



THE ROYAL REBEL

*The Life of Suffragette Princess
Sophia Duleep Singh*

BALI RAI

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With illustrations by
Rachael Dean

Barrington  Stoke

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and Catherine Coe for helping to turn a
good idea into a great story. And to
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CONTENTS

PART 1: England, 1884–1893

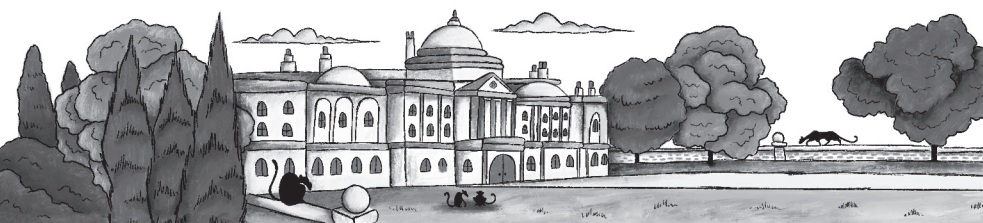
Chapter 1	3
Chapter 2	10
Chapter 3	19
Chapter 4	31
Chapter 5	35
Chapter 6	43

PART 2: India, 1903

Chapter 7	53
Chapter 8	63
Chapter 9	70

PART 3: England, 1903–1928

Chapter 10	85
Chapter 11	93
Chapter 12	104
Chapter 13	109
Chapter 14	123

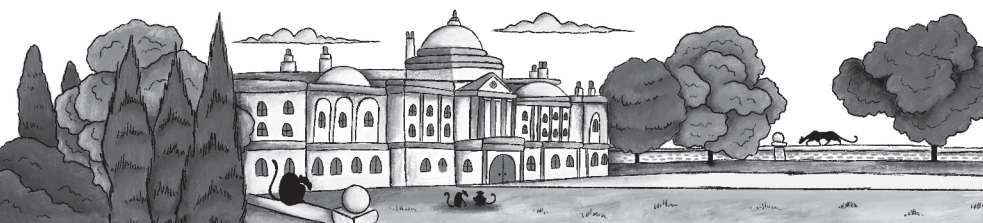


PART 1

England

1884–1893





CHAPTER 1

I watched as a grumpy baboon stole a silver teapot from a garden table. She refused to give it back and bounced around the lawns, holding the teapot and shrieking. One of the servants tried to wrestle the teapot away, but our baboon didn't let him. She turned her back, showing her pink bottom, and began to bang the teapot against her head.

"GIVE IT BACK!" the servant cried.

The baboon growled and ran off towards some trees. A tall, unfriendly ostrich watched the baboon for a moment. In the trees, blue



and red parrots squawked and chattered. My younger brother, Eddie, squealed with delight.

"Please don't worry," I said to our servant. "It's not your fault."

The servant nodded and walked back into the house. Five-year-old Eddie took my hand.

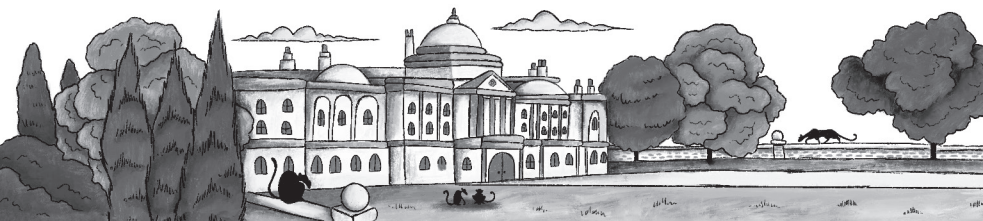
"I want the monkey," Eddie said. "Can we play with the monkey?"

I was eight years old but wise enough to correct Eddie.

"Baboons are apes, not monkeys," I told him. "Monkeys have tails; apes don't."

"I want to play with the monkey!" said Eddie.

Luckily for him, we had monkeys too.



Our home, Elveden Hall in Suffolk, was huge. My father, Maharajah Duleep Singh, had turned it into an Indian palace. Every room was crammed with ornaments and furnishings from his homeland. The gardens were planted with rare plants, and exotic animals lived in the grounds surrounding the house. We had eagles and vultures, monkeys and ostriches, and many expensive parrots. And our bad-tempered baboon. For us children, it was often a paradise. Often, but not always. I sometimes felt as if there was a grey cloud lurking beyond the blue skies.

Two days after the baboon stole the teapot, I found Eddie crying at the foot of the main staircase. He was calling for Mother, but she was nowhere to be found. Mother had withdrawn to her bedroom and locked the door. Not for the first time.



"Shush now, Eddie," I said. "I'm here."

He ran into my arms and sobbed a bit longer.

"Come on," I said. "Let's go and find a book to read."

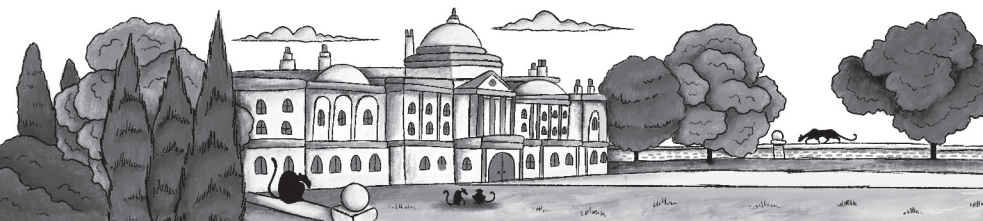
Eddie and I sat on a purple velvet sofa in one of the drawing rooms. The walls were lined with paintings from India. The floor space was filled with wooden carvings of elephants, tigers and other animals.

"Where did the picture go?" asked Eddie.

He pointed to a space on the wall.

"Oh," I said.

The missing painting was of our grandfather, Maharajah Ranjit Singh. He had



been the ruler of the Sikh empire and was a hero to Indians. He had fought the British and won when they tried to invade, and he built a kingdom in India that no one could challenge.

Maharajah Ranjit Singh was wise and strong, and fair to all people. His empire was based around the Punjab region of Northern India – the home of our ancestors, according to Father. It was a land of rich, fertile soil, flat plains and five rivers. Punjabi people were proud and fierce, and utterly loyal to our family. Our grandfather was the reason Eddie and I and our other siblings were princes and princesses.

“That was one of my favourite paintings,” I told Eddie.

A few things had vanished from the house recently, which I found confusing. Later that evening, I asked my older sisters about it.



"Father's selling everything," Catherine told me.

Father spent hardly any time with us. Mostly, he was in London on business. When he did come home, Father always locked himself away, or became angry and irritable. But I still adored him.

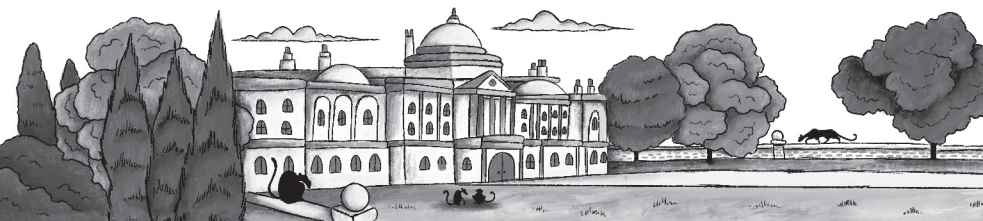
"Why is he selling things?" I asked.

"Oh, you silly little thing," said Bamba. "It's obvious."

"Not to me," I told Bamba.

"Father has spent too much money," Catherine explained. "On this house and the animals, and on his business affairs ..."

"He's bankrupt," Bamba added. "He's brought us so much shame!"



I did not know what bankrupt meant, but it was easy to guess. Father was short of money, and his only option was to sell things. Both of my sisters looked annoyed, but I didn't know why.

"Father's trying to help us," I said. "We should be grateful."

A servant placed our dinners on the table before us, and Bamba pulled a face.

"Father is the reason we're in this mess," she said.

"Don't worry," said Catherine. "One day, you'll see ..."

I turned away, annoyed they were speaking to me like a little child, and I made sure Eddie was using his knife and fork properly.

