

If history were taught in the form of stories,  
it would never be forgotten.

— RUDYARD KIPLING, *THE COLLECTED WORKS*

## *Fair Warning*

If I tell you what happened that night in Ekaterinburg I will have to unwind my memory—all the twisted coils—and lay it in your palm. It will be the gift and the curse I bestow upon you. A confession for which you may never forgive me. Are you ready for that? Can you hold this truth in your hand and not crush it like the rest of them? Because I do not think you can. I do not think you are brave enough. But, like so many others through the years, you have asked:

Am I truly Anastasia Romanov? A beloved daughter. A revered icon. A Russian grand duchess.

Or am I an impostor? A fraud. A liar. The thief of another woman's legacy.

That is for you to decide, of course. Countless others have rendered their verdict. Now it is your turn. But if you want the truth, you must pay attention. Do not daydream or drift off. Do not speak or interrupt. You will have your answers. But first you must understand why the years have brought me to this point and why such loss has made the journey necessary. When I am finished, and only then, will you have the right to tell me who I am.

Are you ready? Good.

Let us begin.

· P A R T O N E ·

## *The End and the Beginning*



*Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains,  
no matter how improbable, must be the truth.*

— SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

# *Anna*

FOLIE À DEUX

1970, 1968

*Charlottesville, Virginia*

*February 17, 1970*

Fifty years ago tonight Anna threw herself off a bridge in Berlin. It wasn't her first brush with death, or even the most violent, but it was the only one that came at her hands. Anna's husband does not know this, however. She watches him, watching her, and she knows he sees only a fragile old woman who has waited too long for vindication. He sees the carefully cultivated image she presents to the world: a crown of thinning silver hair and tired blue eyes. Age and confusion and a gentle aura of helplessness. This impression could not be further from the truth. She has been many things through the years, but helpless is not one of them. At the moment, however, Anna is simply impatient. She sits in this living room, two thousand miles from her past, waiting for a verdict.

Jack is like a frightened rabbit, all nerves and tension. He springs from his chair and begins to pace through the cluttered den. "Why haven't they called? They should have called by now."

"I'm sure they read the verdict hours ago," Anna says, leaning her head against the fold of her wingback chair and closing her eyes.

Whatever news awaits them is not good, but Anna does

not have the heart to tell him this. Jack is so hopeful. He has already written a press release and taken a Polaroid so he can bring both to *The Daily Progress* first thing in the morning. Jack spoke with the editor this afternoon, suggesting they reserve a front-page spot for the story. He's hoping for something above the fold. He's hoping for exclamation points.

Even though Jack hasn't admitted it, Anna knows that he is looking forward to reporters showing up again. They haven't had any in months, and she suspects he's gotten lonely with only her and the animals for company. She feels a bit sorry for him, being saddled with her like this. But there was no other way. Gleb insisted on it, and in all the years she knew him, Gleb Botkin remained her truest friend, her staunchest champion. He's been dead two years now. Another loss in an unending string of losses. Jack is kind to her—just as Gleb promised—and beggars can't be choosers anyway. Anna reminds herself of this daily.

The phone rings. Three startling metallic alarms and then Jack snatches it from the cradle.

"Manahan residence." A pause, and then, "Yes, she's here. Hold on a moment." The cord won't stretch across the room, so Jack lays the receiver on the sideboard. He grins. "It's from Germany."

"Who?"

"The Prince." He beams, then clarifies—there have been a number of princes in her life. "Frederick."

Anna feels a wild stab of anger at the name. She hasn't forgotten what Frederick did, hasn't forgotten the burn pile behind her cottage at the edge of the Black Forest. All those charred little bones. If the news had come from anyone else she would take the call. "I don't want to speak with him."

"But—"

"He knows why."

"I really think it's time you—"

Anna holds her hand up, palm out, a firm, final sort of motion. "Take a message."

Jack pouts but doesn't protest. He knows that arguing is futile. Anna does not change her mind. Nor does she forgive. He picks up the receiver again. "I'm sorry. She doesn't want to speak right now. Why don't you give me the news?"

And then she watches Jack's countenance fall by tiny, heart-breaking increments. First his smile. Then his lifted, expectant brows. His right arm drops to his side. He is deflated. "I don't understand," he says, finally, then clears his throat as though he has swallowed a cobweb.

"Write it down," Anna instructs. "Word for word." She doesn't want to interpret the verdict through his anger once he hangs up. Anna wants to know exactly what the appeals court has to say. Jack is too emotional and prone to exaggeration. He needs to transcribe the decision in its entirety or vital bits of information will be lost the moment he hangs up. Gleb wouldn't need this instruction. He would know what to do. He would know what questions to ask. But Gleb is no longer here, and, once again, this reality leaves her feeling adrift.

"Let me write this down," Jack says, like it's his idea. She watches him shuffle through piles of paper on the cluttered sideboard, looking for a notebook with blank pages. Finding none, he grabs an envelope and turns it over. "Go ahead. I'm ready."

A decade ago Anna's lawyer told her this lawsuit was the longest-running case in German history. This appeal has stretched it into something worse, something interminable. And there stands Jack, writing the footnote to her quest on the back of their electric bill in his tidy, ever-legible script. "How do you spell that?" he asks at one point, holding the phone with one hand and recording the verdict with the other. He doesn't rush or scribble but pens each word with painstaking precision, occasionally asking Frederick to repeat himself.

Jack and Anna don't have many friends. They haven't been married long, only two years, and theirs is a relationship based on convenience and necessity, not romance. They are old and eccentric and not fit for polite society in this quaint college town. But a handful of people—mostly former professors at the University of Virginia, like Jack—are due to arrive shortly. Anna doesn't want to know how he convinced them to come. Entertaining would have been awkward if the decision had gone in her favor. It will be excruciating now. Anna decides there won't be a party tonight. She doesn't have the heart to entertain strangers this evening.

But Jack, in all his eagerness, has cooked for a celebration. Their small den is littered with trays of fruit and sandwiches. Deviled eggs and cheese platters. Tiny brined pickles and cocktail sausages skewered with toothpicks. He even bought three bottles of champagne that sit in a bowl of ice, unopened beneath the string of Christmas lights he stapled to the ceiling. Anna stares at the bottles with suspicion. She hasn't touched the stuff in almost four decades. The last time Anna drank champagne she ended up naked on a rooftop in New York City.

The entire setting is tacky and festive—just like her husband. Jack bought a rhinestone tiara from the costume shop near the college campus just for the occasion. It sits on a gaudy red velvet pillow next to the champagne. He's been dying to crown her since they met, and only today, only in the hopes of a positive verdict, has she humored him. But that hope is gone now. Snuffed out in a German courtroom on the other side of the world.

"Thank you," he finally says, and then lower, almost a whisper, "I will. I'm sorry. You know how she can be. I'm sure she'll speak with you next time. Good-bye."

When he turns back to Anna, Jack has the envelope pressed to his chest. He doesn't speak.

“We need to call our guests and tell them the party’s canceled,” she says.

He looks crushed. “I’m so sorry.”

“This isn’t your fault. You did what you could.” A shrug. A deep breath. “What did Frederick say?”

“Your appeal was rejected. They won’t reverse the lower court’s ruling.”

“I gathered that. Tell me his words *exactly*.”

Jack looks to the paper. “They regard your claim as ‘non liquet.’”

“Interesting.”

“What does that mean?”

“‘Not clear’ or ‘not proven.’”

When Jack frowns, he puckers his mouth until his upper lip nearly touches his nose. It’s an odd, childish expression and one he’s used with greater frequency the longer he has known her. “Is that German?”

“Latin.”

“You know *Latin*?”

“Very little at this point.” Anna swats at him. “Go on.”

“The judges said that even though your death has never been proven, neither has your escape.”

“Ah. Clever.” She smiles at this dilemma. It is the ultimate catch-22. Her escape *can’t* be proven without a formal declaration of identity from the court. “Read the rest please.”

Jack holds the envelope six inches from his nose and slowly recites the verdict. “We have *not* decided that the plaintiff is *not* Grand Duchess Anastasia, but only that the Hamburg court made its decision without legal mistakes and without procedural errors.” He looks up. “So they have decided . . . *nothing*?”

She shakes her head slowly and then with more determination. “Oh, they have decided everything.”

“It was that photo, wasn’t it? The court must have seen it.

There's no other reason they would rule against you. Damn that Rasputin. *Damn* her!" Jack begins to pace again. "We could make a statement—"

"No. It's over." Anna lifts her chin with all the dignity she can muster and folds her hands in her lap. She is resigned and regal. "They will never formally recognize me as Anastasia Romanov."

blistering shards of snow she is used to in Germany, but fat, lethargic flakes that drift and flutter and take their time getting to the ground. Lazy snow. American snow.

Anna's had only a single tryst since that limpid summer in Bavaria all those years ago, but Gleb moved on. Got married. Had children. They've never talked about the intervening years, and it's not worth bringing up now. Anna is in her seventies—too old to get married at all, much less for the first time. Jack Manahan is twenty years her junior. A former professor enamored with Russian history, and with her—or, at least, the *idea* of her. Regardless, he hasn't put up much of a fight since being presented with the plan. Jack's only show of hesitation was a long, curious look at Gleb. Assessing his attachment and willingness to let Anna go.

It occurred to her, far too late in the process, that she had not considered the issue of sex. Jack is young. *Younger* at least. And she is . . . well . . . she is *not*. The idea of consummation almost caused her to back out of this arrangement entirely. All of those hormones have shriveled up, turned to dust, and blown away. Desire is little more than a fond memory these days.

Gleb has taken care of that issue as well, however, assuring her that sex isn't a necessary part of this bargain. She and Jack will have separate bedrooms. This will be a legal marriage, enough to keep her in the United States once her visa expires in three weeks, but it will be a marriage of convenience only. Gleb swore this, endless times, over their last shared bottle of wine. Jack will not lay a hand on her. Unless she wants him to. Why Gleb added that last part she isn't sure. He wouldn't meet her eyes as he said it, and she did not reply. It was a small cruelty. This is how it is with them, apparently. Little wounds. Paper cuts. Just enough to sting but not really harm. Perhaps it's best that they aren't marrying each other after all.

Gleb slips into the antechamber beside the courtroom and surveys her tiny, slender form. "You look nice."

He seems weary and pale and infirm. He's lost weight recently, and his once broad shoulders have narrowed with illness and age. Anna wants to ask Gleb if his heart has gotten worse. But she's afraid of what his answer might be. So she says, "I look ridiculous."

"All brides look ridiculous. That's why they're so charming."

Anna turns back to the window. It's late afternoon, getting darker by the moment, and the overhead light bounces off the glass, throwing her reflection back at her. She touches a hand to her cheek. Traces one deep wrinkle after another, each of them telling a story she's long since decided to forget.

"I am too old for this," she says.

"I know."

"You admit it then?" She studies his reflection too, hovering over her shoulder. "But no apology, I see."

"It is this or you return to Germany," he says. "We are out of time."

"That always seems to be the case with us, doesn't it?"

"Ships in the night," he whispers and sets a large, warm hand on her shoulder. "Are you ready? Sergeant Pace is waiting. So is Jack."

"Sergeant?"

"Judge Morris called in sick this morning."

Anna turns to him and looks, not at his face, but at the knot in his tie. She stares at the red and blue alternating stripes on the fabric, those thin lines circling back on themselves, all twisted and turned around. Anna is knotted up as well, but now, suddenly, it's with mirth.

"I am to be married," she asks, tilting her chin to meet those twinkling green eyes, "not by a priest, or a judge, but by a *police officer*?"

"It gives an entirely new meaning to being read your rights, doesn't it?"

They laugh, then, long and loud. She turns back to the win-