

T W I C E U P O N A T I M E

Sleeping Beauty

*The One Who Took
the Really Long Nap*

W E N D Y M A S S

SCHOLASTIC INC.
New York Toronto London Auckland
Sydney Mexico City New Delhi Hong Kong

*For Stu, who I cannot write a book without
And for Mike, my real-life Prince Charming*

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ISBN 978-0-439-79658-3

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12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 12 13 14 15 16/0

Printed in the U.S.A. 40
First printing, September 2006

PROLOGUE

↔ The Prince ↔

When I finally reached her, all was completely still. The room was bathed in the kind of quiet where you couldn't hear a bee buzz or a toad croak even if you listened really, really hard. The dust motes hung motionless in the shafts of sunlight. The only sounds were my breath and my footfalls on the rug.

I gazed down at her, asleep on her bed of feather pillows. Never before had I seen beauty like this. Even if Mother had not long ago banned from the castle anything that might be considered pleasing to the eye, I would have never been prepared for this. Little did Mother know that tucked away on the grounds of our very own castle lay such loveliness.

The painting I had seen of the girl did not fully capture her true beauty. Her complexion was two part peaches and one part cream. Lips of cherry red. Raven-black hair, so silky it glowed. Her clothing was endearingly old-fashioned — layers of petticoats, a three-pointed collar, sleeves of lace. No one wore that anymore, but on her it looked fetching.

This was my moment. Here lay my destiny. I knew it as well as I knew my own name. (Okay, perhaps that last part was not exactly true because Mother had never given me a name. Nevertheless, I knew what I had to do.)

Before I got too nervous, I bent down and ever-so-gently let my lips fall upon hers. They felt as soft as they looked. While I had always assumed that the recipient of my first kiss would actually be awake and standing upright, it was pretty good as far as first kisses went.

I pulled away. At first, nothing happened. Then her eyelids began to flutter, and suddenly her eyes were wide open. I jumped back in surprise.

The girl sat bolt upright and stared at me. Her eyes were brighter than the bluest sky, although still a bit unfocused. She opened her mouth to speak, but only a squeak came out. She raised her hand to her neck in alarm, then cleared her throat a few times. She tried again. This time her voice was loud and clear.

“Pardon my rudeness,” she said, “but WHO THE HECK ARE YOU?”

“Me?” I asked, surprised. No one had ever asked me that question before.

“Yes *you*,” she said, looking wildly around the room. “Who are you?”

“Why, I’m . . . I’m the Prince,” I replied, bowing gracefully.

“What are you doing here?” she asked breathlessly.

Her flushed cheeks were a deeper red now, and I was momentarily silenced by her beauty. I finally realized she was waiting for an answer.

“What am I doing here?” I said. “Why, I’m awakening you, Princess Rose.”

Her nose crinkled in genuine confusion. “Awakening me? Awakening me from what?”

I stared at her. She honestly did not know what had happened to her! This required a delicate answer. I did not have much training in delicacy, but I tried my best. “You have been asleep for a hundred years. I do not know why. But you have lain in your castle all this time — hidden by vines and trees — protected with fairy magic from the outside world until I came to awaken you.” Unsure what else to do, I bowed again, so deeply I almost tipped over.

The color drained from her face, then slowly refilled. Her eyes shook off a bit of their fogginess. She tried to get out of bed but stumbled. Her legs hadn’t been used for a very long time. I quickly rushed to her aid. I held out my arm for support, and she took it. When she stood, the top of her head reached my nose. She examined my face for a moment.

“The past is slowly coming back to me,” she finally said, letting go of my arm to smooth out her skirts. “Thank you for being the one to awaken me. Others have tried and failed.”

I felt my eyebrows shoot up. “How can you know of the other attempts to enter your castle?”

She shook her head wearily. “It is a very long story. And I know nothing about you. I am not used to being alone in the company of a young man.”

“Nor I a young woman,” I replied. “Let us sit and get to know each other. I am quite sure we have a lot to talk about.”

Before she could reply, something changed in the air around us. It seemed to thin out in some way. The room took on a dreamlike quality. A stab of fear hit me in the gut. Was I dreaming? Was the real me asleep outside the old castle where I’d spent so many frustrated nights? I saw her trying to reach for me, but it was too late — she was fading away.

All I could see was the space around her.

It was vast, and empty.

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

Princess Rose, a hundred and sixteen years earlier

On the day I was born, the heavens themselves opened up to shine rays of welcome down upon me. Or at least that's what Mama said. Mama wasn't born into royalty, like Papa, who was a prince before becoming a king, so she could get away with saying quaint things like that. She also said my nose was as cute and round as a ladybug's behind, and pretty much everyone knows ladybugs don't even *have* behinds.

When the midwife announced, "It's a girl!" whoops of joy and tears of happiness filled the air. Papa gave the whole kingdom the day off (except for the dung heap cleaners, but that is to be expected with an important job like that). I was placed in a bassinet overflowing with fine linen and feathers, and was swaddled in a blanket made from the efforts of the kingdom's finest silkworms. Life was good.

A few days after my birth, it was time for the ceremony where I would be officially named and have gifts bestowed upon me from the good fairies of the realm. Truly, it was

only a formality, because I already had a name. My parents had dreamed of a child for many years, and they had long ago decided what to call me — if I were a girl, I would be named Gertrude (Gertie for short) after a favorite great-aunt of Mama's. But when I arrived, looking all rosy and perfect, they knew only one name would do me justice. I would be called Rose.

One by one the fairies arrived for my big day. The seven of them would be my godmothers and would protect me in times of trouble. Not that anyone expected any trouble, of course, which was fortunate because fairies were notoriously fickle, and often disappeared for decades at a time.

The ceremony began, and my name was officially added to the royal ledger, inscribed with ink made of pure silver. Papa had spared no expense for this event. While Mama fed me from a crystal baby bottle, the fairies were treated to a great feast of peacock and lamb and chocolate truffles. Their table was shorter than everyone else's since none of the fairies was taller than a yardstick. Their place settings were made of solid gold. The edges of the plates were encrusted with diamonds and rubies, while emeralds and sapphires ran down the stems of the silverware. These marvelous place settings were gifts for the fairies to take home with them, my parents' way of thanking them for the gifts they would bestow upon me at the end of the meal.

Much wine was consumed, and many toasts in my name were shouted to the roof beams. I lay in my bassinet, adorned for the occasion with a silver tiara and a pink taffeta dress. I smiled a toothless grin. One by one, the fairies formed a tight circle around me. It was time for the gift-giving.

The first fairy godmother said, "Princess Rose shall be the greatest beauty the world has ever known."

The second said, "She will be bright and clever."

The third said, "She shall be full of grace."

The fourth said, "She will be an excellent dancer."

The fifth said, "She will sing like a songbird."

The sixth said, "She shall play all kinds of music with equal perfection."

Mama and Papa nodded happily after each gift was announced. Mama, beloved throughout the kingdom for her goodness and charity to others, had suffered in silence without a child, and her dreams of having a perfect little daughter were finally coming true. But just as the final fairy leaned over me and opened her mouth, two of the castle guards came bursting into the room.

"Please, Your Highness," they said to Papa, bowing deeply, "forgive the intrusion. But an uninvited guest has barreled through the gate and is calling out your daughter's name. Here she comes now!"

My parents whirled around in alarm. A cold wind blew,

and along with it appeared an old fairy, white hair sticking out of her head in all directions. My parents stared at her, wide-eyed. Papa opened his mouth to speak, but closed it again when he saw the fury on the old woman's face.

"Why was I not invited to this christening?" she demanded. "As the eldest fairy in the realm, I am to be honored, not disgraced in this way."

"Please," Mama pleaded, wringing her hands. "We meant no disrespect. We thought you were . . . I mean . . . we had heard that you were —"

"Dead? You thought I was dead?"

Mama nodded miserably. She couldn't say the whole truth, which was that the fairy had gotten quite nasty in her old age — drank too much at parties, snapped at the staff, that sort of thing — so when word had reached the castle that she'd died, nobody had been too distressed about it.

The old fairy stood up straighter. This was not easy since she was bent practically in half. "As you can clearly see," she said mockingly, "the rumors of my death have been greatly exaggerated."

"Forgive us our oversight and join us for the celebration," Papa said, steering the old fairy toward the table. The other fairies hurried to sit back down. Papa snapped his fingers at the nearest page, who ran straight off to the pantry. He quickly returned with our finest china and set it before

the fairy. She took one look at the place setting and slammed her hand down onto the table. Everyone grabbed their glasses so the wine wouldn't spill.

"I demand the same jeweled gifts as the other fairies. How dare you further insult me in this way?"

Mama looked ready to faint. She did not like confrontation of any sort. "We . . . we only had these seven place settings commissioned. I promise you, we will order another and have it delivered to you at any place in the realm."

"I am tired of your excuses," the old fairy sneered. "It is time for me to deliver *my* gift now." She pushed back her chair, which screeched ominously on the stone floor.

Mother instinctively moved in front of my bassinet, but as the old fairy approached she had no choice but to step aside. I still gurgled happily, unaware that my life was about to change forever.

In a low voice, the fairy decreed, "The princess shall pierce her finger upon a spindle. At the first drop of blood, she shall die."

A gasp of shock and horror rose up in the room, and all was chaos. Chairs were tipped over, sobs soaked through silk napkins. Somehow the old fairy managed to slip away unseen.

"Wait! All is not lost!" A clear, sweet voice rose above the din of wails. Everyone stopped crying for a moment to

find its source. The youngest of the fairies stepped forward and said, "I have not yet given my gift to the princess."

Mama's eyes filled with hope again. She clutched the fairy's arm. "Can you undo the curse?" she pleaded.

The young fairy shook her head and Mama crumpled dramatically into her chair.

"But I can weaken it," she said. The young fairy approached my bassinet, leaned over, and touched me gently on the forehead. "Young Rose, you shall indeed stick yourself with a spindle one day, but you shall not die of your wound. Instead, you shall fall into a deep sleep. This sleep will last at least one hundred years, until the right person awakens you."

Sighs of relief arose from every corner of the room. Papa waved over the royal scribe, who dipped his quill quickly into his portable inkwell and waited. Father cleared his throat and then boomed, "I proclaim here and now that all spindles and similar weaving or sewing equipment be removed from not only the castle but the surrounding towns and countryside as well. Anyone caught with a spindle in their home shall immediately be thrown into the castle dungeon."

"But, darling," Mama asked, her brow furrowed, "what will the townsfolk do if they cannot make or mend their own clothes?" Even with her daughter's safety on the line, Mama's kind heart could not be quieted.

“Do not worry, my dear,” Papa said. “I shall be sure they are all provided for with clothing from another kingdom.”

“But what of the tailors and seamstresses?” Mama asked. “How will they make a living?”

“We shall retrain them,” Papa said, beginning to get exasperated.

Mama was satisfied, so Papa sent castle couriers to ride for miles around in every direction, making the announcement. Pages then went from house to house, collecting all the spindles and weaving wheels. Once the townsfolk were assured that my parents would not let them go without clothing, they happily turned everything over. Word of my beauty and wonderful disposition had already spread, so the townsfolk were eager to do their part to ensure my safety. And, truth be told, many a wife was only too happy not to have to spin anymore.

Life was good again.