the classroom, knocking his desk over as he went. What a little creep. I'm going to ask for a raise.

1869, WASHINGTON, DC



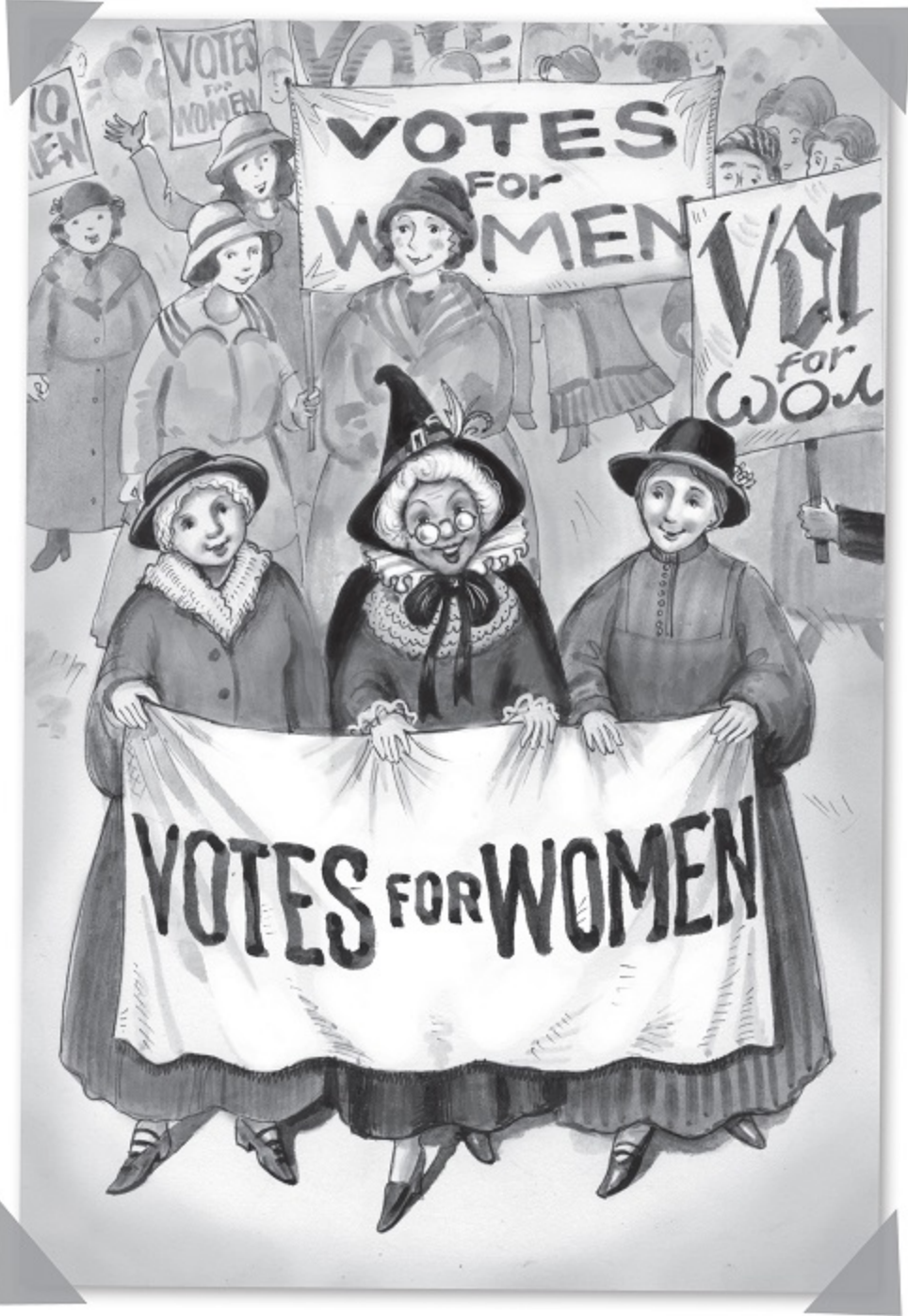
Dear Diary,

The United States changes so much every time I visit it. Thank goodness that Sacagawea girl helped Lewis, Clark, and me explore the Northwest, otherwise the country never would have expanded so much. Hopefully the good old USA will expand socially as much as it has geographically.

Today I attended the women's suffrage convention with my pals Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton and many other brave women. Our friendship started a few years ago when I saw them protesting a town hall meeting with signs that said *Votes for Women*. I wasn't sure what this was all about, so I decided to get to the bottom of it.

Susan and Elizabeth took me out for dinner and explained everything they had been fighting for. I was shocked to learn women are seen as *secondary* to men in most places in the Otherworld, and in the United States they weren't even allowed to vote. Isn't that the most ridiculous thing you've ever heard of? Had I been aware of that sooner, I would have tried fixing it eons ago! I would have made my friend Benjamin Franklin put it into the Constitution—he was one of very few people in the 1700s who owed *me* money.

With so many incredible examples of intelligent, strong, and fearless female leadership (Queen Elizabeth, Catherine the Great, Queen Victoria, Maria Theresa—basically all my old friends!) you wouldn't think women would have to fight this hard just to *vote*! The whole thing is ludicrous.



I think the men trying to stop us are just afraid they'll lose their jobs because women will see right through their lies! I keep telling the girls, "In the fairy-tale world, more women are in control than men, and it's in a lot better shape than this world!"

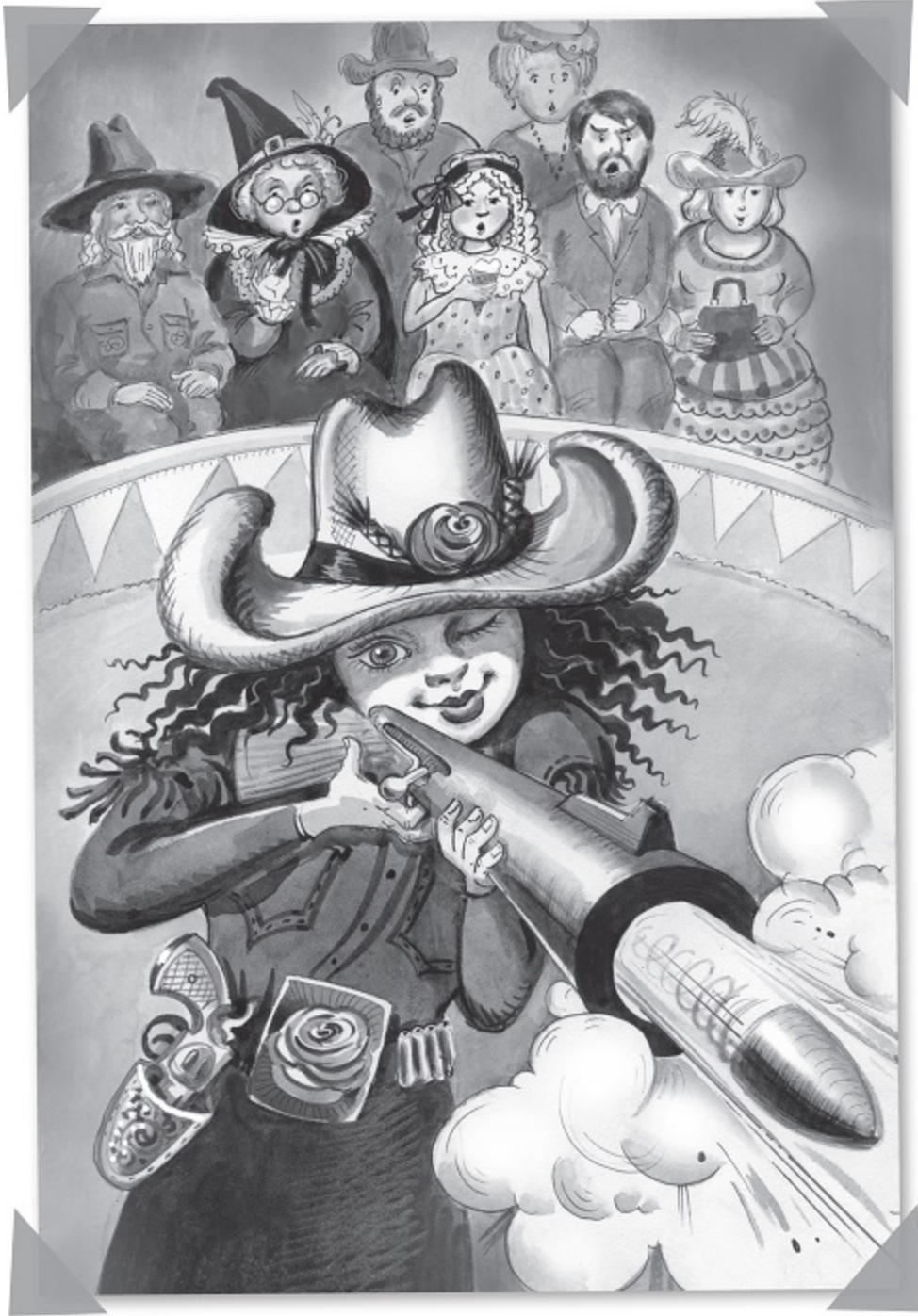
Every time I see a discouraged little girl, I tell her, "Don't worry, kid. By the time you're my age, not only will you be voting, but men will be voting *you* for president!"

1886, TEXAS



Dear Diary,

For the last eight months, Lester and I have been traveling the United States as part of Buffalo Bill's Wild West show. We've been attracting crowds by the thousands! It reminds me so much of my wrestling days. Sure, Annie Oakley might have top billing, but it's a thrill nonetheless. I've missed the adrenaline rush from performing dangerous acts in front of an audience.



We were gearing up for our first stint in Europe, and everyone was getting more excited each day. I couldn't wait to take the gang to all my favorite spots. However, the morning before our departure, Bill came into my trailer and dropped a bombshell on me.

"Goose, there's no easy way to put this," he said. "The other performers and I have been talking, and we don't think it's a good idea that you join us in Europe."

"Bill, what do you mean? Lester and I are one of the best acts you've got!" I said.

"It's too much of a liability, Goose," he said. "Shooting bottles off the heads of children volunteers may be okay out here in the Wild West, but that's not going to fly in Europe."

"Is this about that mishap in Kansas? Because you know my aim has improved so much since then!" I said.

"It's not just the act, Goose," Bill said. "We're all getting a little tired of Lester. He's demanding, rude to the fans, eats all the food, and we all know he's not easy to travel with."

This isn't the first time I've been let go from a gig, and it won't be the last. Obviously, I was disappointed, but there was no use in fighting it. A good performer knows when it's time to take a bow.

"I guess this is good-bye, then," I said. "Take care of yourself, Bill. Please write to us when you reach the 1889 World's Fair."

"We will, Goose," Bill said. "And thanks for supplying us with all those empty bottles—you've got the liver of an ox."

Lester and I packed up our things and were gone by the afternoon. Can you believe out of all the gun-happy cowboys in Bill's circus, *I* was the liability? That's a first.

Our departure is probably for the best, though. I'm not sure how much longer Lester and I will stay in the Wild West. I've got dust in places I didn't know I had. If only my friend Jesse James was still around, we could start up a Wild West show of our own.

1938, SOUTH PACIFIC



Dear Diary,

Lester and I decided we deserved a break after spreading fairy tales throughout South America. So, we decided to find a nice private island in the South Pacific where no one would disturb us—and where the Fairy Council wasn't likely to find us. Apparently, we weren't the only ones with this idea.

We were flying over the Pacific Ocean when something shiny caught my eye on a desert island below. It was a silver plane that looked awfully familiar. We circled the island so I could get a better look at it. On the beach we saw a woman relaxing on a bamboo lounge chair. She sipped a coconut drink as she enjoyed the sun.

“Oh, my word! Lester, that's *Amelia Earhart!*”

It was a miracle! She had been missing for a year! The whole world thought she'd crashed into the ocean and died during her flight around the world. Lester and I dived toward the island and landed in the sand right beside her.

“Amelia! I can't believe it's you!” I said and embraced my old friend. “The whole world's been looking for you! I'm so glad you're alive.”

Amelia wasn't as excited to see me as I was to see her. In fact, she looked a little embarrassed.

“Hi, Mother Goose,” she said shyly. “Well... I guess you've caught me.”

“What do you mean *caught you?*” It didn't take me long to understand what she was getting at—her plane was in perfect condition. “You didn't *crash* on this island, did you?”

“Not exactly,” she said. “I’m sorry! I feel terrible that I made the world so worried, but I needed a break! I couldn’t escape the pressure at home. The press was constantly hounding me, photographers followed me everywhere, and no matter how many aviation records I set, no one was satisfied! Everyone only wanted me to do more—nothing was ever enough! Staging a ‘flight around the world’ and faking my disappearance was the only way I could get a little *me time*. Please don’t hate me?”



“Hate you?” I said. “I was gonna ask if I could pull up a chair!”



1942, ENGLAND



Dear Diary,

I can't write too much today—the world's at war! Lester and I are doing our part to fight the Nazis. We've been asked personally by Winston Churchill to lead the British Royal Air Force, so obviously I have to keep the details to myself. Wish us luck!

It's a tough time in the Otherworld, but I've been telling everyone to *keep calm, and carry on!* The phrase has really caught on. It might be the best thing I've said since *Jack and Jill*.

1954, HOLLYWOOD



Dear Diary,

I was in California today getting lunch with Walt Disney. He's been after the film rights to my life story for years. I keep telling him they're not for sale, but he still spoils me with meals and gifts in hopes that I'll change my mind. (Apparently, he's got his hands full with opening a theme park next year. I'd never say this to his face, but it sounds like a bust.)

I don't know how it happened, but I accidentally stumbled into the offices of a director named Billy Wilder. He took one look at me and begged me to audition for the female lead of his new film, *The Seven Year Itch*.

A career in the film industry was something I never thought possible—there isn't enough light in the world to smooth my wrinkled face for a close-up. Mr. Wilder assured me I was perfect for the role and they had been searching for months to find an actress with my charm and charisma. How can you say no to that?

Mr. Wilder gave me the script and took me to the soundstage where they were shooting the screen tests. I don't want to jinx things, but I have to say *I nailed it!* Everyone was standing and applauding when I finished the first scene. Maybe Hollywood is ready for someone like me?

"Thank you so much, Ms. Goose!" Mr. Wilder said. "That was inspirational! We'll be in touch!"

I was feeling pretty cocky and had a new bounce in my step. I passed another actress waiting for a screen test on my way out. She was pretty and blonde—definitely not what they were looking for.

"Hate to break it to you, honey, but I think I got the part," I told her.

“Next! Miss Marilyn Monroe!” Mr. Wilder called out.

She gulped and headed into the soundstage. Poor thing. Some people just aren’t Hollywood material.



1963, WASHINGTON, DC



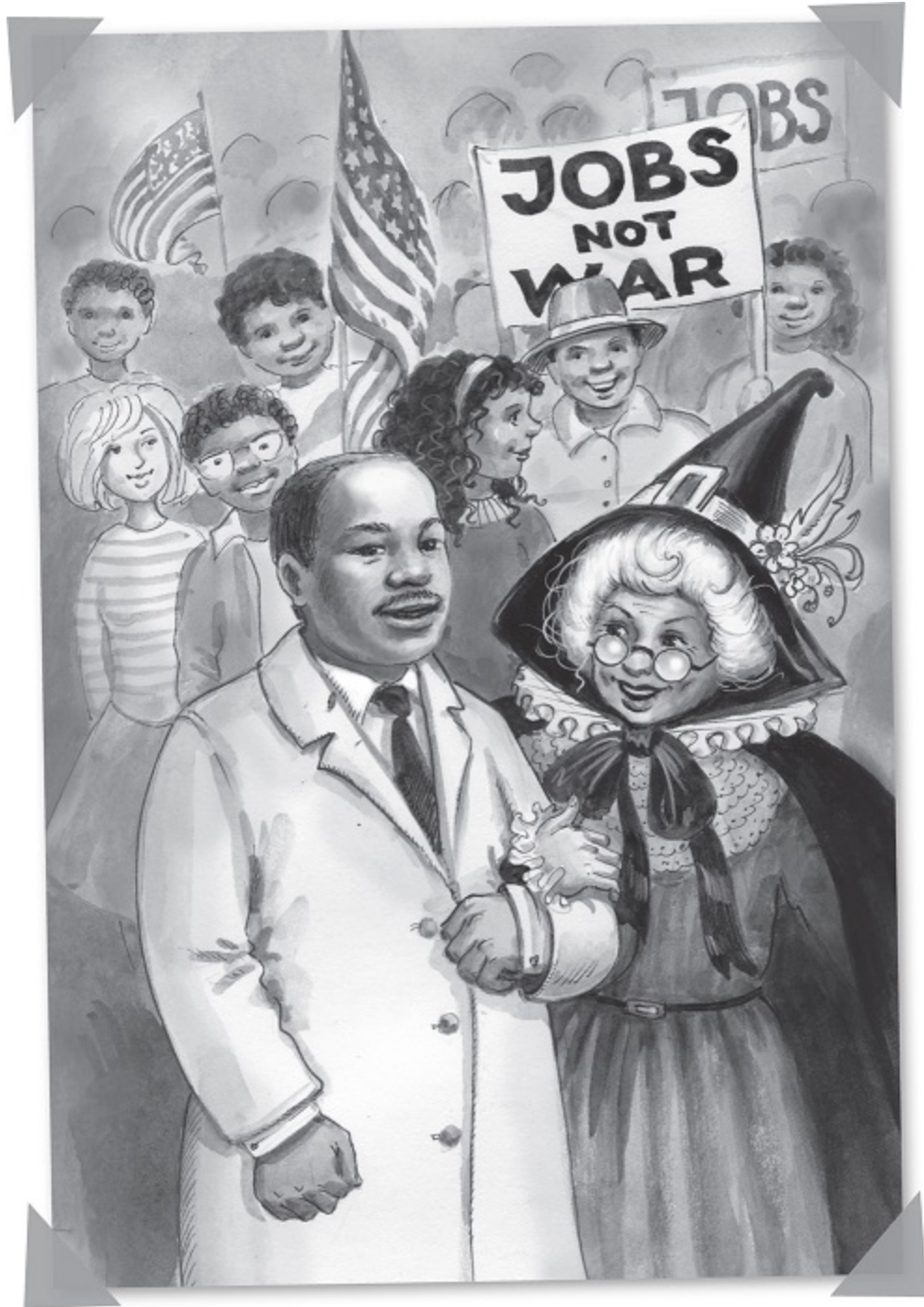
Dear Diary,

It's been almost a century since I campaigned for women's suffrage, and yet I found myself in Washington, DC, today marching for rights. This time around I marched for civil rights with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and hundreds of thousands of other people.

It baffles me that in the Otherworld people are treated so differently just because of the color of their skin. In the fairy-tale world, there are all kinds of different skin colors (black, white, blue, green, red, yellow, orange, purple—every color you can imagine), but no one is treated any differently because of it. Learning about slavery was an even harder pill to swallow. That's something that barbaric creatures like trolls and goblins do; I couldn't believe human beings did it to one another here.

I've been around a long time and have seen a lot of things. One thing I've learned is that only in times of unity can there be progress. With so many obvious examples of this in history, why are so many still set on segregation?

It was such a spectacular day, and Dr. King gave a powerful speech that moved this old girl to tears, but it'll always be hard for me to understand the reason we were there. People shouldn't have to fight people just to be people. You'd think more people would get that.



1969, WOODSTOCK



Dear Diary,

I only have one word for you—*Woodstock*. Whoever came up with the concept of a *music festival* might be the most brilliant person to walk the earth. Oh, wait—was that my idea? It's hard to remember (and hear) things today. If so, it's the single greatest contribution I may ever bring into this world. Forget Humpty Dumpty!

I wish I could tell you more about it, but what happens in Woodstock stays in Woodstock. There's no way Walt Disney can turn my life into a family movie after this week.



1970, LAS VEGAS



Dear Diary,

Tonight Lester and I met my friends Frank, Dean, Sammy, Peter, and Joey out for a drink in Vegas. Boy do those guys know how to make an old girl and her goose laugh! If you thought their movies were funny or their albums were nice to listen to, you've never heard them get together! It's wonderful having friends with just as many crazy stories as I do!

They call themselves the Rat Pack, but whenever I'm around, we're known as "The Goose Group." We've been toying around with the idea of starting a nightclub act and taking it on the road. I'm not sure that's a good idea, though—I'm wanted in almost thirty states, and Lester in fifteen. Maybe they'll settle for a residency in Vegas? Lester gives a mean fan dance when he's in a performance mood.



That reminds me, I never did get a call from Billy Wilder. The movie must have gotten canceled or was a total flop. They don't make them like they used to.

1976, MANHATTAN



Dear Diary,

Met my good friend Andy Warhol at some loft called the “Factory” in New York City today. It was exactly like I’ve always imagined the inside of his head to look—nothing but abstract art and outlandish characters running about.

We’ve been close for ages! When he got sick as a kid, I used to tell him stories and keep him company at the hospital. Andy’s been an odd duck since birth, so naturally we hit it off right away. I’m so proud of him and everything he’s accomplished. It takes real brilliance to turn eccentricity into something profitable.



Andy invited his friends and me over to unveil a new piece of art he had been working on. He ripped off the cover and for a moment I thought I had lost my mind. I saw the same picture of me but four times, each in a unique combination of colors. It was like the Fairy Council's worst nightmare.

"It's transcendent, don't you think?" he asked me. "I'm planning to do this for all my favorite people in pop culture, but no one will ever compare to you."

"Andy, if I'm honest, it's not my cup of tea," I said. "But then again, I told you painting canned food was a bad idea, and look what that did for you!"

I have to keep Lester home whenever I visit him. He's convinced Andy stole his hairstyle.

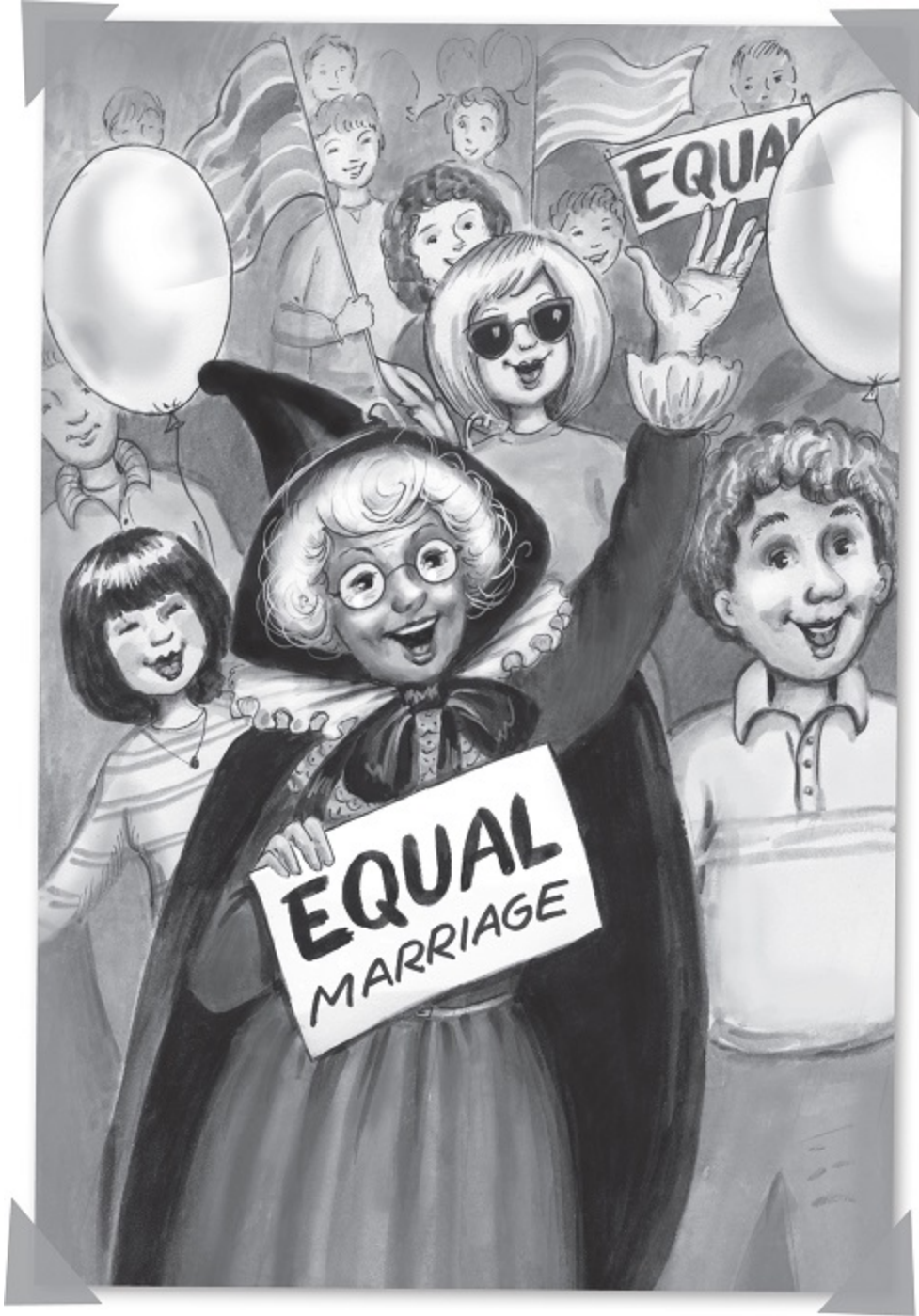
2015, WASHINGTON, DC



Dear Diary,

Well, I was back in Washington, DC, today, so you know what that means.... Yup, more marching! This time it was for marriage equality with my LGBT friends.

Of all the things I've protested over the years, I never thought I would be marching for the right to *love*. We never put limits on love where I come from—in fact, it used to annoy the crap out of me! Being among those men and women today made me realize how much I've taken that for granted.



I must say, of all the historical protests I've been to, this one was the most colorful and the most fun, and had the best music! There were so many rainbows, I was reminded of the Fairy Council everywhere I looked. The LGBT community really knows how to protest something. Although I keep getting called *sir*, so I'm not sure what that's about.

You'd think I would be tired of marching after all these years, but I never back down from something I believe in. I've made a lot of mistakes in my time and committed many wrongs, but I'll always stand on the right side of history.

In Conclusion



What a life I've lived! As if it wasn't exhausting the first time around, reliving everything has really worn me out. From the looks of things, life isn't going to wind down anytime soon. I think this old lady has a few more adventures left in her. I've still got sights to see, people to meet, places to visit, and debts to pay off....

It's funny to think about where I was before I found the Otherworld. I was unhappy, uninterested, and, worst of all, unappreciated. But just because my world had no use for this wise-cracking old lady doesn't mean there wasn't a world that did. And thank goodness I found it!

Think about all the people and places I would have missed if I hadn't gotten off my rocking chair and gone out into the world. Think about all the lives I touched and the changes I helped make—things sure would have been different if it weren't for me. True, the Otherworld may have been just fine without me, but we'll never know for sure.

The truth is, you'll never know the real differences you'll make in the world or in someone's life. Many people don't get the credit or the blame they deserve because history has a funny way of remembering things—always has and always will. All we can do is live every day *like we want to be remembered*, and hope it'll benefit the greater good. And if that's your goal, chances are you'll wind up helping someone along the way, even if it's just yourself.

Well, I better feed Lester before he gets crabby. All this reminiscing has made both of us very hungry. Thank you so much for taking the time to humor the life and times of this trailblazer. As my good friend Carol Burnett always says, "I'm so glad we had this time together."



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About the Author

CHRIS COLFER

is a #1 *New York Times* bestselling author and a Golden Globe–winning actor. He was honored as a member of the TIME 100, *Time* magazine’s annual list of the one hundred most influential people in the world, and his books include *Struck By Lightning: The Carson Phillips Journal*, and the books of the Land of Stories series: *The Wishing Spell*, *The Enchantress Returns*, *A Grimm Warning*, and *Beyond the Kingdoms*.

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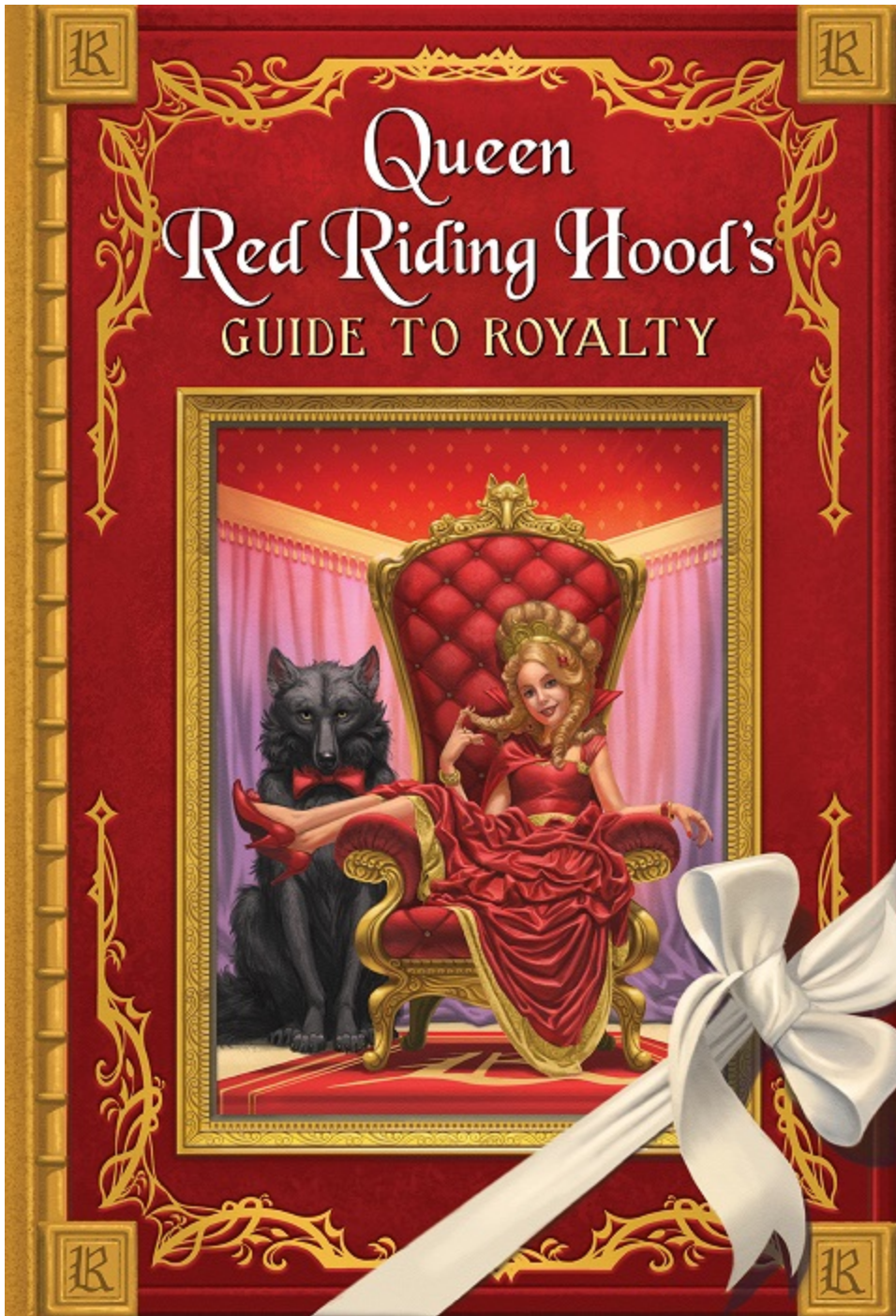
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