

## Daisy Dovetail

For some months after Mrs Dovetail's shocking death, the king's servants were divided into two groups. The first group whispered that King Fred had been to blame for the way she'd died. The second preferred to believe there'd been some kind of mistake, and that the king couldn't have known how ill Mrs Dovetail was before giving the order that she must finish his suit.

Mrs Beamish, the pastry chef, belonged to the second group. The king had always been very nice to Mrs Beamish, sometimes even inviting her into the dining room to congratulate her on particularly fine batches of Dukes' Delights or Folderol Fancies, so she was sure he was a kind, generous, and considerate man.

'You mark my words, somebody forgot to give the king a message,' she told her husband, Major Beamish. 'He'd *never* make an ill servant work. I know he must feel simply awful about what happened.'

'Yes,' said Major Beamish, 'I'm sure he does.'

Like his wife, Major Beamish wanted to think the best of the king, because he, his father, and his grandfather before him had all served loyally in the Royal Guard. So even though Major Beamish observed that King Fred seemed quite cheerful after Mrs Dovetail's death, hunting as regularly as ever, and though Major Beamish knew that the Dovetails had been moved out of their old house to live down by the graveyard, he tried to believe that the king was sorry for what had happened to his seamstress, and that he'd had no hand in moving her husband and daughter.

The Dovetails' new cottage was a gloomy place. Sunlight was blocked out by the high yew trees that bordered the graveyard, although Daisy's bedroom window gave her a clear view of her mother's grave, through a gap between dark branches. As she no longer lived next door to Bert, Daisy saw less of him in her free time, although Bert went to visit Daisy as often as possible. There was much less room to play in her new garden, but they adjusted their games to fit.

What Mr Dovetail thought about his new house, or the king, nobody knew. He never discussed these matters with his fellow servants, but went quietly about his work, earning the money he needed to support his daughter and raising Daisy as best he could without her mother.

Daisy, who liked helping her father in his carpenter's workshop, had always been happiest in overalls. She was the kind of person who didn't mind getting dirty and

she wasn't very interested in clothes. Yet in the days following the funeral, she wore a different dress every day to take a fresh posy to her mother's grave. While alive, Mrs Dovetail had always tried to make her daughter look, as she put it, 'like a little lady', and had made her many beautiful little gowns, sometimes from the offcuts of material that King Fred graciously let her keep after she'd made his superb costumes.

And so a week passed, then a month, and then a year, until the dresses her mother had sewn her were all too small for Daisy, but she still kept them carefully in her wardrobe. Other people seemed to have forgotten what had happened to Daisy, or had got used to the idea of her mother being gone. Daisy pretended that she was used to it too. On the surface, her life returned to something like normal. She helped her father in the workshop, did her schoolwork and played with her best friend, Bert, but they never spoke about her mother, and they never talked about the king. Every night, Daisy lay with her eyes fixed on the distant white headstone shining in the moonlight, until she fell asleep.