

-Chapter 1-

A Wish and a Fall

Norah was leaning out of the castle window and staring up at the starlit sky. Behind her, Sir Cherrybottom was doing what knights usually do to attract a lady's attention: he was smiling, winking and swishing his long blonde hair. The sound of laughter and the clinking of glasses came from the room next door.

'So,' he said, 'I hear we are to be married.'

Norah was silent.

'It will be a splendid wedding, I'm sure.' When this failed to get a response, he added, 'You know, there are many who would be honoured, whose only dream would be to—'

'—I'll marry you,' Norah said, 'if you can catch me.' And with this, she stepped up onto the window ledge.

'I beg your pardon?'

'All you have to do is catch me.'

'You must jest, my dear lady, to be sure. We aren't—'

But there was no time to find out what they weren't as Norah jumped.

To his credit, Sir Cherrybottom dived out the window after her but Norah was a great flyer, even for a fairy. She'd soon left Cherybottom far behind as she swooped up, higher and higher, until the air was so thin she could barely breathe. When she couldn't go any higher, she stretched out her wings and glided. From here, the palace and all the great spires of the city were little larger than pinheads.

But the stars shone brighter than ever.

Norah turned on her back and her curly hair streamed out around her. She flew with her hands behind her head like it was the easiest thing in the world.

When this got boring, she started naming constellations. 'The Great Wand,' she said confidently, spotting the zigzagged line of stars directly above. 'The Three Trolls,' she added, looking at a group to the east. 'The Big . . .' she started, and the name was just on the tip of her tongue when a falling star blazed overhead. Norah closed her eyes and did what any self-respecting fairy would do.

She made a wish.

Nothing happened, of course. Not that she'd expected anything to. *Still*, she thought, *it's always worth a try*.

She sighed and turned back. She could see the palace lit up in the distance, but just looking at it made her feel heavier. Her mother would be waiting for her, arms crossed. Then there would be the inevitable, ‘Why can’t you be more like your sister?!’ But just as she was thinking this – of how boring Esmeralda was and how unfair her mother could be – she felt herself dip like a kite in the wind.

*That’s weird,* she thought, *I must be tired.* But then she felt it again and the air was changing, the way it does before a thunderstorm. What was more, she realised she was the only fairy in the skies.

*Can I really have missed the signs?* she thought, and flew faster, but the harder she flew the more she felt that pull. *I’m going to make it, I’m just tired, I’ll be fine . . .*

A strong wind rose against her, but she battled onwards. The palace was close now, almost close enough for her to call out to the fairies inside, but Norah could get no closer.

Then, with a spark of lightning, the wind dropped, the stars blazed, and the world turned upside down. The sky became the city; the city became the sky and Norah fell down to the stars.