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THE WORLD'S MOST
FAMOUS WOMAN?

Jeffrey Archer

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CHAPTER 1

AN OUTFRIDER FROM THE SPECIAL Escort Group swept into Scotland Yard, closely followed by a green Jaguar and an unmarked Land Rover, while two police motorcycles brought up the rear, completing the royal convoy. They all came to a halt as Big Ben chimed eleven thirty.

A close protection officer leapt out of the front seat of the Jaguar and opened the back door. The Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Sir Peter Imbert, stepped forward and bowed. 'Welcome to Scotland Yard, Your Royal Highness,' he said, and was greeted with that warm, shy smile with which the public had become so familiar.

'Thank you, Sir Peter,' she replied as they shook hands. 'It was kind of you to agree to my unusual request.'

'My pleasure, ma'am,' said Sir Peter, before turning to the welcoming party of senior officers who were waiting in line. 'May I present the Deputy Commissioner ...'

The Princess shook hands with each of the officers in turn until she reached the end of the line, when she was introduced to the head of the Met's murder investigation teams.

'Commander Hawksby is known as "Murder One",' the Commissioner told her. 'And Chief Inspector William Warwick will act as your guide this morning,' he added as a little girl stepped forward, curtsied and offered the Princess a small bouquet of pink roses. She received the broadest smile of all.

The Princess bent down and said, 'Thank you, and what is your name?'

'Artemisia,' the bowed head whispered to the ground.

'What a pretty name,' said the Princess.

She was about to move on when Artemisia looked up and said, 'Why aren't you wearing a crown?'

William turned bright red, while his number two, Inspector Ross Hogan, stifled a laugh, causing Artemisia to burst into tears. The Princess leant down again, took the little girl in her arms and said, 'Because I'm not a Queen, Artemisia, just a Princess.'

'But you will be the Queen one day.'

'Then I'll wear a crown.'

This seemed to satisfy Artemisia, who smiled as her father led the Met's royal guest into the building.

The door was held open by a young cadet, who the Princess stopped to have a word with, before William guided her towards a waiting lift. A long discussion had taken place prior to the Princess's visit, as to whether she should walk up the stairs to the first floor or take the lift. The lift had won by five votes to four. An equally fraught decision was who should accompany her in the lift. The Commissioner, Commander Hawksby and William made the shortlist, while the Princess's lady-in-waiting would take the second lift, along with Inspector Ross Hogan and Detective Sergeant Roycroft.

William had his script well prepared, but was immediately thrown off course by HRH's first question.

'Is Artemisia your daughter, by any chance?'

'Yes, ma'am,' said William, remembering that the Hawk had told him that 'ma'am' had to rhyme with 'spam', not 'harm'. 'But what evidence do you have?' he asked, forgetting for a moment that he wasn't addressing one of his junior officers.

'If she hadn't been your daughter, you wouldn't have blushed,' came back the reply as they stepped into the lift.

'I did tell her not to speak to you,' said William, 'and certainly not to ask you any questions.'

'The fact she disobeyed you probably means she'll be the most interesting person I'll meet today,' whispered Diana as the lift doors closed. 'Why did you call her Artemisia?'

'She's named after Artemisia Gentileschi, the great Italian Baroque painter.'

'So, you must have a love of art?'

'A passion, ma'am. But it was my wife Beth, who's keeper of pictures at the Fitzmolean, who chose the name.'

'Then I'll have another chance to meet your daughter,' said the Princess, 'because if I remember correctly, I'm opening the Fitzmolean's Frans Hals