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AMERICAN  
ROYALS

## PROLOGUE

You already know the story of the American Revolution, and the birth of the American monarchy.

You might know it from the picture books you read as a child. From your elementary school performances—when you longed to play the role of King George I or Queen Martha, and instead were cast as a cherry tree. You know it from songs and movies and history textbooks, from that summer you visited the capital and went on the official Washington Palace tour.

You've heard the story so many times that you could tell it yourself: how, after the Battle of Yorktown, Colonel Lewis Nicola fell to his knees before General George Washington and begged him on behalf of the entire nation to become America's first king.

Of course, the general said yes.

Historians love to debate whether, in another world, things might have gone differently. What if General Washington had refused to be king, and asked to be an elected representative instead? A prime minister—or perhaps he would have made up an entirely new name for that office, like *president*. Maybe, inspired by America's example, other nations—France and Russia and Prussia, Austria-Hungary and China and Greece—would eventually abolish their own monarchies, giving rise to a new democratic age.

But we all know that never happened. And you didn't come here for a made-up story. You came here for the story of what happens next. What America looks like two hundred and fifty years later, when the descendants of George I are still on the throne.

It is a story of soaring ballrooms and backstairs corridors. Of secrets and scandal, of love and heartbreak. It is the story of the most famous family in the world, who play out their family dramas on the greatest stage of all.

This is the story of the American royals.



## BEATRICE

*Present Day*

Beatrice could trace her ancestry back to the tenth century.

It was really only through Queen Martha's side, though most people refrained from mentioning that. After all, King George I had been nothing but an upstart planter from Virginia until he married well and then fought even better. He fought so well that he helped win America's independence, and was rewarded by its people with a crown.

But through Martha, at least, Beatrice could trace her lineage for more than forty generations. Among her forebears were kings and queens and archdukes, scholars and soldiers, even a canonized saint. *We have much to learn by looking back*, her father always reminded her. *Never forget where you come from.*

It was hard to forget your ancestors when you carried their names with you as Beatrice did: Beatrice Georgina Fredericka Louise of the House of Washington, Princess Royal of America.

Beatrice's father, His Majesty King George IV, shot her a glance. She reflexively sat up straighter, to listen as the High Constable reviewed the plans for tomorrow's Queen's Ball. Her hands were clasped over her demure pencil skirt, her legs crossed at the ankle. Because as her etiquette teacher had drilled into her—by hitting her wrist with a ruler each time she slipped up—a lady never crossed her legs at the thigh.

And the rules were especially stringent for Beatrice because she was not only a princess: she was also the first woman who would ever inherit the American throne. The first woman who would be queen in her own right: not a queen consort, married to a king, but a true queen regnant.

If she'd been born twenty years earlier, the succession would have jumped over her and skipped to Jeff. But her grandfather had famously abolished that centuries-old law, dictating that in all subsequent generations, the throne would pass to the oldest child, not the oldest boy.

Beatrice let her gaze drift over the conference table before her. It was littered with papers and scattered cups of coffee that had long since gone cold. Today's was the last Cabinet session until January, which meant it had been filled with year-end reports and long spreadsheets of analysis.

The Cabinet meetings always took place here in the Star Chamber, named for the gilded stars painted on its blue walls, and the famous star-shaped oculus overhead. Winter sunlight poured through it to dapple invitingly over the table. Not that Beatrice would get to enjoy it. She rarely had time to go outside, except on the days she rose before dawn to join her father on his run through the capital, flanked by their security officers.

For a brief and uncharacteristic moment, she wondered what her siblings were doing right now, if they were back yet from their whirlwind trip through East Asia. Samantha and Jeff—twins, and three years younger than Beatrice—were a dangerous pair. They were lively and spontaneous, full of bad ideas, and with far too much power to act on them. Now, six months after they'd finished high school, it was clear that neither of them knew what to do with themselves—except celebrate the fact that they were eighteen and could legally drink.

No one ever expected anything of the twins. All the

expectation, in the family and really in the *world*, was focused like a white-hot spotlight on Beatrice.

At last the High Constable finished his report. The king gave a gracious nod and stood. “Thank you, Jacob. If there is no further business, that concludes today’s meeting.”

Everyone rose to their feet and began to shuffle out of the room, chatting about tomorrow’s ball or their holiday plans. They seemed to have temporarily set aside their political rivalries—the king kept his Cabinet evenly divided between the Federalists and the Democratic-Republicans—though Beatrice felt certain those rivalries would be back in full force come the new year.

Her personal security detail, Connor, glanced up from where he stood outside the door, next to the king’s protection officer. Both men were members of the Revere Guard, the elite corps of officers who devoted their lives to the service of the Crown.

“Beatrice, could you stay for a minute?” her dad asked.

Beatrice paused before following the other Cabinet members into the hallway. “Of course.”

Her father sat back down, and she followed suit. “Thank you again for helping with the nominations,” he told her. They both glanced at the paper before him, where a list of names was printed in alphabetical order.

Beatrice smiled. “I’m glad you accepted them.”

Tomorrow was the palace’s annual holiday party, the Queen’s Ball, so named because at the very first Christmas ball, Queen Martha had urged George I to ennoble dozens of Americans who’d aided the Revolution. The tradition had persisted ever since. Each year at the ball, the king knighted Americans for their service to the country, thereby making them lords or ladies. And for the first time, he had let Beatrice suggest the candidates for knighthood.

Before she could ask what he wanted, a tap sounded at

the door. The king gave an audible sigh of relief as Beatrice's mom swept into the room.

Queen Adelaide came from nobility on both sides of her family. Before her marriage to the king, she'd been set to inherit the Duchy of Canaveral *and* the Duchy of Savannah. The Double Duchess, people had called her.

Adelaide had grown up in Atlanta, and had never lost her ethereal Southern charm. Even now her gestures were touched with elegance: the tilt of her head as she smiled at her daughter, the turn of her wrist as she settled into the walnut chair to Beatrice's right. Caramel highlights gleamed in her rich brown hair, which she curled each morning with hot rollers and wore encircled by a headband.

The way they were sitting—a parent to either side of Beatrice, boxing her in—gave her the distinct sense that she was being ambushed.

“Hey, Mom,” she said in a slightly puzzled tone. The queen wasn't usually part of their political discussions.

“Beatrice, your mother and I were hoping to discuss your future,” the king began.

The princess blinked, disconcerted. She was always thinking about the future.

“On a more personal level,” her mom clarified. “We were wondering if there was anyone . . . special in your life right now.”

Beatrice startled. She'd expected this talk sooner or later, had done her best to mentally prepare herself for it. She just hadn't assumed it would be quite so *soon*.

“No, there isn't,” she assured them. Her parents nodded distractedly; they both knew she wasn't dating anyone. The entire *country* knew it.

The king cleared his throat. “Your mother and I were hoping that you might start searching for a partner. For that person you'll spend your life with.”

His words seemed to echo, amplified, around the Star Chamber.

Beatrice had almost no romantic experience to speak of—not that the various foreign princes near her age hadn't tried. The only one to make it to a second date had been Prince Nikolaos of Greece. His parents had urged him to do an exchange program at Harvard one semester, clearly hoping that he and the American princess would fall madly in love. Beatrice went out with him for a while to please their families, but nothing had come of it—even though, as a younger son of a royal family, Nikolaos was one of the few men actually *eligible* to go out with Beatrice. The future monarch could only marry someone of noble or aristocratic blood.

Beatrice had always known that she couldn't date the wrong person—couldn't even kiss the wrong person, the way everyone else at college seemed to. After all, no one wanted to see their future monarch walk-of-shaming home from a college party.

No, it was much safer if the heir to the throne had no sexual past for the press to rake through: no baggage from past boyfriends, no exes who might sell intimate secrets in a tell-all memoir. There could be no ups and downs in Beatrice's relationships. Once she publicly dated someone, that was it: they would have to be happy, and stable, and committed.

It had been enough to make her steer clear of dating almost entirely.

For years the press had applauded Beatrice for being careful with her reputation. But ever since she'd turned twenty-one in June, she'd noticed a shift in the way they discussed her love life. Instead of dedicated and virtuous, the reporters had begun to call her lonely and pitiable—or worse, frigid. If she never dated anyone, they complained, how was she supposed to get married, and start the all-important business of providing the *next* heir to the throne?

“Don’t you think I’m a little young to worry about this?” Beatrice asked, relieved at how calm she sounded. But then, she had long ago been trained to keep her emotions hidden from public display.

“Your father and I were your age when we got married. And I was pregnant with you the following year,” the queen reminded her. A truly terrifying thought.

“That was twenty years ago!” Beatrice protested. “No one expects me to—I mean—things are different now.”

“We’re not saying you should run to the altar tomorrow. All we’re asking is that you start to think about it. This won’t be an easy decision, and we want to help.”

“Help?”

“There are several young men whom we’d love for you to meet. We’ve invited them all to the ball tomorrow night.” The queen unclasped her pebbled-leather handbag and pulled out a folder, colored plastic tabs peeking from its edge. She handed it to her daughter.

Each tab was labeled with a name. Lord José de Moraga, future Duke of Orange. Lord Matthew Albright, future Duke of the Ozarks. Lord Theodore Eaton, future Duke of Boston.

“You’re trying to *set me up*?”

“We’re just giving you some options. Introducing you to young men who might be a good fit.”

Beatrice flipped numbly through the pages. They were filled with information: family trees, photos, high school transcripts, even the guys’ heights and weights.

“Did you use your security clearance to get all this?”

“What? No.” The king looked shocked at the suggestion that he would abuse his privileges with the NSA. “The young men and their families all volunteered this information. They know what they’re signing on for.”

“So you’ve already talked to them,” Beatrice said woodenly.

“And tomorrow night at the Queen’s Ball you want me to interview these . . . potential *husbands*?”

Her mother’s brows shot up in protest. “*Interview* makes it sound so impersonal! All we’re asking is that you have a conversation with them, get to know them a little. Who knows? One of them might surprise you.”

“Maybe it is like an interview,” the king admitted. “Beatrice, when you do choose someone, he won’t just be your husband. He will also be America’s first king consort. And being married to the reigning monarch is a full-time job.”

“A job that never stops,” the queen chimed in.

Through the window, down in the Marble Courtyard, Beatrice heard a burst of laughter and gossip, and a single voice struggling valiantly to rise above the din. Probably a high school tour going past, on the last day before holiday break. These teenagers weren’t that much younger than she was, yet Beatrice felt irrevocably distant from them.

She used her thumb to pull back the pages of the folder and let them fan back down. Only a dozen young men were included.

“This folder is pretty thin,” she said softly.

Of course, Beatrice had always known that she would be fishing from a tiny pond, that her romantic options were incredibly narrow. It wasn’t as bad as it had been a hundred years ago, when the marriage of the king was a matter of public policy rather than a matter of the heart. At least she wouldn’t have to get married to seal a political treaty.

But it still seemed a lot to hope, that she might find someone on this list whom she could fall in love with.

“Your father and I were very thorough. We combed through all the sons and grandsons of the nobility before we compiled this list,” her mother said gently.

The king nodded. “There are some good options here,

Beatrice. Everyone in this folder is smart, and thoughtful, and from a good family—the type of men who will support you, without letting their egos get in the way.”

*From a good family.* Beatrice knew precisely what that meant. They were the sons and grandsons of high-ranking American noblemen, if only because the foreign princes around her age—Nikolaos, or Charles of Schleswig-Holstein, or the Grand Duke Pieter—had all already struck out.

Beatrice glanced back and forth between her parents. “What if my future husband isn’t on this list? What if I don’t want to marry *any* of them?”

“You haven’t even met them yet,” her father cut in. “Besides, your mother and I were set up by our parents, and look how that turned out.” He met the queen’s eyes with a fond smile.

Beatrice nodded, a bit reassured. She knew that her dad had picked her mom just like this, from a short list of pre-approved options. They had met only a dozen times before their wedding day. And their arranged marriage had ended up blossoming into a genuine love match.

She tried to consider the possibility that her parents were right: that she could fall in love with one of the young men listed in this terrifyingly slim folder.

It didn’t seem likely.

She hadn’t yet met these noblemen, but she could already guess what they were like: the same type of spoiled, self-absorbed young men who’d been circling her for years. The type of guys she’d been carefully turning down at Harvard, each time they asked her to a final club party or fraternity date night. The type of guys who looked at her and saw not a person, but a crown.

Sometimes, Beatrice thought traitorously, that was how her parents saw her too.

Her father braced his palms on the conference table.

Against the tanned skin of his hands glinted a pair of rings: the simple gold of his wedding band and, next to it, the heavy signet ring marked with the Great Seal of America. His two marriages, to the queen and to his country.

“Our hope for you has always been that you might find someone you love, who can also handle the requirements that come with this life,” he told her. “Someone who is the right fit for you *and* America.”

Beatrice heard the unspoken subtext: that if she couldn’t find someone who checked both boxes, then America needed to come first. It was more important that she marry someone who could do this job, and do it well, than that she follow her heart.

And truthfully, Beatrice had given up on her heart a long time ago. Her life didn’t belong to her, her choices were never fully her own—she had known this since she was a child.

Her grandfather King Edward III had said as much to her on his deathbed. The memory would be forever etched into her memory: the sterile smell of the hospital, the yellow fluorescent lighting, the peremptory way her grandfather had dismissed everyone else from the room. “I need to say a few things to Beatrice,” he’d declared, in that frightening growl he used just for her.

The dying king had taken Beatrice’s small hands in his frail ones. “Long ago, monarchies existed so that the people could serve the monarch. Now the monarch must serve the people. Remember that it is an honor and a privilege to be a Washington and devote your life to this nation.”

Beatrice gave a solemn nod. She knew it was her duty to put the people first; everyone had been telling her that since she was born. The words *In service to God and country* had literally been painted on the walls of her nursery.

“From this point onward you are two people at once: Beatrice the girl, and Beatrice, heir to the Crown. When they

want different things,” her grandfather said gravely, “the Crown must win. Always. Swear it to me.” His fingers closed around hers with a surprising amount of strength.

“I swear,” Beatrice had whispered. She didn’t remember consciously choosing to say those words; as if some greater force, perhaps the spirit of America itself, had taken temporary hold of her and snatched them from her chest.

Beatrice lived by that sacred oath. She had always known that this decision was looming in her future. But the suddenness of it all—the fact that her parents expected her to start picking a *husband* tomorrow, and from such an abbreviated list—made her breath catch.

“You know that this life isn’t an easy one,” the king said gently. “That it often looks so different from the outside than it really is on the inside. Beatrice, it’s crucial that you find the right partner to share it with. Someone to help you through the challenges and share in the successes. Your mother and I are a team. I couldn’t have done any of it without her.”

Beatrice swallowed against a tightness in her throat. Well, if she needed to get married for the country’s sake, she might as well *try* to pick one of her parents’ choices.

“Should we look through the candidates before I meet them tomorrow?” she said at last, and opened the folder to its first page.