

"A brilliant read." - Adeline Foo

# ARCHIBALD

AND THE  
BLUE BLOOD CONSPIRACY



SHERMAY LOH

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*To Mum and Dad,  
for always believing*

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## TADPOLES AND HEROES

**L**ord Archibald, younger son of the Duke of Chestershire, let out a not-very-lordly *ummmph* as a damp rag clamped over his nose and mouth.

Archie struggled and tried to hold his breath as he was whisked off his feet with mortifying ease (at thirteen years of age he was, as his grandma put it, “a crying waste of perfectly good veal”). The chemical scent flared up his nostrils and burned straight to his brain.

Everything went black.

When Archie opened his eyes, groggy and sick, the ground was galloping away under him. His hands were bound in front of him and his head was inside a sack, and there were a million things he should be worrying about, like what they wanted from him and whether they’d put bamboo splints under his fingernails to get it.

Instead a random thought popped into his head: he was still in his dressing gown.

Not the normal one he brought to boarding school, made of hand-woven silk and entirely befitting of the son of a duke. No. It was his *favourite* cotton dressing gown, which he loved to wear back home. The one with green clovers on it. And small cornflower blue unicorns.

At least they were blue. Blue unicorns were all right—weren't they? And no one would laugh if his body turned up somewhere in them. Instead they'd all say: oh bless him, the poor young lord who was cruelly taken before his time, he had a softer childlike side that no one knew about, oh, how tragic, how *precious*.

And not: BWAHAHAHAHA, are those baby UNICORNS?

Suddenly the horse under Archie neighed loudly and reared. His captor cursed the horse, its mother and its offspring, and Archie didn't know which side was up as he tumbled off. He landed hard on his head—he saw starbursts of pain and Act One, scenes four and five of his life flashing past. Scenes one through three must have fallen out of his ears when he'd hit the ground.

Archie groaned, tried to turn over and promptly rolled into a pond.

One of those ponds that farmers dug near the edges of their fields to attract wild ducks so they could shoot them during hunting season.

Archie was not a good swimmer—more like a *flounder*, really, as his brother Alexander once put it. The sack over his head filled with water and he gurgled, kicking uselessly like he did in nightmares when he knew he was dreaming but just couldn't wake up—

Suddenly Archie felt a hand grabbing his arm—then he was being pulled upwards, up and up until the underwater silence burst in a rushing roar of water as he broke the surface. Strong hands hauled him out of the water and Archie collapsed on dry ground, coughing up mouthfuls of pond scum and at least one tadpole.

Then the sodden sack came off and the midday sunlight hit him squarely in the eye. Archie squinted up at the face hovering above him: dripping dark hair sticking out in wet curls, a slightly crooked nose and the bluest eyes Archie had ever seen.

“Are you all right, kid?” Blue Eyes demanded. He wiggled his fingers in front of Archie's face. “Hello? Can you hear me?”

Archie blinked. Blue Eyes seemed to take that as a satisfactory response. He stood, picked up a sword that

lay nearby and turned back to Archie.

“Hold still,” said Blue Eyes.

He leaned over, and Archie might have let out a little squeak as the cold blade slid between his wrists, cutting his bonds. Blue Eyes straightened and sheathed the sword. He glanced over his shoulder and then promptly vanished like a figment of Archie’s imagination.

Two uniformed men rode up the road a few minutes later. They stopped when they saw Archie lying dazed and soaked next to the duck pond, the blue unicorns on his dressing gown plastered to his shivering body.

“That’s him!” one of them exclaimed. “That’s the duke’s son!”

The men dismounted and hurried towards him. Archie felt their arms slip under his back, lifting him up, triggering a terrible brain slide in his head.

“Are you hurt?” one of them demanded. “What happened?”

“Don’t know,” Archie grimaced. “He saved my life.”

“He? Who are you talking about?”

“He had the bluest eyes,” Archie mumbled as squiggly grey lines began scurrying across his vision.

“Who—who are you?”

He saw the two men exchange looks.

Then he fainted.

They were, as Archie later found out, a pair of constables.

From *Scotland Yard*.



## *Acknowledgements*

They say it takes a village to raise a child; if the same goes for a book, this one has many aunties, uncles and godparents:

Edmund Wee, my publisher, who pulled Archie out of the pond and put him onto the bookshelf. Ruth Wan, my editor, who loved this story first and went beyond the call of duty for it.

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My parents: Dad, you encouraged me to step off the beaten path and do what I love; Mum, I may be the one with all the glory, but you are the one with all the strength.

## *About the Author*

SherMay Loh wrote her first story when she was five, and it also began with a kidnapping. She worked in finance for several years before deciding to trade numbers for words. Now she's a freelance writer, working with clients from all over the world and doing what she enjoys most: writing. She especially loves unlikely heroes who save the day.

Visit her website at [www.shermayloh.com](http://www.shermayloh.com)

“You can put Archibald right up there with Harry Potter and Artemis Fowl. There’s no sorcery here, but the writing is magic. SherMay Loh tells a gripping tale, packed with intrigue, wit and heart.”

- Colin Cheong, Singapore Literature Prize winner for *Tangerine* and *The Man in the Cupboard*

“A brilliant read. Readers will enjoy a peek into a new world of high drama and a dark secret.”

- Adeline Foo, author of *The Diary of Amos Lee* series

“An absolute delight! SherMay Loh’s fluid prose, and her deft use of humour and intrigue, will keep you rapidly turning the pages. This has all the ingredients of an international bestseller.”

- David Seow, author of *There’s Soup on My Fly!* and *The Littlest Emperor*

Lord Archibald knows the school year is off to a bad start when he is kidnapped and then dramatically rescued by a sword-wielding stranger. No complaints if you’re a princess—but not so great when you’re a scrawny son of a duke in 19th-century England. When other boys are also attacked, it becomes clear that someone is out for blue blood in WyndSOR, England’s School of Kings. Archie must put aside his bumbling ways, don his sleuth’s hat and figure out who’s behind the sinister attacks, and what they’re really after, before it’s too late!

Watch out for **ARCHIBALD AND THE BLACK KNIGHT’S RING** as the adventures of Archibald continue!

[www.shermayloh.com](http://www.shermayloh.com)

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