

*A Princess in Disguise*

April Michelle Davis



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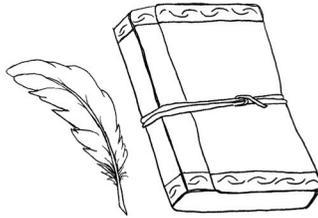
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This is an original print edition of *A Princess in Disguise*.

To SaraJane, the best friend a girl could have



# Chapter 1



I just could not bear to marry a stranger. I sat on my bed to have a think. I knew I would never love a man I was forced to marry. My sisters were excited, or at least willing. Well, I did not wish to go to another ball and be paraded around like a prized mare. I was tired of it, tired of it all, and I wanted my mother.

I reached over to my desk and grabbed my diary. From the drawer, I took out my favorite quill

with the purple feather, which writes so smoothly on the pages. I opened my diary to the next blank page and began to write:

*Dear Diary,*

*It is hard to believe that my sisters and I are related, for we are so different. We are alike only in blood, looks, and the fact that we are triplets. Our differences show through in our personalities but are even more obvious in how we act on our birthday. It is a wonder that we have the same mother, wherever she is. You see, Diary, Mother left a long time ago, so long ago that my sisters and I do not even remember her. We do not know if she is even alive. Father says we look just like her, but he does not say why she is not here. I cannot comprehend how a queen can pack her belongings and simply disappear. I have tried to find this out, but Father has done a good job of keeping it a secret. No one seems to know what happened to Mother. No one seems worried but me. I have tried speaking to our servants and advisors about Mother, but no one wants to discuss her with me. When I bring up my mother, people quickly change the subject, find something else to do, or simply walk away. I do not know why talking about my mother is so wrong. My*

*father forbids it. Now no one tells me anything. Maybe there is a reason why speaking of her is forbidden. Maybe there is something wrong with her. Did something happen to her? Was my father heartbroken?*

*My dear sister Katherine hates our father. She blames him for the disappearance of Mother. She has fantasies of what Mother would be like. My other sister, Eleanor, loves our father but hates our mother for abandoning us. "If Mother really loved us, she would not have left. She is missing out on so much because we are all quite accomplished. Katherine is best at dancing, Margaret is best at singing, and I am best at teasing the boys," says Eleanor.*

*I love both Father and Mother, but in different ways, of course. I love Father for all of the things he has done for us. He pays for the best professors to come to the castle and teach us. He gives us everything we could ever need. I love Mother because she was the one who gave me life. I am sure she had a good reason for leaving us when she did. I try to explain that to Eleanor, but she is so stubborn. Father says that he does not know why she left. He says she gave him no warning, just packed one night and was gone. I often wonder if Mother went to visit one of her*

*siblings. Father says he never tried to find out where she went. I don't think he cares.*

*Every year when our birthday comes, Father makes a big fuss. He hosts a huge ball and invites royal families with princes our age. I think he might want us to marry one of them. On each anniversary of our birth, Katherine becomes angrier with Father, Eleanor becomes angrier with Mother, and I do not eat a morsel the entire day, not even at the ball. We are all nostalgic, each for something different, and our birthday makes this feeling worse.*

I laid the diary on my bed against the pillow. Why was I destined to become a party to a contract with another kingdom through marriage vows? Yet, my sisters had this same destiny, but they were accepting of it. I did not want to be married off.

I walked out on the balcony and looked past the gardens that were pruned to form various symmetrical patterns and mazes. I gazed at the river rushing by and yearned for it to take me along. Though the warm sun was shining, a cold wind blew, bringing an unwelcome chill. I shivered and wrapped my shawl tighter about my shoulders.

I walked into my room and put on an old dress and a cloak to hide my hair and face. Quietly, I snuck

downstairs and took an immediate left toward the servants' quarters. I was friends with the servants and knew I could trust them with my life. They kept my sneaking out into the kingdom to roam the streets a secret, though they may not have wanted to. They knew I yearned to be around common people and keeping this secret would keep me safe. I had begun sneaking out for short visits when I was six. I knew enough to cover myself up with a cloak and ragged clothing so I would blend in more with the peasants. I would simply walk amongst the common people and watch the children play. I wished I could play with them, but I would not have known their games; and I knew to keep my distance.

When I reached the streets of the city, I walked to the marketplace. It was my favorite place to see the common people at work and the various products they had made. Boys and men of all sizes and ages were selling wares that they had grown, made, caught, or killed. Mostly the men were the ones selling, and the women were buying. There were some older women selling, probably because they no longer had husbands to do this for them.

As I walked down the main street in the marketplace, I saw men displaying their items for sale. Many had baskets of various sizes and weaves, dead and live animals, and knives and other weaponry. I stopped

at one table and began looking at a marvelous piece of fabric dyed a beautiful shade of indigo. A sudden wind blew in with its chill. The wind was so strong that it knocked my hood off my head. The merchant twisted his neck a little to the left and eyed me for a few seconds too long. Why was he staring at me? Did he suspect I was a princess? I pulled the hood back over my head and wanted to disappear, but I loved the color of the fabric and had to have it. It could be sewn into a beautiful dress. Should I leave and run back to the castle or pretend I hadn't noticed his look and buy the fabric?

I held my hood tightly around my face and in a muffled voice said, "Excuse me, sir. For this piece," I lifted the corner of the fabric off the table. "How much are you asking?"

The merchant looked at me for the longest time from behind the table of fabrics. He stood but did not move. He tilted his head to the right, as if examining my very being. I could not tell what he was thinking, but I was beginning to get worried and thought I should run. Then the merchant took the fabric, folded it, and said, "two gold bits."

Suddenly, a young man stepped to my side and, pretending to know me, paid for the cloth. I was unsure of what was going on, but I took the folded fabric from the merchant as the young man took me by the arm. I wanted to get away from the merchant, but I was afraid