

— I —

The Misfit Princess

— Chapter One —

The Mundane Princess

Dawn had not yet struck, and Aurora was already out in the woods. Even with her lantern to guide the way, the Greenlandian Forest was dark enough to spook nearly any child. But Aurora needed not fear the possibility of getting lost, for she knew her way around this land well. Although she had never tried, she probably could have navigated through even the densest of thickets with her eyes closed. Her home was here, amongst the greenery, a place that felt far more welcoming than her lavish chamber ever could.

Alongside her lantern, she had the Stars, and they were shining brightly on this particular night: the Prevaedo Galaxy—more commonly known as the Magical Way—created a water-colour painting of purple and pink above her. The moon was huge, almost full, and it too helped guide the way as Aurora moved deeper and deeper into the darkness of the forest.

Once she had travelled far enough to feel safe, she turned around and looked back at the stone castle growing smaller and smaller in the distance. *Not far now.* All that could be heard was the wind whistling in the trees, the distant hooting of an owl, and her tall, black lace-up boots rustling through the grass as she continued to make swift movements away from the imprisoning stone walls.

When the tallest tower finally disappeared from sight, she was in her favourite hidden glade. Aurora had named it ‘Secret Glade’, as she had never seen another folkian face there, and she liked to think she was the only one who knew about it.

Both the Starlight and the moonlight spilled into Secret Glade better than the thickets she had just traversed. Now that she was here, in her home, she unclenched her jaw and took a deep breath of the fresh forest air. Then she gave an extended sigh of relief and called aloud, to seemingly nobody, “At last!”

But there was somebody. And that somebody was standing beneath her on all fours, nuzzling her leg.

Aurora looked down at a little fawn below her. “Oh, hello!” she cried out in joy, giving him a hug. He was one of the babies from the Spring, recognisable because, although he looked bigger every day, he was still covered in white speckles. She had named him Buttercup, as that was his favourite plant to feed on. None of the other deer seemed to enjoy the buttercup, so this made her friend different from the rest, which Aurora had a great appreciation for.

From out of the abyss between the trees, his brothers and sisters revealed themselves in the silver moonlight, entering Secret Glade. The animals came right up to Aurora and greeted her as one of them. Eagerly, she embraced the fawns, even though she had seen them just the night before.

Following the children were the parents: a handsome buck and an elegant doe. They bowed their heads upon greeting Aurora, and she reciprocated. Then out hopped the rabbits and the squirrels and the raccoons, among other playful forest creatures, all of them eager to greet their beloved friend.

Unlike the noble children who lived in the castle, Aurora did not fear the wild animals that roamed the forest of the Greenlands. Instead, the animals were her closest companions. Of course, when Aurora first started visiting the woods, she had been very afraid and, likewise, the woodland creatures had feared the folkian. Or at least, she assumed they had; there was no real way of knowing, for they did not share the same tongue. But Aurora supposed all wild animals would be wary of any unfamiliar being roaming through their territory. Through repeated visits, however, she and the animals had grown familiar with each other.

Now that Aurora had been coming to the forest for many Suns, the animals seemed to look forward to their nightly gatherings and would come right up to her, seeking affection. Even the most dangerous of the woodland dwellers were no longer a threat to the girl. The bears, wolves and mountain lions would give a low bow upon seeing Aurora, and again, she would reciprocate.

It was well worth waking up in the middle of the night and scaling down the walls of her castle prison. She had not always been forced to take such a dangerous route. There was a time when she could just quietly slip through her chamber door, make her way down her tower and

scurry out of the castle. But eventually, she had become a little too comfortable with her routine and, one night, she miscalculated her departure time and was caught by a castle guard.

Of course, they were under obligation to tell her parents, King James and Queen Audrey Green. Aurora had tried to spin a tale, claiming she must have been sleepwalking, but the king and queen did not frown upon the use of truth serum—yes, even on their own daughter. The disgusting brew, which tasted of the strongest liquors, had been forced down Aurora’s throat, causing her to vomit profusely until she spat out what she had really been up to.

Her parents had, evidently, been horrified by the notion of their daughter, the princess of the Greenlands, running off to frolic in the woods after Eventide; “As though you are a low-life *elf*!” her father had spat, red-faced; meanwhile, her mother had spoken in a weepy voice, “We provide you with a life of luxury here in the castle, and in spite of it all, you run away!”

To prevent her from leaving the castle again, her parents kept multiple guards on patrol right outside her tower. Now, she was not allowed to leave her chamber without being escorted by a trusted servant.

But none of this stopped Aurora from coming to the forest; if anything, it made her more determined. She had been making these routine trips for a long time. Her earliest memories were of wandering through the tall Greenlandian trees.

One particular memory was so vague and distant she was unsure if it was real at all. Her vision had been overtaken by a golden light so strong and bright she felt she might go blind from the very recollection. She tried not to think about this mysterious golden light too much.

It must have just been the golden Sun. As a small child, she had probably been wandering through the Greenlandian Forest, looked up, been intrigued by the celestial figure, and stared a little too long.

If she had been coming to the woods since she was an infant, this would not surprise Aurora; the Greenlandian Forest felt like an innate part of her. Even though her parents had forbidden her journeys, there was no way, not in all of the Cosmos, she could ever stop coming here. She needed the Earth, the feeling of the cold, wet grass underneath her feet, the beauty of the green trees and the warmth of the welcoming meadows. Most importantly, she would miss the animals, and felt they too would miss her dearly.

Aurora was not exactly sure why the animals trusted her so. Was it mere exposure, and could they grow to love any folkian who took enough midnight walks through the woods? She *liked* to believe there was something about her specifically the animals appreciated. Even though she knew it was quite silly, the thought made her feel better about everything. She *liked* to believe the reason the animals had grown so fond of her was her singing.

As a young child, when she was first secretly wandering through the trees, Aurora would sing songs along the way. She loved singing. She didn't know if she had a pleasant voice, as she had only sung for the forest creatures—that is, after her parents had made it clear they were completely opposed to the notion of her making music. Still, she felt she had a gift for the art. This was a welcome feeling because Aurora did not have a gift for any of the activities she was forced to engage in back at the castle.

Had her parents known she was out singing in the woods, they would be furious. Not only was she forbidden to leave her chamber, but “Singing is for court-jesters,” they would tell her. The royalty were merely supposed to be amused by the idiotic fools who performed at their grand balls. They were never to debase themselves by actually *playing* music.

So, anytime Aurora could sing without being punished, she took full advantage of the opportunity. After Eventide, when she was in the seclusion of the woods, visiting with the forest creatures, she would sing them songs.

On this night, Aurora sang one of her favourite tunes. She did not know where she had first heard it, but she had known the words for as long as she could remember. Sometimes, she could faintly recall hearing someone sing it to her when she was very young, but that was impossible.

It could not have been her mother, for not only did Queen Audrey scoff at the idea of an upperclassman playing music, she also despised this particular song. The queen grew angry whenever she caught her daughter singing anything, but the time she caught her daughter singing *this* song, she had been livid; “Where did you learn a song with words such as *those*?”

Before Aurora could ask what was so horrible about the poetry, her mother had cast a silencing spell on her, preventing her from talking or making any sound for a fortnight.

The punishment had made Aurora much more prudent with her singing, but it certainly did not stop her from loving the song; she adored the words and felt as though the animals did too. As Aurora sang, they all gathered around her (Buttercup resting on her lap) and they listened...

*Mother Earth, O, Mother Earth
What is all this darkness worth?
Why each night are we consumed
By the Moon who rules you?
Is there a purpose for this darkness?
Is there a light to follow this?
Mother Moon, O, Mother Moon
Tell me dawn will break soon*

As Aurora sang, she picked flowers from the soft, mossy floor of the glade. She weaved them into a beautiful crown and placed it on her head. To the east, the Sun rose into the sky and nightfall's veil began to lift. Dawn's light trickled into the glade, and the beauty of the surrounding greenery revealed itself.

With her golden-blond hair shining in the Sunlight, the morning birds had no trouble finding Aurora. They took turns perching on her fingers and joined her in song. When Aurora ended the song, the birds continued to sing wildly—*Chirp, chirp! Chirp, chirp!*—greeting the girl.

“Hello, hello!” Aurora cried in bliss. “Well, it is a lovely morning, isn't it? I've got something for you...”

And she reached into the pocket of her nightgown and pulled out a bag of seeds. She tossed handfuls onto the ground, and the birds dived down from their perches to begin eagerly pecking away.

It was then something unfamiliar caught Aurora's eye: boot prints in the dirt. The boots appeared to be a similar build to hers, but a fair bit larger.

How could somebody have found their way into my beloved Secret Glade?

The animals were now looking concerned.

Aurora did not want them to worry. She made an attempt to distract them: “I’ve got breakfast for everyone!” And she reached into her pocket again, this time pulling out two things: a bag of carrots and a satchel full of raw chestnuts, both freshly harvested from the Greenlandian farms. “There you go,” Aurora said, throwing the food out in front of her. “Make sure everyone gets some.”

The boot prints had likely been made by a hunter passing through yesterday. Aurora gazed at Buttercup. The thought chilled her.

Still, she tried to enjoy her precious time here. She sat back, leaning against a tree, and watched the animals breakfast on the stolen goods: the rabbits and deer slowly chewing the carrots, while the squirrels and racoons nibbled on the chestnuts. (Her attempt to distract them had been fruitful.)

She was perfectly content with stealing a little something for them. Bringing the animals joy was well worth the risk of being caught. And it was not as though the castle-folk were going hungry. Everyone who was fortunate enough to live in the castle had far more than they needed, so she would gladly spare a bit of what was on her plate. Of course, the animals were capable of retrieving their own food, but it can be a nice change of pace to have someone *else* feed you...

Aurora did not bring any food for herself. She would need to eat back at the castle—an important part of keeping her secret late-night forest visits, well, just that: a *secret*. She knew her maid, Miss Alice, would be very concerned if she noticed that Aurora was not hungry for breakfast, especially because the princess had a considerable appetite. And besides, Aurora much preferred hot porridge with fresh fruit, cinnamon sticks and folkian sugar over raw chestnuts and carrots.

After the woodland creatures finished their meal, Aurora strolled down to a nearby lake which, similar to her glade, she had named ‘Secret Lake’.

Secret Lake was small, but deep. It did not lead into the West Coast Sea or the Greenlandian River; it was merely a little valley the rainfall had filled. The water was considerably lower than usual, what with it being the end of Summer and the land being so dry.

But Morningtide's breeze, travelling overhead, still cultivated a certain freshness; the most delicate ripples danced along the lake's surface. Because Secret Lake was really part of the forest, it was quite dirty: green algae lay across the surface, while lily pads and reed grass adorned much of its border. Aurora didn't mind the dirtiness at all. Truthfully, she couldn't have asked for a better lake!

As she made her way down, the animals followed closely behind her, but kept their distance from the murky green water.

Aurora, however, did not.

Upon reaching Secret Lake, she threw off her nightgown and flower crown, unlaced her boots, and bolted towards the water, jumping in without a second thought. She loved swimming, the cool feeling on her skin. Here, Aurora was free. She could move through the water quickly and smoothly—and even if the girl did get tired, she would simply rest her limbs and float on the surface with ease.

Aurora was not entirely sure why she had this skill, although she certainly did appreciate it. As a young child—only having lived about three or four Sun cycles—she had been sitting by the castle moat with her younger brother, Prince Jonathan. They were having one of their usual rows. Once the fight became heated, Jonathan sent her flying backwards into the moat. The surrounding citizens began yelling for a castle guard to get the Greenlandian princess out of the water before she drowned. But lo and behold, Aurora had *not* been drowning; she had been swimming!

“By the Cosmos! *How* is the princess doing that? Has she been trained?” And the folk of the Greenlands quickly concluded that she must be a very talented princess.

Well, they certainly ended up being wrong about *that*!

There was nothing half as refreshing as a morning swim in Secret Lake, especially at the dawn of what would be another hot Summer's day. The Sun was shining and the breeze was fresh. Being in the water made Aurora feel whole again. If only this morning could have lasted forever...

However, the morning dawn was as mortal as a mundane—and so, with great reluctance, Aurora swam to the edge of the lake, pulled herself up onto the grass and lay her unclad body out

in the Sun to dry. The greenery was so lush and comforting compared to the cold stone walls where she spent her days imprisoned.

Today, in particular, she dreaded her return. She gave a heavy sigh, gazed up at the Cosmos, and made a wish: "I'd give anything to no longer live in the castle."

The woodland creatures seemed to understand Aurora. They were giving her that familiar grim look as the Sun grew closer to the treetops. Buttercup came close and bent down to kiss her face.

"I'll miss you too."

It took all her willpower, but Aurora forced herself up onto her feet. Again, she dressed herself in her much too fancy silk and lace nightgown, and tied up her boots. Then she bid the animals farewell and turned to begin her much less exciting journey back.

This time, Aurora's venture through the trees was lit by the golden Sun. She made her way back through the forest pathway she had blazed, longing to stay in the greenery. However, once the trees became sparse and the castle was in sight again, she broke into a sprint, not wanting to be seen by anyone already awake: peasants working on the farmland or merchants travelling along the Green Road. She bolted through the meadow, across Green Road, and dived right into the murky moat, swimming across and pulling herself out onto the other side.

Back on her feet, she made her way to the base of the stone wall, all the while keeping an eye out for any guards on morning patrol. Now that the Sun was up, it was far more difficult to avoid them. But there was something all too glorious about a morning swim in Secret Lake that prevented the Greenlandian Princess from returning any earlier.

Aurora made it to the base of the wall. She glared at the dirty stones; they were an ugly green colour, almost brown, so horribly bland compared to the lush trees of the forest.

They were, however, useful. Using the deep cracks that separated the bricks, she began to climb. Up she went, hands reaching for the spaces, and upon finding them, pulling herself even higher. This was tricky work, but Aurora had plenty of practice, what with her nightly escapes.

Once at the top, Aurora peered over and took note of any morning guards and early risers in the courtyard. As soon as they were out of sight, she scaled down the wall as quickly as possible, until she was close enough to the ground to safely jump.

Then, she whipped around and ran past Greentown, through the courtyard, around to the back side of the castle, towards her tower. Upon arrival, she repeated the climbing process, this time having to go much higher. Up, up, up she went, moving as fast as she possibly could.

From the top of her tower, the Greenlandian princess was blessed with a spectacular view of not only the Greenlandian Forest and the West Coast Mountains, but also the West Coast Sea. Most mornings, after returning from her nightly excursion, Aurora would take a moment to bask in the glory of this view.

Today, however, there was no time for such a pleasure, as she was only a few stones away from her tower's balcony when she heard a merry, high-pitched voice from behind the door to her chamber:

“Princess Aurora! Princess Aurora!”

She must have been behind schedule.

“Yes, Miss Alice, I'm awake, just give me a minute!” Aurora called back. She had just finished pulling herself over the top of the balcony when Miss Alice entered her chamber.

Miss Alice had flat, mousy-brown hair and a plain face. Being a maid, she wore a practical pale-blue dress. (Aurora envied the simple design of the garment, although not the colour.) Tied around Miss Alice's waist was a frilly white apron. On her head sat a lacy mob cap.

“A happy Morningtide to you, Princess Aurora!” Miss Alice sang, pushing a rickety breakfast trolley across the green stone floor.

“Happy Morningtide to you too, Miss Alice,” Aurora replied, shuffling inside the green-and-gold canopy that draped over her four-poster bed, which was large enough for a giant.

“What were you doing out on your balcony?”

“Uh, I was just greeting the morning Sun.”

“Greeting the Sun?”

“Well, you know... looking out and admiring its beauty.”

Miss Alice gave Aurora a look up and down. “Princess, why are you so dirty?”

Aurora’s stomach churned. “I’m dirty?” she said, as though she hadn’t the slightest clue.

Miss Alice said, “Why, yes, Princess, come and look at yourself in the mirror,” and took her by the arm and led her to the full-length mirror that stood next to her vanity.

The thing was designed for royalty: it was taller than any folkian would ever stand—or at least any folkian who was not part giant. The frame was pure gold filigree, only coming to an end at the very top, when it reached a carving of a Sun with the face of a man—the Sun, the symbol of the Solar Revolution, worshiped by the entire world of New-Camelot.

Aurora had despised this mirror for as long as she could remember. More recently, she had grown to dislike her reflection as well.

The princess was attractive. She did not have a single physical attribute that would be considered ugly: high cheekbones, a well-defined chin, long eyelashes, lips red as the rose, and, like all royalty, she was pale—pale as snow, in fact. Even though she spent so much time in the woods, she did not have a peasant’s tan, as she could only make her journeys after Eventide. She was not skinny, but full-figured from indulging in rich castle food. And she even had the long golden-blonde hair of her mother, Queen Audrey Green. With the Greenlandian princess’s appearance, a handsome prince could ask for nothing more.

And that was why Aurora resented her appearance: she looked like a true member of the Green family! The only part of Aurora that did not resemble her family was her eyes. They weren’t bright blue like her parents’ and brother’s, but a deep, earthy green with strokes of vibrance like shards of emeralds. Her eyes were indeed rather interesting.

Aurora was awoken from her thoughts when she felt Miss Alice brush her off. “See, Princess? Grass stains, dirt—oh, you’re covered in leaves too!”

“Oh, well, um—that’s odd—I don’t know how that happened,” Aurora said, trying to sound as though she was just as concerned about it as Miss Alice.

“You just woke up covered in filth?” Miss Alice went on. “How strange! Even your hair is damp—why, it’s as though you’ve been swimming!”

In these sorts of situations, Aurora would never have got past one of her other caretakers. However, Miss Alice was gullible, and Aurora found herself relaxing with this piece of good fortune in mind.

“It’s *so* strange,” Aurora agreed. “Maybe the nightgown was dirty *before* I put it on.”

“Maybe,” the maid said, now bent over as she brushed off the princess’s bottom half. “But would you not have noticed?”

“Well, I did have quite a large goblet of wine at dinner last night.” This was not a lie: Aurora over-indulged in food and liquor anytime she had to engage with her family.

“Yes, but how would your nightgown have got dirty in the first place?”

“Not a clue.”

“And that wouldn’t explain your hair being damp.”

“Was it not raining this morning?”

“Princess, it’s another hot Summer’s day, just like the rest.”

“Maybe someone played a joke on me and dumped water on my head overnight.”

Aurora had not expected Miss Alice to believe such a story, but her maid cried, “Ah, of course!”

This was relieving, until she heard the next thing to come out of Miss Alice’s mouth: “It could have been a noble girl, envious of the glorious opportunity you will receive tomorrow!” The maid was almost tearful as she said it.

“Don’t remind me,” Aurora grumbled.

Fortunately, Miss Alice did not hear her. She was busy clutching the sides of her head and pacing around the chamber. “I’ve got to get you cleaned up as soon as possible! I’ve brought your breakfast upstairs! As soon as you’re done eating, I will draw you a bath!”

It was typical for Miss Alice to be consumed by her job: to keep the usually-out-of-line princess in line. However, judging by the rate at which she was pacing and the stiff look on her face, it was apparent the maid was particularly troubled by the unkempt state of her charge today.

Aurora tried to soothe her: “My parents have seen me make a mess of myself before, Miss Alice,” she wheedled as she fixed herself a morning cup of tea with plenty of milk and

sugar. “They are not going to be shocked by this. Besides, I’m going to get changed into day clothes soon, and it’s not as though they see the dirty washing.”

“Oh, Princess, have you forgotten? Tomorrow is the day you travel to the Solar Kingdom, the *capital*, to meet *Prince Daniel!*”

Aurora had a hard time not laughing at her maid’s distress. How *could* she have forgotten? Many moons prior, on Ostara, the Spring Equinox, the ball had been announced, and the Greens had received a letter inviting them to this regal event where they were to present the Greenlandian princess to the Solar Prince; and ever since, Aurora had been dreading the Full Grain Moon.

But tomorrow night, Prince Daniel *would* choose his bride. And then, after moons of unnecessary wedding preparations, the two would become king and queen of the capital, as well as emperor and empress of all New-Camelot, ruling the entirety of their world together.

This was why Aurora’s lie had worked. The opportunity was enough to make any noble girl, or even a peasant girl, envious. In fact, the other girls were not merely jealous of her; they resented the princess. And Aurora couldn’t blame them. She knew she was not worthy of representing the Greenlands.

But as much as it seemed as though she had been accidentally switched at birth, Aurora did, in fact, share the blood of King James and Queen Audrey Green. She *was* a Green, even if she couldn’t live up to the name. And yes, as much as she had wished for the whole situation to disappear, the time had indeed arrived.

“And it’s not just *you* who will be meeting him, Princess!” Miss Alice went on. “It’s Princess Eleanor of the Heartlands and Princess Matilda of Tangleknot, as well! There are three princesses and there is only one prince!”

“Well, I don’t see a problem with that!” Aurora spat.

The maid’s face turned magenta. “What do you mean you *don’t* see a problem with that?”

“Well, if he picks one of the other two girls, which he is likely to do, I won’t be forced to marry him.”

Miss Alice only looked more confused, so Aurora added, “Which I would strongly prefer!”

“But Princess, you are growing old—why, come the next full moon, the Harvest Moon, and you shall have travelled around the Sun *fourteen* times!”

“I still have plenty of time to find a mate.”

Of course, Aurora knew this was not true; the princess would be surprised if even a peasant boy wanted to marry her.

Miss Alice looked as though she was going to explode. “Princess Aurora, you are a *princess*! You are best marrying a *prince*!”

“Well, there are other princes, aren’t there? Surely, I could find someone else and fall in love with them, and the two of us could *choose* to be together.”

Aurora knew she was driving Miss Alice mad by saying all this. This was not their first discussion about the marital traditions of New-Camelot.

“Princess Aurora,” Miss Alice started, straightening her own dress now, “Prince Daniel is not only a prince. He is prince of the *capital*, son of *Emperor Sola*! Marrying him would bring your family so much more power and prosperity!”

Aurora took a prolonged sip of her sugary tea to hide the pained and disgusted expression on her face. The whole thing seemed ridiculous. If she was going to marry anyone, it would be for love, not power. (And even then, it was hard to believe she could ever truly love another folkian.)

Nevertheless, tomorrow her family would gather in their unicorn-drawn carriage and fly eastward towards the Solar Kingdom. Then Aurora would be gussied up in the most ridiculous gown possible and forced to present herself to the future emperor of New-Camelot.

It was nerve-wracking enough to present herself to a prince desired by so many; to have him assess whether she was beautiful enough, graceful enough, and so on. But she would also be forced to present how far along she was with the development of her powers, for the whole ballroom to see.

Aurora hated royal balls, even when the focus wasn’t directly on her. Being forced into uncomfortable gowns that only reminded her of her mother, her hair being done up in some

ridiculous manner, and having to wear all kinds of gaudy jewellery. And it never seemed to matter how much effort any one of her royal dressers put in. By the end of the night, her hair would always come loose and her dress would always become a mess—sometimes even destroyed.

And yet, Aurora never had any recollection of how these things happened. She had never done any of it, at least not on purpose. Of course, the king and the queen *did* blame her for it, as well as the dressers. Aurora had, inadvertently, caused dozens of servants to lose their jobs.

However, the horrible attire was not the worst part of royal balls. It would not do Aurora's experience justice to say being forced to dance with the noble boys was embarrassing. Aurora could enjoy dancing when she was free, singing and playing in the forest, flowers in her hair. She could not, however, stand to dance in a ridiculous ball gown with all the Greenlandian folk watching.

Sometimes the boys would refuse to dance with her, which was embarrassing enough. However, their refusal would have actually been a relief had their parents not forced them to dance with the princess anyway. The boys would just mock and laugh at her throughout the entire number.

Worst of all, Aurora could not forget the ball where she and her brother, Prince Jonathan, were made to duel. It was supposed to be a demonstration of how the royal children were progressing in the development of their powers, which would have made for a lively evening if Aurora actually *had* any powers. But seeing as she was mundane as a peasant, Prince Jonathan had thrown her backward onto her bottom in one easy blow.

And tomorrow night she would again be forced to get up in front of all the Solar citizens with nothing to show. Not that the distant folk of New-Camelot would expect anything of Princess Aurora. She was well aware of her reputation; she had been nicknamed 'the Mundane Princess', after all.

Her parents often reminded her of how they continuously lost sleep over her lack of magical prowess. Yet they were still forcing her to go and meet the Solar prince. She supposed that they wanted to prove that the duel with Prince Jonathan was a fluke, believing there was magic somewhere deep within Aurora; "How could there not be? You are *royalty!*"

And so, the past few months, the Greenlandian princess had been made to train extra hard. Today was the last day, the last chance to rise to her parents' expectations. It was *not* going to happen. Nevertheless, Aurora had to pretend that it could.

As instructed by Miss Alice, the princess ate her porridge as quickly as possible, and was now due for a bath. Miss Alice filled the tub with hot, bubbly water, salts from the West Coast Sea, rose petals and oil of lavender. Luxurious as it was, the Greenlandian princess privately admitted that she preferred her morning wash in Secret Lake. Miss Alice scrubbed her clean and washed her hair; but Aurora knew it was useless, as she was bound to get messy again.

After the bath, Miss Alice combed her hair and tied it into a neat braid. Aurora would not have minded how the braid looked, had the maid not proceeded to decorate it with obnoxious pink ribbons.

"Pink is such a lovely colour for a young girl, isn't it?" Miss Alice said dreamily as she dressed Aurora in a somehow even more obnoxious pink gown.

Aurora bit her tongue and forced herself to give a nod. Miss Alice may have been exceptionally sweet, but it was maddening how she simply could not see through the charade of it all. To cope with how ridiculous she felt in the pink garments, Aurora pretended the bows Miss Alice had tied in her hair were flowers picked from the meadows of the Greenlands.

Miss Alice began leading Aurora down the winding steps of the tower and then through the Greenlandian castle corridors. The passageways of the castle were quite dark, lit only by torches. In the firelight, the regal flags and banners were easily spotted, what with them all being green and gold, the Green house colours.

While Aurora loved exploring the greenery of the forest, she absolutely hated the colour here, where it was just a reminder of her parents' presence.

The misfit princess followed closely behind Miss Alice, but secretly wished to turn, bolt down the corridor and make an escape from the castle. She managed to resist the temptation, however, not wanting to cause Miss Alice any trouble. The maid was under strict orders to ensure Aurora attended her lessons.

Back when Aurora learned alongside the other upper-class children, she would often show up late or sneak out early, and eventually started playing hooky. Those were the days: back when she was just a number, back when she did not need private instruction. Nobody had yet realised she was a mundane—nobody but her.

And before then, it had all been theory: learning about the Sun, understanding the phases of the moon, memorising the Constellations and the maps of New-Camelot; being introduced to the different categories of magic, reading about the major potion ingredients and their uses; and of course, learning about the history of their people: the Old World and its problems, the Witch and Warlock Trials, why they left for a new world; who led them on their dangerous journey, the prophecy that formed modern New-Camelot; and most importantly, the Solar Revolution.

Aurora had not minded the magical theory, but the history was very, *very* dull. Still, it had not been a real issue. She was able to learn the stuff like any other child, for she had not been made to actually try practising magic yet.

When Aurora had reached eight Sun cycles of age, the children began experimenting with wand sparks: the most basic method of channelling one's powers. This was when the princess had confirmed she was different.

While Prince Jonathan had been the first of the upper-class children to access his powers, and had done so with ease, Aurora waved around wand after wand and yielded no results. At first, this was seen as somewhat normal; it is common for some children to take longer when initially accessing their powers. For a while, she had not been the only one.

But as more and more of the noble children discovered their abilities, it was eventually only Aurora who had not produced any kind of magic. Of course, it would have been humiliating for any upper-class child to be a mundane, but to be a mundane *princess*...

Aurora had been frustrated as much as she was humiliated. Being born a princess, naturally, Aurora should *also* have been born a sorceress. But despite having lived nearly fourteen Solar cycles—the age upper-class children hone their craft—time and time again, Aurora still failed to produce a single scrap of spell-work.

Did her parents really believe she would be able to catch up on several Suns worth of powers by the end of the day? The very notion was ridiculous. Ridiculous as it was, there would

be no getting out of today's drudgery. So, once up another two flights of stairs and all the way down the third-floor corridor, Aurora entered the lesson chamber.

Rather large for just one student, the space was circular, with shelves and shelves of books lining the curved walls. In the centre of the arched ceiling, another golden Sun with the face of a man had been painted, much larger than the one on Aurora's mirror.

Professor Skuyler was waiting for her. He was a strange little elderly man, standing only half as tall as Aurora. He wore circular glasses so oversized he had to keep pushing them back up onto the bridge of his skinny nose. He was balding, but kept a brassy moustache and beard both so large most of his face was hidden.

Because of his short stature and unkempt facial hair, Aurora's professor reminded her of a foul gnome she had met once while walking through the Greenlandian Forest. Although the gnome had been much shorter and much more cruel: "Hark! Who walks the mossy forest floor?" And then after a moment: "Oi! You! You are the Mundane Princess!" he had said with a cackle. "You are a disgrace to the Greens, living your life as a lowly elf!"

Aurora couldn't imagine Professor Skuyler speaking to her in this manner—and for that, she was appreciative. But despite his politeness, Aurora did wonder if he was part gnome: he was just so peculiar-looking. So much, in fact, that she had a hard time believing her parents would hire such a man. It was not appropriate for her to ask about his race, however, especially given that gnomes were known for their foul disposition.

Through the unnecessary amount of hair, two earthy brown eyes fixed themselves upon her. "Princess Aurora," he greeted her with a little bow.

"Professor Skuyler," Aurora reciprocated. She still felt strange calling him by his first name, but he had insisted time and time again that he did not have a surname.

"As we both know, you will be meeting the prince of the Solar Kingdom tomorrow—we've got no time to waste!" And he gestured toward the middle of the room, always left clear for practising magic.

Aurora stepped over to the centre of the stone floor, easily done as it was decorated with yet another image of the golden Sun with the face of a man: a large nose, big lips, and one eyebrow raised just slightly.

Once there, Professor Skuyler kept travelling over from an altar off to the side to pass her a variety of magical tools: wands, staves and the like. Aurora waved each piece around vigorously, but wand after wand, staff after staff, charm after charm, spell after spell, she had no success.

Magic lessons always irritated Aurora, but today she felt particularly agitated. With each tool they tried, her motivation dwindled further. Her mind kept drifting to the woods, and likewise, her eyes drifted towards the large bay window.

Of course, she was looking out in the direction of Secret Glade. However, she could not help but notice that the other upper-class children, including her brother, had begun a flying lesson. They looked so free up there, flying around on broomsticks.

“Princess Aurora, I see that you admire their flying.” Professor Skuyler said.

Aurora’s face was suddenly warm.

“Oh, uh, no, not at all!”

Now, this was not entirely truthful; learning to fly on a broom *did* interest her. Not because she was jealous of her brother and the noble children. She merely wanted to learn because having the skill would make her nightly journey into the woods a lot quicker, and she could have more time with the animals.

“You know why you have not been allowed on one, right, Princess?”

“It’s dangerous,” Aurora answered stiffly.

“And why is it dangerous, Princess?”

“Because I can’t do magic!” Aurora cried. “So, there’s no telling what the broom would do! I could fall to my death!”

Professor Skuyler was sent into a panic; “Princess Aurora! What did I say about words being *powerful*?”

“Right, sorry, Professor,” Aurora said, gathering herself. “It’s not that I can’t do magic, it’s that my powers simply have not come in.”

Aurora tried to sound like she meant what she was saying. Similar to how she felt about Miss Alice, she did not want to offend Professor Skuyler. She liked him far more than any of the other instructors who had taught her. Many had been greedy for the gold, as there was a huge

reward in order for the mage who could teach Princess Aurora how to access her powers. They had lusted for the fame and glory. Aurora represented a near-mythological challenge: ‘Who can conjure the magic out of the Mundane Princess?’

The other instructors had not brought pure intentions. Many had not even worked as professors prior to tutoring Aurora. But Professor Skuyler had been a scholar for his entire life, and when he was not teaching, he was studying. He had dedicated his life to the Craft. His intentions were genuine; it was simply his passion for the supernatural that motivated him to teach Aurora. And so, despite Aurora’s loathing for the lessons, she could at least appreciate the sincerity of the strange little man.

Professor Skuyler was so kind and so patient with Aurora, even when she was difficult. It only made it worse that she would not be chosen by Prince Daniel. She would not enjoy disappointing this teacher the way she would have with so many others. They had been impatient and said cruel things to her. Some of them had even used curses to torture her—once the Greenlandian king and queen approved of such punishments, of course.

Aurora was happy to have Professor Skuyler even if his ideas regarding magic were a little odd. He was, indeed, wise—there was no doubt about that. He seemed to understand magic in a way that most of the nobility, and even the royalty, did not.

But the way he talked about magic was strange: as though it had its own consciousness, as though it could hear your words and read your thoughts.

“Your powers haven’t come in *yet!*” Professor Skuyler said firmly, pointing his own wand out towards Aurora.

Even his wand was odd; it looked like nothing Aurora had ever seen. In fact, it did not look as though it was made of wood at all. It was an earthy red colour with little white speckles all over it.

“My powers haven’t come in yet,” the Mundane Princess recited. Then, under her breath, she mumbled, “and they *never* will.”

She had not intended for Professor Skuyler to hear her, but indeed he had.

“No, Princess,” he replied. “They won’t come in if you talk about them like *that.*”

Aurora sighed.

“You know what I keep telling you: you have to believe in yourself! You have to let the magic out! You can’t force it out! Doing something by force is equal to resisting it!”

The princess shut her eyes tightly.

“Do you not want your powers to come in? Do you not want to learn how to cast spells so you can jinx your brother and fly around on a broom?” As Professor Skuyler rambled on, he clutched his wand and stared upward, a dreamy expression on his face.

Aurora opened her eyes and looked directly at Professor Skuyler. “Do you honestly believe that having power, having magical powers, makes one the most joyful man in the world?” The words were out of her mouth before she had time to think them through.

Seeming completely unaware that Aurora had, in fact, been criticising and not encouraging him, Professor Skuyler continued, holding his wand in front of his heart as he spoke: “There is a reason why magical practice is reserved for only the royal and the noble. It is sacred. It is not meant for commoners. It is meant for the folk who actually know how to use it.”

My parents sure know how to use it. All of the horrible punishments they had given her for not keeping in line: incantations that bound her legs together so she had to hop from place to place, silencing spells that stopped her from speaking for a fortnight, and occasionally, when she had done something especially bad, curses that caused all kinds of pain. There was no doubt, despite their sadistic methods, that King James and Queen Audrey Green were very skilled with the arcane arts.

“You see, Princess, it is of utmost importance that only the upperclassmen use magic and that we learn our Craft well. We do have the most responsibility after all, and the hardest of lives, what with it being our noble duty to keep New-Camelot safe from tyranny and destruction...”

Aurora had heard the same story time and time again. “It doesn’t make any sense!”

“What doesn’t make any sense?”

Aurora decided *not* to argue that her parents were tyrants. Instead, she focused on her own incompetence: “If the upper class is truly just inherently magical, then why can’t *I* practise magic?”

“You can, Princess, but you’ve got to stop resisting.” Professor Skuyler stroked his beard and gazed pensively at Aurora. “You are defiant by nature, I know, but you’ve got to get yourself properly in line with this. You are a princess, and therefore you are a sorceress—and with that comes responsibility. Now, let’s get back to work.”

The day was a long one of trying various tools and exercises to ‘unlock her powers’. *Ridiculous!* But eventually, as days always do, it came to an end. Aurora got through the toil of the final lesson by looking forward to gorging on roasted beef and potatoes. Even more, she anticipated washing her supper down with a large goblet of wine.

And most importantly, she relaxed every time she remembered that Prince Daniel was not going to choose her as his bride—even if she was slightly ashamed.

There was simply nothing anyone could do about it: Aurora was as mundane as the peasants who had grown the potatoes and slaughtered the cattle, upon which she was so looking forward to feasting.