

The Dress

This story includes the character of Anna from the *Storyteller's Daughter* by Victoria McCombs

A wisp of hay lay on the floor, gray and withering, but full of wisdom. He saw a young girl descend the stairs to his resting place, watching as she opened the heavy oak door, despite the protest from the hinges. The young maid named Anna pried up the floorboards of the large room to reveal a circular concrete tile. The tile had grooves in the middle, making it easy to lift. In her labor, the wind grasped the wisp of hay and took it into the air, seemingly watching her with its colorless texture and musty gray hue.

"A dress," Anna said, "Cosette needs a dress worthy of a queen."

Anna hurried down the rungs into her small haven, full of her parent's old treasures. Down at the bottom, she looked around, her father's old trunks heaped to the brim with old manuscripts. When she turned, her gaze fell upon her mother's last gift to her -- the most wonderful dress in the world.

This dress of sky-blue silk and a sandy colored sash was special for many reasons. Anna's mother was to become a lady of the court and she had wished for a special dress for the occasion, but she never had the opportunity to wear it. On the way to retrieve her fine garment from the dressmaker, her carriage tipped over and fell into a ditch alongside the road. In the chaos, her driver jumped from his seat at the front of the carriage, saving himself. Unfortunately, the fine lady was not as fortunate. When the news hit Anna, she was devastated, and the final gift bestowed upon her did little to replace the life of her mother.

Her mother may not have been the queen, but she deserved to be one. Anna's father became consumed by the loss of his wife. He conducted his business obsessively, trying to quell his sorrow. He went on a business trip to England in an effort to change his scenery, but the sea had other ideas. Tragedy struck Anna for the second time, as her father gave into the power of the sea, following his wife to the afterlife.

Newly orphaned, Anna did not have the resources to maintain her parent's grounds. To give her at least some money to support herself, Anna reluctantly had to sell her childhood home. From there, Anna had found herself looking for work at the palace. At this point, Anna had worked for many people, even gaining the opportunity to work for the late queen. She worked for many and was always kept in her station by her masters. None of her masters saw her as an equal or tried to talk to her as she was doing their hair or tailoring their suit.

Things were different when Cosette had come to the palace. At first, Cosette was frightened and scared, but as her true character was revealed, Anna found herself marveling at how much Cosette and her mother were alike. Cosette talked to Anna, trusted Anna, and treated her as a friend instead of a maid. Anna began to cherish their relationship so much that she decided she would give Cosette the dress. She never needed to know that the dress was her mother's. Anna would lie and say that it was one of the late queen's old dresses. She had never had someone in the palace that had seen her as an equal until Cosette. Sure, the late queen had sometimes asked her to use her gift of growing flowers (and this had delighted Anna), but this simple task didn't bring her the same joy as helping Cosette. Her mother's dress seemed like a small price to pay to return the favor.

As Anna climbed up the rungs with her mother's dress in her arms, the piece of faded gray hay landed on the great garment. As she held up the dress once more to admire the sand-colored sash sparkling in the light, the piece of faded grey hay landed on the puffed sleeve of the great garment. The old piece of hay looked into the eyes of the young maid so full of gratitude and joy, he smiled at her happiness, then floated to the floor as Anna snapped out of her trance, rushing out of the room to give Cosette her mother's dress, her footsteps growing fainter and fainter in the distance.