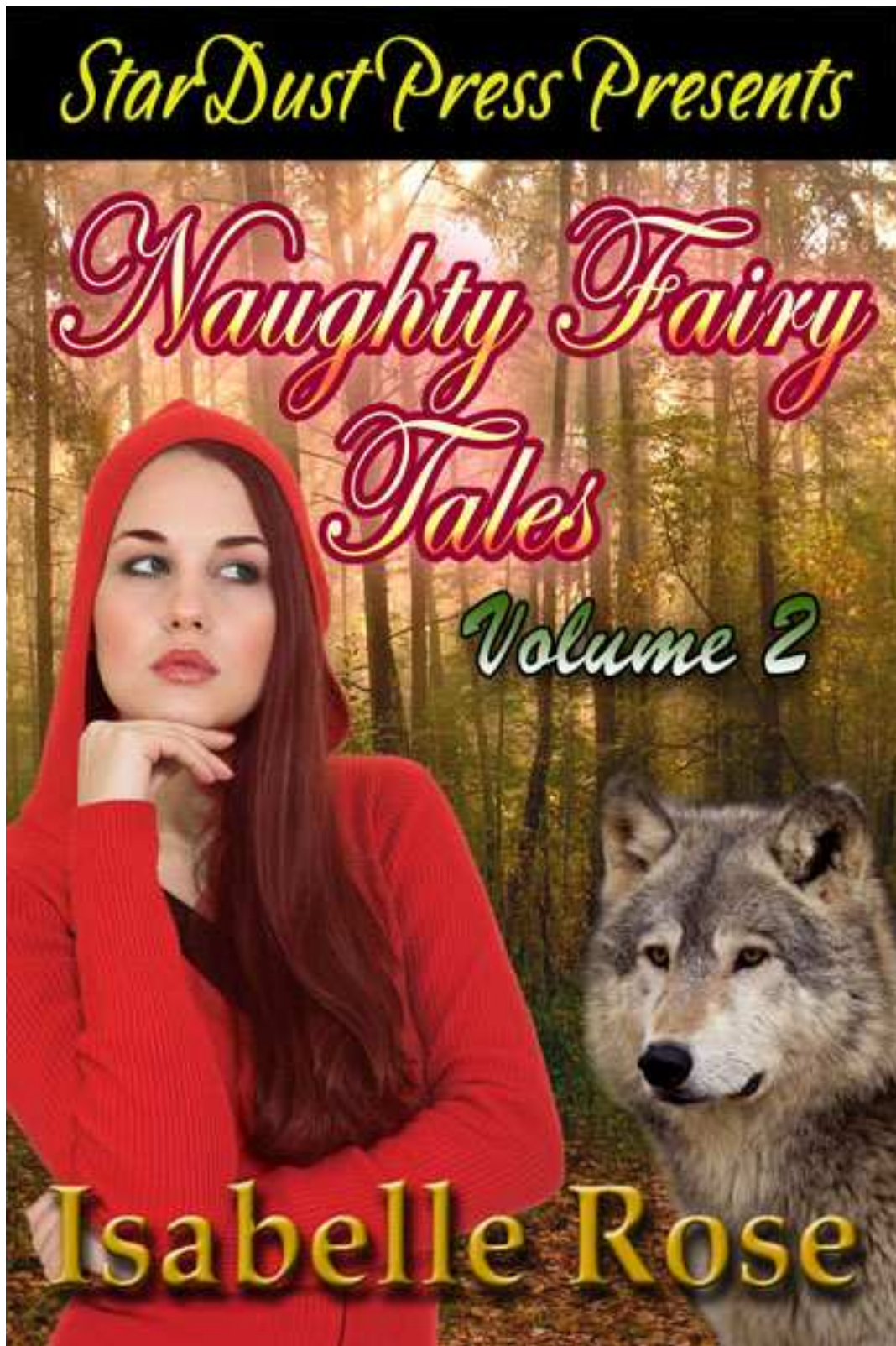


StarDust Press Presents

*Naughty Fairy
Tales*

Volume 2

Isabelle Rose



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Vol. 2

Isabelle Rose



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Red and Wolf

Her flaming red hair tangled in the flowers. Her dress was damp with the dew of the green grass. She arched her back as a wave of warm pleasure surged through her body. She wasn't supposed to know about these things. She wasn't supposed to do these things in the middle of the dark forest. She wasn't supposed to know what fiery blood should feel like running through her veins. She was lost in the woods. But at that moment, she didn't care.

The wolf told her, "Go pick the flowers. Smell them."

Following his advice, she'd strayed from her path and got distracted from looking at the beautiful flowers, each one more beautiful and sweeter-smelling than the last...until she found her own.

The wolf had taught her this.

Her free hand reached out to the sky, trying to grab hold of something for fear of losing herself within the warmth of her pleasure. Her other hand, however, was occupied. This hand was responsible for how she was feeling. It was poking and prodding her velvety, warm and very wet pussy.

"Oh, God," she moaned as she finally came.

She gasped as she felt the heat set fire to her body. She could feel all her blood rushing through her veins in a hot surge. She panted as the last moments of her orgasm came to an end. She sighed happily and removed

her fingers from her still-throbbing pussy. They came out slick with her musky juice. Placing them inside her mouth, she tasted the sweet and sour flavor of her recent release. She sucked her fingers clean.

Later, as she gathered her things and pulled herself together, she didn't realize that a pair of glowing, yellow-green eyes had been watching her all along.

* * * * *

"Red? Wake up," Anna, her mother, called. Not satisfied, she rapped on the bedroom door in rapid succession. "Wake up! I need you to take some things over to Grandmother Goldie."

Red groaned and covered her head with her pillow. She didn't want to wake up. She didn't want to get out of bed. It was warm and comfortable, just the way she liked it.

"Red, I mean it. Wake up," Anna ordered in a harsher tone of voice.

"Alright, alright. I'm awake, mother." Red threw the sheets aside and washed her face on the washbasin. She looked at herself in the mirror and saw that her bright red hair was in disarray from sleep. She grabbed a comb and tried her best to control the wild curly mane before she went down to the kitchen, where her mother was packing the basket with bread, sweet buns, cheese and wine.

"Here, take your little red hood and this basket, and make your way to your grandmother's. Stay true to the path and you'll be there before noon. Be sure to be back before dark. You know how the wolves like to lurk within the shadows and take young girls like you to their caves in the forest," her mother warned as she waved her index finger.

Red rolled her eyes. On the contrary, she knew she would be perfectly

safe in the forest. Nothing ever happened. At least nothing exciting. It was always the same people, the same scenery, the same gossip—nothing ever changed. She was looking forward to a little adventure, a little bit excitement in her life. “Thank you, Mother. I’ll see you later tonight.” She kissed her mother on the cheek and walked out of the house.

Once outside, she put on her red hooded cape and started the walk to her grandmother’s house. She loved the red hood, as her grandmother had made it especially for her the day she turned eighteen. Every day for the past two years, she had worn it wherever she went, and since then, people nicknamed her “Red Riding Hood”. She didn’t mind it so much, since she figured there were worst things in life to be called.

She loved the velvety texture of the cloth. The color was a red so rich and dark that it made her wonder if her grandmother had used actual blood to dye it. She didn’t know what it was about the red hood, but it made her feel...aware. She looked at men differently. She watched the way they moved. One day she stared at the blacksmith for hours, wondering what it would be like to have his muscled body over hers. It didn’t take long for her to find out. She had met him later that evening and gave herself to him. After that night, whenever she had the crimson cape on, she knew she would be able to have any man she wanted.

* * * * *

Wolf sniffed the air, smelling the scent she left behind. *So...this is the famous Red Riding Hood.* He grinned and licked his sharp teeth with his tongue.

“Perfect,” he whispered to himself. “Absolutely perfect.”

It would be extremely easy to catch her, especially with the scent of her filling his nostrils. He was miles away, but he could sense her as if he

was standing next to her.

He transformed from wolf to human. No matter how his physical appearance changed, his eyes remained yellow-green. His thoughts never strayed from his prey.

She would be his prize, his plaything for the day, and if she lasted through the night? Why, he might take her to his home. And once there, who knew what would happen?

He knelt down beside the river for a drink of water. When he saw the human reflected on the water's surface, he let out a growl. It took Wolf a moment to realize that it was him in his human form, as he hardly ever took this shape. After he relaxed a bit, he cupped his hands and dipped them into the water, bringing them up a moment later full of water. He leaned forward and drank. Feeling hot, he dove into the river and swam. The water was nice and cool, and he felt very refreshed. "Now for the little redhead," he said with anticipation, swimming to shore.

He ran all the way, nosing out her direction by her scent. He stopped for a moment and inhaled, her fragrant essence filling his nostrils. He was so taken by her smell he wanted to keep it in his lungs for as long as possible. His eyes glowed dangerously at the thought of being near her again. She didn't know how dangerous she was with that body, those full and luscious breasts, those long, long legs—long enough to kill a man, that is, if he lived long enough to become entangled among them.

He slowed down as he drew closer. Wanting to admire her face unobserved, he hid behind a nearby tree.

Beautiful. She had the darkest green eyes he had ever seen, green like the leaves on a forest tree. Her lips were perfect and red like a newly-bloomed rose, and she looked like she had a bright and cheerful demeanor.

But there was something in her eyes that spoke of a hint of darkness, and the way she swayed her hips was not the way an innocent girl should walk. Her bright crimson hair bounced and danced with the wind as she moved. Her red hood made him think of freshly spilt blood. She was Red alright.

* * * * *

A half-naked man jumped out from the bushes and landed in front of her.

"Oh!" Red gasped.

"Don't be afraid, I won't hurt you." He lifted his hands up to the level of his chest, palms facing out. *Yet.* "My name is William Wolf. But you, my dear, you can call me Wolf. Where are you going in such a rrrush?"

"Good day, Mr. Wolf. My name is Red Wallace, and I'm going to my grandmother's house."

She couldn't take her eyes off him. He was incredibly handsome...and dangerous, with those scars across his chest. His pants were torn at the knees and his long hair was loosely tied at his neck, flowing down to reach the middle of his back. She smiled. He might be exactly what she was looking for. She noticed the way his eyes noted every small thing, how he flexed his muscles, and how he seemed to be very restless, unable to stand still in one place.

"Why? It's such a beautiful day. Why waste it inside some old woman's house?"

Red wasn't a slacker in detail either. She noted how Wolf wrung his hands nervously. He definitely had other things on his mind. She decided that she would have some fun with him—*Mr. Wolf*. Who did he think he was

fooling into thinking he was normal? Red knew better. She knew a wolf when she saw one.

"My mother said that I had to. She says Grandmother is ill and needs this bread and wine to make her strong again." She showed him her basket, and just as she said, there was bread and wine neatly packed inside.

"You'll miss it then," Wolf said nonchalantly, as if he had nary a care.

"Miss what?"

"Oh, you wouldn't be interested." He began walking away from her.

"Interested in what?" she insisted as she followed him.

"The wild flowers that have started blooming. The rabbits chasing each other in the open field. The lake sparkling like the stars at midnight." His eyes became glassy. She saw the veins popping out of his neck. "The freedom of the wild." He growled.

For a moment she wanted to disobey her mother and stray from the path. She wanted to see the world like he did. That was when Red became frightened of him. She saw the golden glow of his eyes. She was right. He was a real wolf. She shook her head. "No, no, no. You're trying to trick me." She lifted her chin and began walking away from Wolf.

"Me? Trick you? I'm telling you nothing but the truth. But you'll miss it." He smiled and continued to walk away from the path.

"I want to see these things," she murmured, mostly to herself.

He flashed to her side, a blur of that had her head spinning. "Then go," he whispered in her ear. He licked her from her throat to her nape, taking the time to suck on her plump lobe while he was at it. She shuddered and her knees buckled. She would've fallen to the ground had Wolf not caught her.

"But I can't," she murmured, her knees still shaking. Her crotch grew warm and she clamped her legs together. She wanted to spread them wide. She was filled with so much wanting. She wanted to make love to Wolf right then and there.

"Sure you can. Go pick the flowers. Smell them," he said as he placed his hands on her waist and pulled her back against his crotch. She felt his erection right between her butt cheeks. Her facial cheeks reddened and became warm as she felt him grow harder.

"Oh my goodness," she moaned.

"There is nothing good down there." He moved his hands from her waist to her inner thighs. Her vision grew blurry with so much wanting. He lifted her skirt. When she remembered that she wasn't wearing any undergarments, she almost made him stop. She gasped as she felt his hands on her pussy. He pushed his finger inside her and pulled it out. It was slick with her juices. He brought it up to his mouth and she imagined him sucking on his finger. The image caused her to grow even wetter.

"Oh God," Wolf moaned. He spun her around and kissed her passionately on the lips. "I'll see you soon, my dear." He turned and ran into the forest.

Red's knees grew weak and she slid down the ground. "He's perfect," she whispered, her eyes glued to his back until he disappeared among the trees.

* * * * *

Geoffrey Hunter looked at the tracks that Wolf had left behind. He pushed back a lock of blond hair as he bent closer to examine the ground. To his surprise, he found another pair of tracks, smaller than Wolf's. He picked up a bit of soil with two fingers and sniffed it. He frowned as he caught a

whiff of a young woman's scent. He tasted the sample of the soil. *Strange, no traces of blood.* As far as he knew, anyone who encountered William Wolf would be lucky to come away alive.

Intrigued, he followed the trail of the young woman and hoped she was still alive.

* * * * *

Grandmother paced back and forth, her hair shaking with fury as she lifted her fists up in the air. "Where is that wretched girl with my wine?"

Her salt and pepper hair cascaded into curls all the way to her waist, which swayed when she paced. Even if she hadn't combed her hair in days, the curls would never go away. (Once upon a time, she had been known as Goldie Locks.)

* * * * *

Wolf was back in his natural form. He would have her tonight. At the moment, he chasing after a deer. He would feast on the animal before going to Red. He knew that if he ate something beforehand, she'd live to see another day.

The deer stopped, no doubt thinking it had outrun his enemy. Wolf stopped as well, crouched down and watched the deer's chest heaving in and out as it tried to catch its breath. The deer turned away for one second. At that moment, Wolf leapt from his hiding place and lunged at the deer's throat. His sharp claws tore at the deer's chest. Blood spilled out of the corners of his mouth, spurting from the deer's ruptured veins. After he bit off a chunk of his prey's stomach, he threw back his head and howled.

* * * * *

A distant howling sent a shiver down her spine. Red felt a strange wind blow past her, blowing her hair all over her face. She pushed her hair back and looked up at the sky, which had grown dark. Worse, she was lost in the middle of the woods. "Shit," she swore.

"Hello, little girl," Wolf said, seeming to appear from nowhere.

Red gasped and turned, clutching her chest as her heart skipped several beats. "Don't do that. You scared me."

She took a moment to calm down when she noticed that Wolf looked different. He smelled of danger, and he had a bit of dried blood on the corner of his lips. The murderous expression on his face hinted that he wouldn't mind killing a few animals...or people. Still, Red couldn't help but enjoy the fact that he was standing before her. "What do you want?"

Wolf laughed. He grabbed her by the waist and played with her hair, twisting a bright, red lock of curl between his fingers. "You know what I want."

"Try and be specific." Red pulled her hair away from Wolf's hand.

He crossed his arms over his chest and smirked.

Red noticed his abs—his perfect six-pack abs, and his chest that was covered in black silky hair. The silver light of the moon shone on his body, making him so handsome in a wild way with his tousled hair. Her gaze then trailed over the rest of his body. He was wearing the same black pants that were torn at the knees, and she'd never seen such long and chiseled legs as his. His cock was also slowly becoming erect, bulging against the cloth. Her pussy creamed at the thought. Unconsciously, she licked her lips. She didn't know if it was the red hood's doing or if she really wanted to make love to Wolf.

Red came to herself and covered her blushing face with her small

hands. "I have to go," she said with some desperation.

Wolf came nearer and lowered her hands from her face. He held her chin in one large hand and kissed her on the mouth.

His lips are so soft and warm.

He pulled away from her and waited, his eyes glinting. She caressed his cheek gently. Shadows of a beard formed along his chin. She looked into his eyes and she saw a yearning hidden deep inside that she couldn't ignore. One hand behind his neck, she drew him toward her and kissed him back. His growing beard scratched her face, but she didn't care. She wanted to devour him.

He pulled her closer, his big hands pressing against the small of her back. They explored each other's mouths with moist, velvety tongues until he couldn't contain himself any longer. He had to see what was hidden beneath her clothes. He snagged the little red hood with one hand, tugged and threw it aside. He grabbed her white shirt and ripped it off with a single pull.

She gasped as her breasts were exposed. Her nipples hardened as the cool night air caressed her naked chest. She moaned as Wolf gently pinched the tight buds. He lowered his head and alternately sucked, kissed and nibbled, taking turns with each one. In the midst of the pleasure she was experiencing, she had the incongruous hope that he wouldn't turn into a wolf and bite one of her breasts off. She felt his hot breath against her skin and her vision blurred.

He lifted his head, looked at her with hunger deep in his eyes and kissed her on the lips. He sucked on her lower lip and gently bit her.

Her heart fluttered in surprise.

Slowly, he lowered her on the ground, laying on her red hood. She smiled. It seemed right that they were going to make love on top of her

crimson cape.

Wolf pulled her skirt off and threw it aside. She lay before him completely exposed. He couldn't remember the last time he had seen something as beautiful as she. Her skin was so fair he could see the veins pulsating underneath the thin layer of flesh in the bright moonlight.

He parted her long legs and explored her pussy with his mouth. He brushed the soft folds with his tongue, tasting her yummy juices and eliciting soft moans from her. He licked her clit. It felt like crushing petals of a warm rose in his mouth. Her breathing quickened. When her belly muscles began to tense, he substituted his tongue with his middle finger, pushing it in slowly, stroking and teasing her inner walls with absolute thoroughness. She arched her back, groaning and bearing down as she tried to take every inch of his finger inside of her. He pushed two more of his fingers inside of Red and pressed his thumb against her clit. Just knowing how easily his cock would be able to glide in was enough to drive him crazy.

He took his pants off and revealed his swollen cock. "Get down on your knees and bend over, sweetie."

As she turned around, she cut herself on a sharp rock. "Ouch."

The world slowed. His eyes fixed on her wound. His vision blurred. *Blood*. It was the only thing he could see and smell.

Mesmerized, he took her hand and licked the cut until it stopped bleeding. As his tongue soaked up the metallic taste, he shuddered. He growled with pleasure, even as the smell of it drove him closer to madness and almost changed him into his wolf form.

The wolf in him lost control. His eyes glowed bright yellow-green, and his nails went from normal to dangerously sharp and vice-versa every few

moments. He just knew he was going to devour Red in the middle of their lovemaking. He swallowed the urge to howl and began to sweat uncontrollably as he tried to suppress his change.

"Oh, God!" Wolf roared as he felt himself losing control over his change. He could feel his canines grow longer and sharper. His hands started turning into paws and grew long sharp claws where his nails should've been. He let out another roar as his snout protruded where his human nose previously was. He was losing control.

But then so was she.

* * * * *

Oh my God, what is he doing back there?

Red was starting to get tired of being on all fours, exposed and waiting for his cock to ram into her, so she lay back down on her red hood. She soon felt his cock nudging at the entrance of her pussy and lifted her hips, sucking in her breath as his stiff rod filled her. He seemed to be holding still, so she did all the work on his shaft, moaning as the first waves of her orgasm ran through her body. Her blood soon reached the boiling point. She then noticed that Wolf was sweating profusely, pouring drops all over her body. She saw how his jaw changed every few seconds and his eyes glowed bright gold. Her heart raced. She was frightened, but then another wave of pleasure ran through her at that moment and her fear was quickly forgotten.

She had an idea. *I hope this works.*

By some feat of strength, she managed to turn them over, such that she was on top of him. The incredible thing was that he remained inside her. She saw the look of surprise on his face and the sigh of relief that he released. The position seemed to help keep his change under control. Slowly, he began to change back to his human form. All through the whole process,

he kept his eyes locked on hers.

Red smiled and winked at him.

He ran his hands against her skin. She loved how warm his hands felt against her cool flesh. He raised himself up and sucked on her nipples. He kissed her neck and left a moist trail with his tongue all the way to her earlobe. She shuddered with delight as she felt his hot breath against her ear. Her muscles tightened around his cock. She heard him moan with pleasure. She enjoyed hearing the sound so much she repeated her action again and again. She moistened her fingers and then rubbed her clit. "Oh God, yes," she gasped.

"Are you coming?" Wolf asked.

"Mmhhmm." She nodded.

"Yes, come for me," he whispered into her ear. He kissed her passionately on the lips and thrust his tongue deep inside her mouth.

She moaned. "Oh, oh."

With every thrust, her orgasm built until it exploded, as if someone had lit a set of fireworks inside her groin. She dug her nails on his biceps and left three long scratches down his arms. Wolf let out painful groan. She drew blood, her fingernails digging beneath his skin. After a few moments, he let out a long howl and came, spilling his seed inside her womb.

"That was amazing." Red smiled at him as she tried to regain her breath.

"You were incredible."

"Do you always do this?" She rolled to lay on her side, facing him, and rested her chin on the palm of her hand.

"Do what?" he asked, confused.

"Chase after women and make love to them in the middle of the forest?"

He shook his head. "No."

"Then...why me?"

"You don't know much about wolves, do you Red?" He smiled.

"I guess I don't."

"Wolves mate for life," he explained.

"And so?"

"You are my mate," Wolf said simply.

Red frowned. "Me? Your mate?"

"Yes. I came to this realization while we were making love."

"When?"

"I already told you."

"No, I mean during what part of our lovemaking?"

"When you realized I was Changing and you got on top of me."

"So what do we do now?"

Wolf smiled. "We can do whatever we want." He held her in his arms and played with a red curl.

She yawned, took his free hand and placed it right above her breast. Over her heart, Wolf could feel it pumping. He fell more deeply in love with Red as he watched her eyelids slowly close and she went away into a place of dreams, a place he couldn't follow.

* * * * *

The next morning, Wolf opened his eyes, all of his senses immediately on the alert. He sniffed the air as if some foul thing had been released into the air. Then he felt a sharp pin prick on his shoulder.

Geoffrey Hunter had finally found him.

Damn it.

Wolf gave a quick glance to where Red lay sleeping soundly beside him. He was comforted by the sight of her moving chest. It broke his heart to see her like that, so peaceful, so innocent. He reached out to touch her cheek, but Geoffrey pointed the knife at his extended hand. Taking the hint, he pulled his hand away and put his pants on. He walked away from his love and reluctantly followed Geoffrey.

As soon as they were far away from Red, Hunter began talking. "If it isn't the famous William Wolf. I have been waiting for this moment for a very long, long time."

"What a pity."

"Why?"

"You spend all that time looking for me, while I..." Wolf paused for emphasis, "I spend my time making love to a beautiful young woman in the forest. I wonder who of the two of us spent his time in these woods more wisely," Wolf said with a mischievous grin.

"Shut up."

Geoffrey's eyes were bloodshot from lack of sleep. Wolf could only hope Geoffrey was as tired as he looked.

Wolf never saw the punch coming.

He growled as he tasted blood. It poured out of the side of his mouth. He knew his eyes were changing color, glowing bright gold, his teeth growing sharp and his nails turning into dark claws. Geoffrey Hunter would pay dearly for that.

"So you think you can kill me with that little toy you call a knife? I thought you were a great huntsman, part of the greatest line of Hunter's in all of this land. What a pity indeed," Wolf taunted.

Geoffrey screamed in anger and lunged at him.

Wolf laughed. This was exactly what he wanted. He smelled the fear that poured out with Hunter's sweat. That fear fueled the rush of adrenaline surging through Wolf at the thought of making a kill.

They rolled around in the dirt for a while. Wolf tried to wrestle the knife away from Hunter's hand. But no matter what Wolf did, Hunter wouldn't relinquish his weapon. Wolf had no choice but try to predict what Geoffrey was going to do next. Wolf could only hope that Geoffrey was as foolish as he looked.

Come on, you fool. Pull your knife back and try to stab me.

The huntsman did exactly what Wolf wanted him to do. Hunter pulled his arm back and lunged forward.

Wolf grabbed hold of Geoffrey by the neck, whose eyes went wide with fear. "Did you really think you'd win?" Wolf took pleasure in snapping his neck and hearing his bones crack under his hands. He let out a sigh of satisfaction as he felt Geoffrey's body fall limply to the ground.

Oh no. Red.

He ran to the spot where he'd left her earlier, his feet taking him as fast as they could. He hoped she would still be there.

He skidded to a stop. He didn't see her anywhere.

His heart sank. She was gone. All that was left was the smell of their mating from the night before. The scent made him dizzy and lightheaded. It was intoxicating. Thinking about it made him feel aroused.

Grandmother's house.

That was the closest place she could run to. He willingly changed himself to his wolf form and chased after Red.

* * * * *

Red woke up to find Wolf gone. She put her clothes back on as fast as she could. She had enjoyed the previous night very much, but she had never expected him to disappear the way he did. She sniffled and tried to stifle her tears as she made her way to Grandmother's house.

Red tried to stop thinking about Wolf, but the images of their lovemaking and all the things he said kept reverberating in her mind.

She sobbed.

How could he have left me without a second thought?

Then she realized she should've returned home yesterday afternoon. She cried as a cascade of tears escaped her eyes.

* * * * *

Wolf finally reached his destination. He sniffed the air a few times. Red hadn't arrived yet. He had time to pick some flowers for her. He snuck into her grandmother's garden and plucked a few tulips. He used his fingers to comb his hair. He did everything he could to try and look presentable. He knocked on the door and waited.

Nothing.

He frowned.

That's odd.

He knocked once more.

"Come in," a high pitched voice invited.

"Hello? Red's grandmother?" Wolf asked as he walked in through the door.

"Here, on the bed."

"Alright." Wolf put the flowers down on the little table beside the door.

He sniffed the air, still suspicious. Something really wasn't right. There was a familiar scent in the air. It made him feel nostalgic. He remembered the days when he was younger, of the times when he was with...

He walked towards the bed and saw a pair of blue-green eyes peeking from underneath the covers. It was his best friend from the days of his youth—Marcus. Wolf pulled him out of the bed by the neck and tossed him on the floor. "What are you doing here?" Wolf growled as he kicked his ex-best friend in the stomach.

Marcus groaned and sucked in a breath of air as he clutched his abdomen. "What do you mean? I'm here to feast on that little redhead you've been chasing since yesterday. I thought we could have our fun with her, just like we used to. I've come to make peace with you," Marcus ended with a pained look on his face.

Marcus had been banished from the forest for having betrayed their Alpha to the Hunter family. It should've been something punishable by death, but the Leader of the Pack figured exile would be worse than death. What

could possibly be worse than not being able to come back home?

"Get out. Leave now and I'll forget you ever came back. And you can't have her." Wolf growled. "She's *my* mate. *Mine*."

"Really?" Marcus was clearly amused.

"I mean it. Stay away from her," Wolf ordered with a heavier growl and a dangerous glow in his eyes.

If Marcus didn't leave by the time Red showed up, he'd kill him. He would have no ill feelings about it either. Marcus wasn't the same person he had been during their friendship. Wolf would've killed anyone to protect his best friend—but not anymore.

"I was sort of hoping she'd come in through the door sometime soon. I'd stay under the covers, and she'd say things like 'Grandmother, what big eyes you have. Grandmother, what big ears you have. Grandmother, what big teeth you have'," Marcus mimicked a girl's feminine voice, his lips in a parody of a smile.

Every word that came out of Marcus' mouth only made Wolf angrier. *This is not my childhood friend. This isn't the person I once knew.*

"Then...I would gobble her up! But you had to ruin it by walking through the door! Such a spoil sport," he grumbled.

"Where's her grandmother?" Wolf asked.

"She was rather tasty. A bit sour, though, what with all that wine and vodka," Marcus mumbled. He stood up and walked to the dining room. He picked up a bottle half full with wine and emptied its contents with three large gulps. "But all in all? She was pretty good."

That was when Wolf noticed that Marcus had a large bulge in his belly. Red's grandmother was still alive and moving around in his stomach. He

could see her hand pressed against Marcus's belly.

"Good God!" Wolf shielded his eyes from the horrific sight. "You could've at least had the decency to chew her." He turned away from Marcus's bulging stomach.

"I was hungry." His one-time best friend shrugged his shoulders carelessly.

"I'm serious now, get out." Wolf grabbed him by the scruff of his neck.

"No. I want to meet this little redhead," Marcus protested.

* * * * *

Red breathed a sigh of relief when she saw her grandmother's house. For a moment, she stood still some distance away and watched the gray smoke coming out of the chimney. At least, her grandmother would be too drunk to notice the state of her clothing. Her red hood was dirty and covered in grass stains. The right sleeve on her white blouse had come off. Her hair was a disaster. She took a ribbon and tied her mass of red hair into a thick ponytail.

She trekked down the hill, almost slipping a few times. When she got closer to the house, she noticed the door was ajar.

Strange.

With utmost caution, she stepped into the house. Her heart was dancing all over her chest in fear. She didn't know what to expect. Grandma Goldie always locked the door. Always. Then, she heard Wolf's voice.

He came to look for me!

"Wolf?"

She searched for him in the living room. Empty. She went into the

kitchen and let out a small gasp of surprise. Wolf was there, but so was another man. "What's going on? Who is he?"

"Well, well, well," the stranger said as he feasted his eyes on her. She didn't like his gaze, not one bit. "No wonder you wanted her all to yourself."

"Keep away from her," Wolf warned as he tightened his grip around his neck.

"Wolf, where's my grandmother? Is she in the bedroom?"

The large bulge in the stranger's stomach suddenly moved, and she had the horrifying suspicion she knew what that was. "Oh my God," she blurted out. "He ate her!"

"Go upstairs, Red," Wolf ordered.

Her hand covered her mouth, her eyes wide with horror. "Is she dead?"

"I said, go," he growled.

Red opened her mouth to argue, but Marcus tried to break free to grab her. With lightning speed, Wolf used his free hand to clasp Marcus's hand tightly and crush it with a single squeeze. He never thought he would enjoy anything as much as hearing that satisfying crunch.

Marcus yelped. He threw a punch with his good hand, but Wolf was too fast. He took hold of Marcus's other hand and broke it. The bone popped and tore through the flesh, and blood spilled all over the floor.

Wielding the kitchen knife, Wolf cut Marcus's stomach open and helped Grandma Goldie out, who was covered in guts and chunks of raw meat. "Ugh! Disgusting!" she shouted.

Red ran to her side. "Grandmother, are you alright?"

"I will be once I take a bath," Goldie muttered as she walked out of the house.

Wolf turned to Red. "Are you alright?"

She nodded. He could see that she expended a lot of effort to tear her eyes away from the dead body in the middle of the kitchen. In a way, he could understand. Humans always had a morbid fascination for things they didn't understand.

"I'll take care of this," he promised.

"I'll help you." She took a deep breath and made herself pick up Marcus's legs. Wolf picked up the other end, and together, they carried him outside. They dug a hole in the backyard and buried him. When Wolf threw the last bit of soil on top of the body, he leaned against the shovel and looked at Red. Her cheeks blushed deep pink and her skin shimmered with a light hint of sweat. The sunset glowed bright orange upon her face. It made her hair look like fire. Her skin looked like shimmering gold. Her green eyes sparkled like emeralds.

He had never seen her look more beautiful.

* * * * *

"Clean at last," Red declared as she squeezed the excess water out of her hair. She noticed that Wolf didn't bother. He just let his damp hair dry naturally. They were sitting in Grandma Goldie's living room. Grandma had drunk the bottle of wine that Red had brought her and was now passed out in her bed. Red felt comfortable with the knowledge that nothing would wake Grandma up from her death-like slumber.

"Would you like some tea?" she asked as she stood up.

"Yes, please."

He followed her into the kitchen and leaned against the doorway. "I'm sorry I left you alone this morning. It wasn't my fault."

"I know."

"But still..." he started to speak, but she interrupted him with a kiss.

She pulled him close to the dining table. He must've understood what she was hinting at because he swept away all of the things on top of the table with one huge swipe of his hand. She sat on the edge of the table and pulled up her skirt, while Wolf dragged his pants down to his calves. Soon, his hard cock was dancing gently between her thighs as Red wrapped her ivory legs around his waist. She moaned as the warmth of his body surrounded her. He kissed her neck, shoulder and chest with nibbling bites. He pulled down her blouse and sucked her breast. His tongue grazed against her hardened nipples.

"I want you. Right now," she whispered in his ear. She licked his earlobe. He shuddered.

"Whatever you want, I'll do."

"I want your cock inside me."

Wolf grinned and drove his cock inside her pussy. She gasped with pleasure as his iron rod pushed its way in. She barely felt him before he quickly pulled out of her.

"You're torturing me," she moaned.

He grinned wickedly. "I know."

"Please..." She grabbed his buttocks, one cheek in each hand and tried to pull him back inside her through sheer force of will. He bit her neck. Finally, he complied with her desire and pushed himself entirely inside of her.

"Ah," she gasped as she arched her back.

"Was that what you wanted?"

"God, yes!"

He picked her up and pressed her against the wall. She kept one leg firmly planted on the ground and she wrapped the other around his waist.

"You are so beautiful," he whispered.

She rested her head on his shoulder and breathed in his scent. He smelled like pine and river water. She wanted to be close to him always. "I think I'm in love with you."

"Say you love me, Red."

"I love you."

"Ah," he sighed happily. "Say it again, please."

"I love you," she repeated. She rested her head on his shoulder as her orgasm slowly bubbled inside her. "Oh, God," she moaned as she felt the first waves of her orgasm run through her like a tiny thunderstorm roaming rampant in her veins.

"Yes, come for me." He pumped his hips with more urgency as her muscles tensed around his cock.

Red bit into her lower lip to keep from screaming from the intense pleasure she was experiencing.

"I love you, Red!" he shouted as he sprayed his seed inside her pussy.

* * * * *

They became the most talked couple in her town. Red never returned home. Their story quickly became legend, then turned into myth. All the

information was switched around until no one knew what was fact and what was fiction. But the story remained of the girl with the red hood and the wolf that couldn't help but follow her to her grandmother's house.

Beautiful Passion

France 1884

He ran through the forest wildly, not knowing, not understanding why he was able to see and sense everything that moved within the vast woods. He could hear every rustle of the leaves, and though the owls were miles away, it was as though their every hoot came from somewhere nearby. He roared in anger at his confusion.

Roared?

Where had that horrid sound come from?

Was that me?

All through the night he ran and ran, and found shelter in an abandoned château far away from where his home used to be.

Trembling, he walked through the gate. He clutched his stomach, almost completely contorted by the sudden pain that gripped him. He walked through the doors and went to stand in front of the fireplace. He stared down at his misshapen hands for a long time, before moving gaze to the horizon and watching the last rays of sunlight disappear behind the hills. As soon as it grew dark, sharp needle-like pain ravaged his entire body.

The transformation began. His skin burned as it rippled at a rapid pace, his flesh bubbling and burning off. His shoulders popped and grew

wide, and his hands turned into furry claws.

He screamed as he ran through the hallways, trying to escape the pain of his transformation. With his sharp, new claws, he tore through everything in his path.

He found a mirror hanging on the hallway. Catching sight of his face for the first time, he let out an angry roar that he was sure could be heard throughout the forest and maybe even in certain parts of a nearby village. Fur covered his once handsome face and sharp, canine-like white teeth took place of the straight ones he once possessed.

Many rumors were later spread about how this château was haunted by an evil spirit. It frightened all...but one.

* * * * *

Several years later

Linda lay in the middle of her father's garden, basking under the gentle rays of the sun. She had received a letter from him last month saying that he would be returning home sometime this week. For three days, Linda had stayed close to the house. She liked being the first one to greet her father after his long trips. She hoped nothing happened to him that would delay his arrival.

Today, she was wearing her yellow garden dress, the only one she owned that didn't have a high collar. Those collars made her feel restricted, tied down and unable to breathe. She didn't like them one bit.

She didn't mind getting dirty though. She loved the feel of the moist soil on her back. She also loved watching the different flowers as they danced softly against the wind. Thus, Linda spent most of her time outside the house, preferably in the garden. She lay on her side and studied the

tulips she had planted last year. This was the first time they bloomed. She marveled at the bright reds, deep purples and the happy yellows she saw scattered all around her. She turned her gaze to the sky and entertained herself by looking up at the clouds.

Her sisters had snuck the Foster twins, Anthony and Ben, inside the house again. She could hear Bernadette and Miette letting out whoops of delight and loud giggles. But after a while, the giggling stopped.

Linda frowned. *Why has it had grown quiet all of a sudden? What are they up to?*

She hoisted up her skirt, clutching both sides of it with her hands and snuck around the house until she was right underneath Bernadette's window. She dropped her skirt and stood on the tips of her toes until she could see into the room. Involuntarily, she let out a soft gasp. What she saw was an entanglement of bare arms and legs, pulsating in rhythmic motion. Blood surged through her body, making her hot between her thighs. The moaning. The sighing. The gasping. Their blushing bodies.

Her throat was dry like a desert. Her sharp, green eyes absorbed everything, the beautiful carnality of it all. When it was over, Linda squirmed when she realized she was wet. But what surprised her most was how disappointed and unsatisfied she felt, and was evidenced by the aching hunger in her belly.

She stepped away from the window and waited for Ben and Anthony by the door. When they emerged, she grabbed them by the arms and pulled them towards her. "I want you to make love to me."

"What?" Anthony asked, astonished.

"I want you both."

"You think you can handle two of us?" Anthony quirked an eyebrow.

Linda felt a delicious thrill at the thought.

"You saw us inside?" Ben asked, his blue eyes wide with surprise.

She nodded and, taking a step closer to him, kissed him on the lips.

"Who goes first?" Anthony asked, a wicked glint coming to his eyes.

She giggled as she broke away and ran, leading them toward the field. The grass was high and no one would see them. That was important, because she didn't want her sisters to know what she was up to. They would immediately tell her father, which she didn't want to happen. She heard the twins running after her, and she thrilled at the feeling of being chased, of being desired.

Anthony caught her first, and Ben appeared a few seconds later behind him. She laughed, giddy with delight and excitement. Anthony wrapped his arm around her waist and picked her up. She felt weightless as her legs lifted off from the ground. She panted and tried to catch her breath as he let her down, pressing her body against his as she slid toward the ground. Every inch of his blatant masculinity caused her throat to dry.

His eyes were filled with lust, and her crotch tightened. She smiled. She liked how eager he was to bed her.

A sudden thought occurred to her. *Who first?* She had seen both of them in action earlier. Ben seemed the more sensitive of the two, but Anthony looked like the type of man who knew how to please a woman. Ben appeared to be able to control his emotions better, while Anthony looked like he was always ready to jump out of his skin. *Gentle? Or rough? Can I have both?*

Anthony undressed her while he kissed and licked her neck. She liked the feel of his soft lips on her tender skin. He then nibbled at a sensitive part of her skin. Her eyesight blurred as the sensations overtook her. He didn't

bother with the hundreds of buttons and the endless ribbons. Instead, he ripped the dress off. She parted her lips to complain, but before she could utter a sound, she was silenced by Anthony's lips over hers. She broke away from Anthony's lips, turned around and kissed Ben.

They helped her out of what remained of her dress and undergarments. Linda itched to take Anthony's clothes off, and as soon as he straightened up, she unbuttoned his shirt and moaned softly as his smooth, tanned skin was revealed. He lowered her to the ground and sucked hungrily on her small breasts. She moaned and arched her back as his tongue flicked back and forth over her hardened nipples.

Ben, who had positioned himself at her feet, began kissing his way up toward her pussy. He licked her cleft slowly at first, then with more urgency.

Meanwhile, Anthony stopped paying homage to her breasts. He kneeled beside her face and placed his hardened cock over her lips. She parted her lips and took him inside her mouth. He moaned with pleasure as she ran her tongue along the length of his cock. She reached up and caressed his rippled abs, marveling at his wonderful body.

She didn't want to stop, but her jaw was starting to ache. She pulled her mouth away from Anthony's cock, panting. He lay down beside her and caressed her naked body, his eyes fiercely intent on her.

Ben climbed up on top of her petite body and pushed his cock inside her wet pussy. Linda gasped as she felt his length. He seemed to go all the way inside, touching her up to her womb. "Oh God," she moaned.

She lifted her head and looked between her thighs. Ben hadn't gone all the way inside her. Yet, she felt as though he had filled her up completely with his manhood.

She wrapped her long legs around his waist, the movement causing

him to go even deeper. Ben leaned over and kissed her on the lips, before moving his hips in an unhurried rhythm. Linda's own hips rose and fell as she struggled to match his rhythm. Warm waves of heat ran through her veins. Linda imagined her orgasm as a wild horse on fire that multiplied itself more and more as the pleasure grew.

They moaned and gasped, shaking each other from the inside out. Linda came. Hard. Ben moaned as he, too, came a few moments after she did. He collapsed on top of her and slipped out a moment later. Before she could even catch her breath, Anthony climbed on top of her and pushed his cock to the entrance of her pussy.

"My turn," he said, a wicked grin on his face.

Linda nodded and spread her legs wider. She moaned softly as his cock slipped inside, sliding in with minimum effort. Her pussy adjusted, still warm from the climax she had with Ben.

"Linda, can you get on top of me?"

"Alright." Linda was tired, but if they let her, she would make love to them all night. With awkward movements, they rolled until she was on top of him, with his hard cock still within her.

Anthony grabbed hold of her breasts as though his life depended on it. Slowly he massaged them until her nipples were erect. He raised himself to suck on them. Linda moaned as she felt how his nimble tongue flickered back and forth against her nubs.

"Do you love it?" he whispered.

"God, yes."

"Say it," he demanded.

"I love your cock."

"Louder!"

"I love your cock!" Linda repeated with more volume, almost shouting at the top of her lungs.

Anthony moaned and rolled, pinning her on the ground. Now he was back on top, pumping his cock with a fast rhythm. Linda was feeling the beginnings of yet another orgasm.

Two in one day? I could certainly get used to this...Oh my God.

Linda gasped and panted as his cock rubbed against her clit. "Don't stop." She groaned, digging her nails into Anthony's shoulders and then slowly raking them down his back. He growled softly, and Linda wondered if it was in pleasure or pain. Once more, she came, the orgasm taking her unawares. It wasn't as hard as the first time. Instead, it was soft like a warm blanket thrown over her pussy.

Anthony pulled his cock out and sprayed his cum across her chest. Linda gasped in surprise. No one had ever done that to her before.

After a while, she smiled. She kind of liked it.

* * * * *

"Linda!"

Her father!

She was still naked and lying in the field, her torn dress a few feet away from her. She looked around for the twins, but they were gone. She scrambled to get dressed as fast as possible. She needed to welcome her father home without arousing his suspicions that she'd been naughty while he was gone. When she found herself unable to put her torn dress back together, she decided to sneak into her room and put on a different dress.

She ran across the field, still hearing her father's loud cry, calling her name. She went around the house and saw that her father was by the front door. Lucky for her, he wasn't done unloading his carriage, and her sisters weren't much help at all. They were occupied with opening the many trunks that their father had brought home, making sure he had returned with the things they had requested. When Linda was sure it was safe, she climbed through her bedroom window and landed gracelessly on the floor with a soft thump. "Ouch!" She hobbled to her armoire and threw on the first dress she found.

"Linda!" her father shouted, his voice seeming to come from inside the house.

"I'm here, Father," she called sweetly, stepping out of her room and into the living area.

"Ah, there you are, my daughter." A broad smile on his tanned face spoke of his joy at returning home after a long voyage. His face was covered in deep wrinkles and fine lines.

Her sisters rolled their eyes.

Linda ignored them. His eyes always shimmered whenever she was in his line of sight. She knew she was his favorite. She ran to hug him.

After a tight embrace, Linda drew back. "How was your trip? Did you see any Indians this time? Or did you find yourself in a ship full of pirates?" she asked, half teasing.

Her father always came back from his trips with a new story. Sometimes they were true, but most of the time, they were nothing but tall tales.

"No, nothing exciting during this trip, my dear child." He patted her cheek gently.

"How long are you going to stay this time?"

"A week, perhaps. I have business to attend to in Paris," he explained.

His brows were tied in a knot. Linda knew that he was deep in thought about the business. Aside from his furrowed brows, she could tell what he was thinking about by the way he stood. If he put his palm against his cheek, it was about his daughters. If he placed his left foot forward and put the tips of his fingers on his chin, it had to do with the house. If his right foot was placed forward and he twisted a corner of his mustache like he did at that moment, it had to do with his business.

"I'll leave you to your thoughts, Father," Linda said, happy to find any excuse to leave his side.

As soon as she was safe inside her room, she released a sigh of relief. She couldn't believe she actually got away with everything that had happened to her that day.

* * * * *

The Beast sat on the rooftop of his home and watched as the forest moved. He loved the way the trees danced with the rhythm of the wind. This was the only place he ever felt at peace. Five years had passed and no woman had come within fifty yards of him or his home.

He started at his paws. "I truly am hideous." He growled as he moved them from his sight.

He was going to return to his chambers when the wind brought a scent that filled his nostrils. He knew that smell. A man. A sweaty, disgusting male who hadn't bathed in days was slowly approaching his home. He growled in anger, at the audacity that someone would dare walk through the gates and into his home without asking for his permission beforehand.

"Hello?" the man called out as he pushed the gate open.

Beast leapt up from his spot and walked gingerly on the roof as he followed the man's progress. He was as quiet as a cat and blended in with the shadows as he followed his new prey. "What do you want?" he called out from the rooftop.

The man started. "Who spoke? Is it owner of this house?" the man asked, confused as he looked around, as though searching for the source of the voice.

"I am the owner of this home, yes," Beast growled. He didn't like the fact that the stranger called him a *man* when he wasn't.

"I seek shelter for the night. I was lost in the woods and I'm weary from my travels. Would you be so kind as to offer these old and weary bones a place to rest tonight?"

The Beast thought about it and decided that perhaps it wouldn't be such a bad thing to allow this miserable old man to stay for just one night in his home. "Very well, but you are to touch nothing. Go only where the candles are lit. Understand?"

"Yes, sir, I understand. Thank you! Thank you!"

"Follow the candles. They will take you to the dinning hall. There will be food for you there."

Lucas was thrilled when he heard the man say that he was allowed to stay for the night. He didn't really fancy walking for another hundred miles or so, looking for refuge. He hadn't believed his strange host's instructions about the candles and was pleasantly surprised when they did lead the way to the dining hall, where warm food was ready on the table and placed before

a comfortable seat.

He wondered for a moment why his host didn't join him for dinner, but he was so hungry he quickly forgot the thought. There were steamed vegetables, mashed potatoes, roasted duck, pork, chicken, cherry pie, blueberry pie and fruits he didn't know the names of. The delicious smell overpowered his senses and his mouth watered. He picked up the utensils beside his plate and ate until he could eat no more.

After dinner, Lucas followed the candles to a room with a large soft bed, a wash tub and a basin full of warm water for him to bathe. He thanked the Lord a hundred times as he took off his clothes and washed himself. Afterwards, he laid down on the bed and fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

The next morning, Lucas woke up feeling re-energized and ready to go home. He wrote a note to his mysterious host, thanking him for his kindness and hospitality. As he left the château, he remembered what his youngest daughter had asked for before he left for this Paris trip. His two elder daughters wanted jewels and clothes, which he'd had expected. But Linda's words were carved in his memory. Unlike her older sisters, Linda had always sounded wiser beyond her years.

"A rose, Papa. Bring me the most beautiful rose you've ever seen. That will be gift enough for me," she'd requested with a smile.

He'd kissed her on the forehead and promised to bring her the precious flower.

And now, he was in a garden staring at the most unbelievably gorgeous rose he had ever laid eyes on. It was of the deepest red—blood-red—causing it to stand out from all the other flowers in the garden. He wondered if someone had cast a spell on this particular rose, because he

couldn't take his eyes away from it.

Lucas looked around to make sure no one was in the vicinity or peeping out from the windows. He crept near the rosebush and plucked the rose. He tied a handkerchief around it before keeping it in his front jacket pocket. He smiled, thinking about how pleased Linda would be when she gazed her pretty green eyes on his gift. As he took one step toward the exit, he heard a horrifying sound. He looked up and saw a giant black shadow loom over him.

Beast roared with anger.

How dare he?

Enraged, he leapt from his perch on the roof all the way down to the garden where his "guest" stood. He growled. "Is this the thanks I get? After the hospitality I have shown you? I treat you like royalty and you behave like a common thief?"

The fire of his anger rushed through him as he circled around the stranger whose name he didn't bother knowing. Beast scolded himself for having invited this man into his home.

"P-p-please forgive me. I meant no harm," the man begged. He quivered in fear and used his hands to shield his head. Lowering himself to the ground, he sobbed.

"Are you afraid of me now? Are you?" Beast took a deep breath. "I know you are. You smell of fear." He enjoyed watching the man tremble with fear.

"Forgive me, please forgive me. The rose was a gift for my daughter. That's the only reason I even dared." He fumbled in his pocket and produced

a pocket watch, which he opened and displayed the miniature tucked inside.

Beast growled and tried not to seem too curious as he snatched the pocket watch out of the man's hands and peered at the picture.

Beautiful.

Her eyes captured him—bright, emerald-green eyes that challenged with a simple look. The ghost of a smile played about on her full lips, almost as though there was a secret she wanted to share. Beast knew that he wouldn't be able to live out the rest of his days in peace without, at least, meeting her in person. He looked speculatively at the old man and knew that he would be the key to his daughter.

"Do you want to live?" Beast asked as he tossed the watch back at his "guest".

"Yes, yes!" The man fumbled to catch his watch, then straightened, no doubt believing he would be free to leave.

"Then send her here in your place. If she doesn't come by the new moon, you will fall ill and die. I hope you are a man of your word."

"No!" The old man fell to the ground on his knees. "Please, kill me instead. Don't take my daughter."

"Go, do as I say or I will find her and kill her in front of you," Beast growled.

Terrified, the man turned and ran out of the garden and out of the Beast's château.

* * * * *

"Come out, come out wherever you are, precious," Anthony called out in the sweetest voice she had ever heard from him.

Linda had taken all of his clothes and hidden them. He was now walking around the stable, naked, looking for her, while Ben was inside the house, keeping her sisters occupied. Linda couldn't help but giggle as she thought the situation was very funny. She tried to suppress her mirth by placing her hands over her mouth. She peeked out at Anthony from her hiding place and smiled as she watched his half-hardened cock swing from side to side as he walked. Suddenly, he grinned, appearing to have heard her stifled giggle.

"You think this is really funny, don't you? Me naked and at your mercy."

Linda tried to sneak away on all fours when she heard both his voice and his footsteps getting closer to where she was hiding, only to find herself face to crotch with Anthony. She shrieked gleefully as she tried to crawl away from him. He jumped on top of her and tickled her.

"No! Stop!" She tried to sustain the urge to laugh.

"Where are my clothes?"

Linda laughed in response.

"Will you tell?"

"Never!" she shouted.

Anthony surrendered and kissed her. Linda returned his kiss but with more passion. His cock grew harder and he pressed it against her thigh. She gently nibbled his lower lip, her hand caressing his chest.

Linda frowned. She heard something. "Wait...stop."

"What is it?" He started kissing her neck. She moaned and almost gave in to the moment, with his warm lips pressed against her skin. His hot tongue flicked back and forth against the sensitive part of her neck. She

pushed him away when she realized that it was her father's carriage she was hearing. "I think my father's home."

"Oh great. Where are my clothes?"

The last thing she needed was to get caught naked with Anthony in the stable. Linda gave him a mischievous grin and uncovered his clothes from underneath a stack of hay. She ran to the other side of the stable and grabbed the white dress she had hung on one of the hooks. After dressing, she ran to the house and knocked on her sisters' window.

Miette opened the window and asked, "What is it?"

"I'm not sure, but I thought I heard Papa's carriage. Finish up in there and get dressed."

Miette stuck out her tongue. She'd never liked taking orders from her little sister.

Linda ran to the front door and stood there watching a cloud of dust slowly made its way to her house. "Papa?" she wondered.

She watched the flurry of dust part to reveal the carriage. Their black horse Shadow looked like it hadn't rested in days, foam and saliva dripping from the corners of its mouth. She heard the familiar jingle and clanks that went with the carriage. Her father was home. It took her a second to realize that the dirty wide-eyed old man driving the carriage was her beloved Papa.

"Linda!" he shouted.

She ran to him. "Papa, are you alright?"

Linda had never seen her father this way. His gray hair was tangled and wild, almost as though he hadn't combed it since he'd left them last month—which was very unlike him. He was always well dressed no matter where he went.

"Pack everything! We must flee tonight," he shouted as he jumped off the carriage.

Shadow wasn't concerned. The animal continued trotting with the carriage still attached to its body until he reached the stable where it knew there would be water and fresh hay.

Lucas ran into the house and grabbed a large woolen sack. He began throwing everything he could get his hands on into it. Linda was very worried. Something was very, very wrong.

"Father, what are you doing? Why do we need to pack? Why must we flee?" she asked as she followed her father around the house. All the while, she wondered about his strange behavior.

"Where are your sisters? Tell them to pack. We must flee!" He threw his hands in the air.

"Papa." Linda calmly held his shoulders.

He looked away from her eyes. He sobbed as he tried to speak.

She patted his back. "There, there, Father. Whatever it is, I'm sure it isn't so bad." Her words only made him sob louder. "I have sold you, daughter," he stammered. He wiped the sweat off his forehead with the back of his hand as he struggled to look into her eyes.

"What? You would never..." she whispered, unable to believe what she had just heard.

"I have. I sold you...for a rose." He pulled the rose out of his pocket. "This rose. I'm amazed that it didn't wither on my journey home. None of the petals have fallen off. The edges didn't even have the decency to turn brown. It looked as beautiful as the day I took it. That was how I knew..." he looked at her, awe and wonder and a little bit of fear in his eyes, "that it truly was

enchanted.”

Linda stared at the rose, mesmerized. She barely murmured her thanks. She had never seen anything quite as beautiful. The bright color seduced her so much that she almost forgot what her father had done to get it. Dazed, she took it from his hands and pressed it against her chest. It was as though this flower had a heart beat.

“I stayed at the home of the Beast,” her father continued in his narration. “Red glowing eyes, like looking into Hell’s flames.”

“Papa, you’ve had a long journey.” Linda tried to find reason behind her father’s delusions. “Go to your room and rest a while. I’ll bring you some soup.” She gave him her best smile and led him to his bedroom.

“No!” He rolled his shoulder and pulled his hand away from her gentle but firm grip. “We must flee. He’ll come for you.” He clutched her hands and pulled them against his chest. “He’ll come for you.”

Linda felt his speeding heartbeat underneath the palm of her hand. She was afraid that her father’s heart was going to explode from anxiety. She needed to get him to lie down and relax.

She slipped the flower into her side pocket. “There’s no need, Father,” she soothed, rubbing his back and leading him to his bedroom. “I’ll go to him and sort this out. I’m sure he’s just a lonely man with a bad temper.”

He shook his head. “No, no, no.” Yet, he allowed himself to be tucked into bed, proving to Linda just how exhausted her father was. He was asleep in seconds.

Linda sighed as she looked at her father. She took his hunter green blanket and covered him. She smoothed out his gray hair before walking out of the room and closing the door behind her.

She remembered the red rose that she had tucked in the pocket of her dress. She took it out and studied it, marveling at its color. *What is it about this flower?* It seemed to whisper her name, calling her to some strange place. She placed it in a vase on the night table next to her bed.

* * * * *

Several days later, after her father had recovered from his journey, he was able to tell his daughters with more detail, the things that had happened to him in the Beast's château.

"Linda, you are not seriously considering going, are you?" Bernadette shrieked. "You can't go. You simply cannot." She waved her index finger in front of Linda's face.

Linda only gave Bernadette a cold glance. She didn't like to be told what to do any more than Miette did, especially from her sisters. They thought that just because they were older, they knew better than she.

"Would you rather the Beast come here and devour us all?" Linda asked.

"Papa would never let that happen," Miette said, looking at her father for reassurance.

He gave her a weak smile, which didn't give anyone much comfort.

"Yes, but I'd rather no one from the village hear of this. Think of Papa's reputation as a merchant," Linda said.

They all nodded in agreement at the mention of their father's fortune. Bernadette and Miette could only think of their future dresses.

"Did you get a good look at his face?" Linda asked.

"No. His face was covered by a black hood."

"Nothing else? What makes you think he's a beast?"

"He appeared from the shadows. From thin air. No man can do that."

"This is all very strange," Linda whispered.

"Papa, tell her she can't go," Bernadette pleaded.

"I can't tell her what to do." Their father looked at his daughters with a helpless expression on his face. His eyes filled with tears.

Linda held her father's hand and squeezed it tight. "Father, don't worry. I'll return."

He nodded. "You should pack."

"So it's settled. I'm going," Linda announced.

"I wish you didn't have to go," Lucas said as he threw one of her trunks on top of the carriage.

"I know. Don't worry I'll return as soon as I am able to," she promised.

Linda didn't want to admit it out loud, but she was excited about this journey. She was curious to meet this so-called "Beast", the creature that had managed to frighten her *fearless* father.

"Goodbye, my daughter. Stay on the path. Even if you're not looking for it, you'll find it" Lucas pulled his youngest daughter into a tight embrace.

She hugged back. After a few moments, when it became evident that Lucas had no intention of releasing her, she whispered, "Papa, you have to let go."

Her father shed a few tears as he released her. She gave her sisters kisses on the cheek and hopped onto the carriage. "Goodbye!" she shouted,

waving.

* * * * *

The forest didn't frighten her so much during the day. The pine trees swished gently from side to side and the leaves rustled. A gentle breeze blew and the sun shone upon her face. She was confident that she had made the right decision. Enjoying her newfound freedom, she stopped every once in a while to explore a fox hole or to chase after a butterfly.

She looked up, surprised that it had grown dark. The velvet, midnight sky was covered with bright, shimmering stars. It was breathtaking. The moon shone brightly, its silver light illuminating the path before her.

However, when she heard the hooting of the owls, the howling of the wolves and the chirping crickets, she began to question her decision. The myriad of sounds sent shivers down her spine. The trees cast shadows that confused her, making her wonder if what she was seeing was real or if she was imagining things. Her horse had grown weary, its pace slowing with each passing second. She decided to stop and rest for the night. After feeding her horse some carrots, she sat down on the grass to have her own dinner—bread and sweet wine.

About an hour later, she locked herself in the carriage and tried to sleep. She tossed and turned a few times before finding a position that made her comfortable. The hoot of an owl caused her eyes to shoot open. Skin covered with goose bumps, she looked out the carriage window to see if there was anything out there. She tried to make herself relax and go back to sleep, but she found it near impossible to do so.

Linda thought of the only thing she could do that would make her tired. She lifted her blue silk skirt up to her hips and took off her shoes, undergarments and stockings. She didn't waste any time rubbing her pussy

lips, every once in a while teasing her clit. She plunged two of her fingers inside her pussy and was surprised at how wet she was. She withdrew her fingers and thrust back in over and over, arching her back as the sensations overtook her body. Every stroke felt like static and sparks were ready to shoot out of her.

She grunted and moaned as the orgasm rolled through her body. She sighed happily, took her cum-covered fingers and licked them clean. A few minutes later, she fell asleep.

* * * * *

Two weeks later, Linda finally reached the Beast's château. She took a sniff under her arms and almost passed out from the stench. In the entire time she had been traveling through the woods, she was able to find one small stream. That was the only bath she had taken.

"Beast or not, he has to have a bathtub or I'm leaving," she mumbled. She tied the horse to the gate and walked to the entrance.

The Beast watched Linda from the rooftop as she carefully approached the door. He was amused to see her sniffing herself and wriggling her nose at the awful smell, the stink having reached him before he even laid eyes on her. *At least she didn't smell as bad as her father.*

"Hello?" Her voice cracked a little.

So...she is afraid.

Linda straightened her back, squared off her shoulders and bolstered her courage. She knocked on the door and shouted, "I'm here to see the

man who owns this château."

She could've sworn she had seen a shadow move on the rooftop. She quickly realized it was a gargoyle statue with a few crows perched on its head. They must've sensed her looking at them because the crows flew away, leaving their droppings on the gargoyle's head.

"I see that even though your father is a thief, he is a man of his word," a voice in the shadows said.

Linda turned in the direction from which the voice came and peered into the darkness. All she could see was a pair of glowing eyes. "My father is not a thief. He is a good man who made a foolish mistake."

"It doesn't change the fact that he took something from me," the voice growled. "I showed him hospitality fit for a prince and robbing from me was how he repaid me?" He let out an angry growl.

Linda couldn't help but enjoy the slight rumble she felt in her chest when he spoke. "Why do you want me here?"

"Curious."

"Curious?" she echoed.

"Yes"

"I don't understand." Linda frowned.

"I saw what your father had in his carriage. Gold, fur, precious stones, gowns and rugs, all sorts of things. I was curious to meet the girl who asked only for a single rose. Why?"

"I'm simply not interested in those things."

"What are you interested in?" the voice asked, his form taking a step forward.

Linda stared at the shape that stepped out of the shadow and noticed that what should've been a man's bare feet were large paws with black claws. She took an involuntary step back from him. Before she had the good sense to run away, she remembered why she'd come here. She took a deep breath and stood her ground. "Your face."

"Are appearances so important to you?" he growled.

"They are when you are being described as a monster with glowing, red eyes. I wanted to see you with my own eyes. I wanted to know if my father was telling the truth or if you were just another of his tall tales. You can say...I was curious as well."

"I am no monster, if that's what you think. You won't be harmed as long as you are in my home. You will want for nothing. You can go wherever you please, except for my chambers. You are free to leave whenever you like as well, for you are neither my slave nor my prisoner."

Linda thought about what he had just said. She wondered if he spoke the truth about her being able to come and go as she pleased. Then, a small ray of light shined on one of his eyes. She gasped softly as she saw the color.

Gold. He had orbs the color of dark gold. She had never seen anything so breathtaking, the way the pupil became smaller or the way each iris sparkled like powdered gold. She could easily spend the rest of her life looking into those eyes and find that she had not wasted her life. She couldn't help but notice how sad they looked though. Lonely. Vulnerable. Those are the words she associated with him at that moment. In the end, his eyes made the decision for her.

"I will stay."

Without saying another word, Beast led Linda to her room. As she

followed him, she couldn't help but look at all the beautiful things he had in his home. Paintings of aristocrats lined with gold and chandeliers with crystals as big as her fist. She was surprised at how clean everything was.

Beast stole a few glances at Linda when he knew she wasn't looking. He had never seen a more beautiful woman. Her skin was olive-toned and her hair was the color of midnight. It was so black it looked blue. He then realized that her eyes were the color of the leaves on the rose her father had stolen.

He cleared his throat. "This is your room." He opened the door for her and showed her where she would be sleeping. "Is this to your liking?"

"This is exquisite." She walked into the room and spun around a few times.

"Your trunks are already here. The clothes in the armoire will magically adjust to your body and the ribbons on the dress will tie themselves." He pointed to the armoire at the other end of the room.

"Really?" she asked as she walked to the armoire.

"Yes."

"Thank you." Linda smiled at him.

He saw her staring at his exposed hands. Quickly he hid them underneath his cloak and she looked away. He felt vulnerable. Weak. And he didn't like it. Beast was going to walk away when he stopped himself. He scratched his ears nervously and turned around. "Would you care to join me for dinner tonight?"

"Is that what I will do during my stay here? Dining with you?" she inquired.

"Would that be so horrible?"

"Now, now, no need to be sensitive. I didn't say 'no', did I?" She smiled. "I would love to join you for dinner. But..." Her smile gave way to a concerned look.

"But?" he pressed.

"I don't know your name and I still haven't seen your face." She gestured to his hood. She took a step towards him and tiptoed, her hands reaching up toward his head.

He recoiled.

Linda showed him her palms and stepped away from him. "I won't hurt you," she whispered.

"It's not you I'm afraid of. I don't know what I will do to you if you start screaming."

"I won't," she promised.

"I am hideous." He stared at his calloused hands. He extended his claws then hid them underneath his robe.

"I promise not to scream."

Beast gazed at Linda's face. She had that determined look in her eyes. He had seen that same expression in the miniature her father had in his pocket. He took a deep breath and nodded.

Her hands reached out towards his head. Slowly, she pulled back the black hood that covered his face. His eyes stayed on her face the entire time. He didn't dare blink. Linda's eyes widened a little, but other than that there was no expression on her face. He was surprised. He had truly expected her to scream.

"You're beautiful," she whispered. She gently touched his golden mane.

He recoiled with a start. *How long has it been since I have felt someone's touch?*

As she ran her fingers through his hair, he closed his eyes and leaned his head against her hand. He purred as Linda scratched the back of his neck. He could feel himself growing hard. Reluctantly he pulled himself away. "I'll see you downstairs."

Linda was a little surprised at his sudden departure. She thought they had a special moment just then.

Why did he leave so suddenly?

She undressed and took a bath. She was happy to find that the water was warm. She was even happier at finding a bar of lavender soap. She would be glad to get the stench off her body. As she bathed, her thoughts drifted to Beast. She was surprised how unafraid she was of him, though he had the face of a lion. It wasn't what she had expected. She thought he would have horns like a demon, red eyes and giant claws. But all she saw was a beautiful creature, someone deserving of pity, someone who was afraid of a broken heart.

After her bath, Linda put on a wine-colored gown with a high collar that was trimmed with lace. She followed the lit candles until she reached the dining room. She smiled to see that Beast had taken time to make himself a bit more presentable. It looked like he had tried to comb his mane back, and halfway through had given up. Thus, only half of his hair was combed, while the rest was still in tangles. She giggled and joined him at the dinner table. All throughout dinner, Linda stole glances at the Beast, and at times, she'd

caught him looking at her, causing her heart to beat faster.

* * * * *

"Good night," Beast said as he stopped in front of Linda's bedroom door. He had insisted on walking her back to her room.

Linda wasn't sure what to do at this point. Under normal circumstances, she would've kissed him on the cheek. She wanted to treat him like she would a normal man. He had been extremely kind to her and only lost his temper whenever it came to his appearance. She couldn't blame him for that.

I would do the same, if I were in his position.

"Good night."

In that split second, she made her decision, leaning over and giving him a peck on the cheek. She quickly stepped away from him and went into her room. She closed the door behind her and panted. She touched her lips to ensure that they were still there. She could still feel his silky fur against her lips. It had tickled her nose.

Beast leaned against her door and pressed his palms against the hard wood. He could feel her quickened heartbeat as though he had placed his hands against her tiny chest. He loved the way her soft lips had tenderly brushed against his fur. He took a deep breath and drew the scent of her inside his lungs. He wanted to keep it in there for as long as possible.

"There is hope after all," he whispered as he reluctantly walked away from her bedroom.

* * * * *

Linda let out a sigh of relief as she changed into her nightgown before falling onto the bed. She couldn't believe how soft the mattress was. She thought that this time, falling asleep wouldn't require the nightly pleasuring she had given herself during her journey. However, after an hour of tossing and turning, she realized that she had gotten herself trapped in a routine. She now knew that she wouldn't be able to fall asleep until she was satisfied. Only this time, she wanted to be a little more creative. She wanted to watch herself.

Linda saw a large mirror on the other side of the room and moved it in front of the bed. She removed her nightgown. She wanted to see how her whole body reacted to her climax. She lit a candle and placed it on the table beside her bed.

She got comfortable and made sure she could see her reflection in the mirror. Her heart raced as she realized what she was about to do. She bent her knees, spread her legs wide and looked at the opening between her legs. She marveled at the color she had hidden deep within herself. It looked like a cluster of lace that had been dyed dark mauve.

She touched herself, running her fingers up and down her pussy as she looked into the mirror. She saw the lust that filled her eyes and the way her cheeks blushed as she started to feel the first waves of her orgasm. She pushed two of her fingers inside her pussy, pumping them in and out. Her breasts jiggled softly as the heat ran through her veins. She groaned with pleasure as she rubbed her clit with her thumb. She struggled to keep her eyes open as her climax took over her body.

She looked at her reflection in the mirror. She felt like she could do anything. She was the woman who would be able to tame the Beast.

* * * * *

With a start, Linda opened her eyes. She found that she was in a beautifully decorated bedroom.

How strange, this isn't my room. There's something strange about this place.

"Linda?"

She gasped and turned around, not expecting anyone to be in the room with her.

A naked man was standing behind her. Well, now he was in front of her. Her groin tightened as she looked at the handsome man's physique Linda marveled at his body. It was *that* remarkable. He was tall and built in a sinewy way. He had so many ripples on his stomach that all she wanted to do was run her tongue against his skin and feel each muscle with her mouth. Her heart stopped once she saw his golden eyes.

It can't be.

"Who are you?"

"Linda, it's me. Beast." He took a step towards her, his eyes mirroring his confusion.

She shook her head. "That's not possible."

The Beast's gold mane had changed to long blonde hair. His eyes were still the same golden color, but he no longer had fur, paws or claws. He was a man.

"What do you mean?" He frowned.

"Look in the mirror," she suggested.

He lifted his eyes. A moment later, his expression turned to awe and wonder. "How is this possible?" He continued gazing upon his reflection in the

looking glass as he touched his face, as though he couldn't believe what he was seeing.

"I don't know," Linda replied.

He turned his gaze on her, his eyes filling with hunger and lust.

Linda glanced down at herself and realized that she was naked as well. She bashfully tried to cover herself up with her hands, but quickly gave up upon seeing that it would do no good. She lowered her arms and played with her fingers restlessly.

With a pained look on his face, Beast looked away.

"It's alright to look," Linda whispered. "I'm just...nervous."

"I shouldn't gaze at something I cannot have."

"Who says you can't have me?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that this may be the only chance we have to be together like this." She ran a suggestive finger down his arm. "Opportunity is not a lengthy visitor."

Beast wasted no time. Hmm...she loved a decisive man. He scooped her up in his arms and kissed her. Their tongues wrestled in their mouths as he walked to the bed. They broke free from their kiss when they fell onto the bed, laughing.

Their laughter was stilled when he kissed her neck. Linda let out a quick gasp, then moaned in pleasure as she felt his warm lips caress the sensitive part of her skin. He kissed his way from her neck down to her breasts. He licked and nibbled her nipples until they turned bright pink and were as hard as pebbles.

"Make love to me...right now," she requested in a low husky voice.

He pushed his stiff cock inside of her. Linda moaned as she felt him inside of her. He was so hard and warm. The skin was smooth as silk, and his cock glided in and out of her with ease. If this was his true form, she couldn't wait to figure out how she could get him to stay that way permanently.

She moaned as his erection filled every inch of her pussy. Her orgasm was growing like a volcano, ready to erupt between her thighs.

"Oh God," he gasped.

His cock was beginning to tense, which meant he was going to come soon. "Come for me," she crooned.

Linda moaned and shouted as she ground her hips in tempo with his cock. His cum sprayed her pussy walls. She moaned as she let her climax take over her entire being. She wrapped her legs around him and moved her hips with more urgency as the warmth continued to spread.

Beast pulled himself away from her. His cock slid out of her with ease.

Linda pouted for a moment. She hated the emptiness she felt as he rolled off her body. He lay beside her and rested his cheek on his palm. She looked into his gorgeous golden eyes, unable to believe what just happened.

"Are you alright?" he asked.

"I'm more than alright," she replied with a grin.

"How do you think this happened?"

"Maybe it was magic."

Beast arched his eyebrow. He laid his head on the pillow and stared at the ceiling.

Linda studied his profile. He had a straight nose and thin wide lips. She

reached out and caressed his cheek. "You're so handsome."

"Will you stand to look upon my beastly face tomorrow morning?"

"I never had a problem with your face." She climbed on top of him and kissed him passionately on the lips.

* * * * *

The following morning, Linda woke to find that she had no sore muscles or bite marks that normally came with lovemaking.

Was last night real?

She went to the washbasin and rinsed her face, then searched for a dress in the armoire. She chose a hunter-green dress that had lovely cream lace trimmings. It was one of the magic dresses. Linda liked the color, but felt it was too big.

I wish it were a little smaller.

No sooner had she thought those words, the dress cinched around her waist. She closed all the buttons on the dress and marveled as the laces tied themselves for a snug, but comfortable and breathable, fit.

She went downstairs into the dining room and waited for Beast to join her for breakfast. She sat and waited. Her meal came. The fragrance wafting from her eggs and sausage made her feel hungrier. Still...she waited. The food was starting to get cold.

Finally, she picked up her fork and ate her meal, only because she was really hungry. An hour had passed and Beast never appeared.

She sipped the last of her tea and decided to go see him in his room even though she knew it was forbidden. As she walked over to his side of the château, she saw how different it was.

Claw marks decorated the walls. Broken mirrors, torn paintings and shredded curtains were everywhere. She suddenly understood why he wanted her to stay away from this side of his home.

She reached his door and knocked on the clawed wood. "Beast?" she called out as gently as she could.

"Go away," he growled.

"What's the matter?" She leaned against the door and wished he would open the door and let her in.

"I won't show myself to you like this, not after what happened last night in our dreams. Not now that you know what I truly look like."

So last night wasn't real. A dream, but now she knew his real appearance. What happened to turn such a handsome man into a hideous beast? "Beast—" She broke off and sighed. "I wish I didn't have to call you that. Why can't you tell me your real name? Who were you before you named yourself 'The Beast'?"

"It doesn't matter."

"Yes, it does. If you truly want to be the man you were last night, your name matters. Now please open the door," she pleaded.

"Why are you doing this?"

"Doing what?"

"Caring. Why do you care?"

"Because I do. Someone has to care about you."

"Last night...you don't know how much last night meant to me."

"Yes I do." She released another sigh. "Are you going to let me in? Or am I going to talk to the door all day?" Linda heard him let out a light

chuckle as he opened the door.

The sun was directly behind Beast, casting a golden glow almost like a halo above his head. His golden mane melted with the light, and his golden eyes shimmered like molten gold. There was certainly nothing beastly about him.

Beautiful. Absolutely beautiful.

"Leonard. My name is Leonard."

* * * * *

Linda ran barefoot through the forest. She'd never thought that grass could be this soft underneath her feet. Her eyes darted to every tree and bush, making sure that Leonard wasn't hiding behind them. They were playing hide and go seek, and so far, she had lost every time it was her turn to seek. It would seem that Leonard was a master at hiding. She didn't want to end the day without winning at least once.

Come out, come out wherever you are.

She heard leaves rustling on the trees above her and looked up, but quickly realized that it was just some birds flying away from their nest. For a moment, she just stood there, staring upward at the beautiful autumn afternoon. The leaves were a glorious mix of yellow, orange and red. The sky was clear and bright blue. She took a deep breath and enjoyed having fresh air filling her lungs.

Linda had been with Leonard for an entire month. She was surprised at the dramatic change she had undergone in such a short amount of time. She no longer worried about her appearance. She didn't bother wearing a corset or undergarments of any kind anymore. Every morning, she would throw on one of the dresses from the magic armoire and let it tie itself

around her. She didn't bother with the buttons, and she had never felt freer.

She heard a faint rumble and followed the sound until she found Leonard asleep beside the river. He was snoring. She gently shook him awake.

He stretched and yawned, opening one eye to peer up at her. "Oh good. You found me. I thought you had given up."

"You cheated," she accused as she sat beside him.

"Can we go now? I'm hungry." He yawned once more and flashed his sharp, white teeth.

Linda scratched the back of his ear.

He moaned. "That's the spot."

He looked at her and realized that he found what he had been searching for so long. Linda was everything to him. She was a companion, a friend, a lover. Even though she was his lover only in the dreams they shared, it was enough for him. He could be a beast in the day. He didn't really mind. As long as she was with him, he was happy.

* * * * *

Leonard was quiet the entire time they were eating their dinner. Linda had never seen him like that before. She wondered what he was thinking about. She knew better than to ask though. He would speak whenever he was ready. Afterwards, they sat by the fire in silence. He startled her by whispering her name.

"Yes?" She turned toward him.

"I need to tell you...how I became a beast."

"Alright."

He was silent for another moment. She supposed he was searching for the right way to begin.

"I wasn't a very good man in the past," he started. He raised his eyes up to her to see her reaction.

Linda nodded and urged him to continue.

"I used to hunt. It was all I ever did. I killed everything in my path. Deer, boars, bears, hawks, anything as long as it was fair game. I was a murderer and I didn't know it.

"One night, just as I was ready to fall asleep, I heard movement in the forest, not too far from where I was sleeping. I followed the sound until I came upon a clearing in the forest and under the moonlight sat a lion. He didn't move. He just sat there, as though waiting for me to make the first move. Foolish that I was, I pulled out my knife and attacked. The lion roared in anger and clawed at me. We fought for what seemed like hours. Eventually I won the fight. It didn't occur to me to ask 'What was a lion doing in the middle of the forest?'

"The lion's spirit spoke to me and recounted the crimes I had committed against all the creatures of the forest. He also said that I raised my sword against him, even though he hadn't attacked me or shown any sign of doing so. I was truly a beast, instead of the human that I am. My punishment was to take the outward form of the beast that I was on the inside. So that I wouldn't forget why I was being punished, I would take the form of the last creature I had harmed." He hung his head.

"The lion," Linda whispered.

"Yes."

"How can you become a man again?"

"I can't tell you. Otherwise, it won't happen."

"Do I have anything to do with it?"

"Yes."

"How can I help you if I don't know what it is I have to do?"

"You have to figure that out on your own." He stood and walked out of the room, leaving her alone sitting by the fire. She spent the entire evening thinking of ways to break the spell.

* * * * *

The following morning, Linda realized what she had to do. She waited for Leonard in the dining room as she did every day.

"Good morning," he greeted her as soon as he appeared.

"Good morning."

They sat down and had a breakfast of boiled eggs and buttered toast.

"Leonard," Linda said as soon as she was done with her meal.

"Yes?"

"If I am to stay here with you for always, I want to make one thing clear."

"What is it?"

"I want to keep my freedom. I don't want to be tied to the rules of society anymore. I want to live here peacefully the way we have this past month."

Leonard thought a moment and nodded. "You can do what you like as

long as you are under my roof."

Linda nodded and thanked him.

* * * * *

They were swimming in the river. She splashed water at him, laughed and giggled whenever she got water on his hair.

Leonard smiled. She was so beautiful.

A sound caused him to lift his head. There was no mistake. He'd heard the breaking of a branch. His heart stopped beating for a moment. *Something isn't right.* "Shh. Stop." He put his hand over her mouth.

Linda whimpered.

"I hear someone approaching. I can also smell them, and the odor is very strong. There's more than one man." Leonard released his grip on her and helped her swim to shore.

"What do we do?"

"Get dressed as quietly as you can and go home." He ran into the forest and left her before she could protest. He ran toward the stench that made him feel sick to his stomach, not because he was afraid but because it was a very nauseating smell. He climbed the tallest tree in his property, thankful that the autumn leaves helped camouflage his golden fur. He growled when he saw a mob of dirty farmers walking up the path. Leading the angry mob was none other than Linda's father. He leapt down from the tree and ran home as fast as he could. He knew that this day would come. There would always be some obstacle to his happiness.

"Leonard," Linda called out his name as soon as he walked in through the door. "What is it?"

"A mob is coming here, and they're led by your father," he growled.

Furious, he picked up the dining room table and threw it halfway across the room.

Linda jumped as the wooden table shatter into pieces. "Let me talk to him. I'm sure he's just worried about me."

"I swear to you, if any harm comes to you, I will kill them all. And if they attack me, I will defend myself." He clenched his fists and dug his sharp claws into the palms of his hand. He felt the wound and watched as blood slowly seeped between his knuckles.

* * * * *

Linda opened the door and waited for the people to reach her home. Her father was the first face she saw. The next pair of faces in the crowd belonged to Ben and Anthony. Her heartbeat quickened at the sight of them, and she blushed as she remembered their time together.

"Linda!" her father shouted as soon as he caught sight of her.

"Hello, Papa," she said sadly. She felt a little guilty for not having written a letter to let him know she was safe.

"We have come to take you back home," Anthony announced.

"I already am home," she replied, her hands on her hips.

"This is the house of the demon," Lucas said.

"No, it isn't. He is a man who made a mistake. He shouldn't be punished for it any further. Leave him alone, please, Papa."

"Linda, I sat by and watched you leave. I waited for you to return and when you didn't, I almost went mad. Now you want me to sit by and watch you give yourself to this creature of hell? This demon? If I have to take you

back home by force, then so be it." Lucas took steps toward her and grabbed her arm.

"No!" she yelled, struggling to pull herself away from his grip.

A great roar came from above her. The mob screamed as a giant blur of gold landed in front of her.

"The Beast!" Lucas shouted.

He released his daughter, pulled out a pistol from his holster and pointed it at Leonard.

"Papa, don't!" Linda moved in front of Leonard and extended her arms, trying to protect him from harm.

"Step away from him," Anthony ordered. "We've had enough of this."

"Shut up!" she screamed. "Papa, listen to me. Don't do this. I love him."

Everyone became silent. No one had expected her to say that. Even Linda hadn't expected those words to come out of her mouth.

"How is that possible?" Lucas's face crumbled. He became a much older man, right before her very eyes.

Linda cried at the sight of her father's heartbroken face. "Why are the stars up in the heavens? Why does the sun rise between the mountains every morning? Why do roses bloom? There is no explanation, Papa. It just is, and I just love him."

"Does he love you in return?"

"I'll never find out if you kill him."

She heard Leonard moan behind her and turned around. He lay on the ground in a fetal position, clutching his chest as though his heart was about

to explode through it.

She went down on her knees beside him. "Leonard."

He clutched her hand and whispered, "Say it again."

She leaned down close to his ear and whispered, "I love you."

"And I love you." His body went limp.

"Leonard?" His hand slipped away from hers. She shook her head in denial. "This isn't happening."

"The Beast is dead!" Lucas cheered.

"No!" Linda shouted, pounding Leonard's chest with balled up fists.

This isn't the way it was supposed to be. I was supposed to break the spell and we would both be free.

"Linda, come home with me child." Her father placed one hand on her shoulder.

"Don't touch me," she growled.

She rolled her shoulder and shook her father's hand away. Lucas saw the look on her face. He realized that this wasn't his daughter anymore. Her hair was dirty and matted. Linda's skin was greasy and there was a wild look in her eyes. He hadn't noticed until now that she wasn't wearing any shoes or a corset. He didn't understand how it was that she had changed in such a short amount of time. She was no longer his sweet little girl.

"Goodbye, daughter," he said to the stranger his daughter had become.

"Goodbye, Papa." She remained at the Beast's side, unmoving.

* * * * *

"Oh, my darling," she whispered. "My love, why did you leave me?"

The sky turned from the happy robin's egg blue it had been earlier that day to an angry gray. Lightning danced between the falling rain and the dark clouds.

Linda was drenched in matter of minutes. She wasn't worried about her health at that particular moment though. She was wondering how she was going to move Leonard's massive body out of the rain. Then lightning struck his body. Linda jumped back as she watched his body glow bright blue from the inside out. After a few moments, she had to use her hands to shield her eyes because the light was getting brighter and brighter by second.

She heard a painful scream, and then the light slowly faded away. Linda brought her hands down and saw a naked man standing before her. He was tall with golden eyes and long blond hair that fell to his shoulders.

"Leonard?" she asked, not daring to believe.

He gave her a smile in return, with an amazed expression on his face. "You did it."

Linda caressed his cheek and smiled. He took her in his arms and kissed her. She looked down at his cock. It was hard and ready for her. She arched her eyebrow and licked her lips. Evidently he didn't need any words to know what she wanted. He wasted no time scooping her up in his arms and carrying her inside the château. He placed her on top of the dining table and smothered her with kisses as he tore her clothes away. He looked at his hands and smiled.

"What is it?" Linda asked.

"For the first time I miss my claws."

"Could you have touched me like this with your claws?" She gently caressed his cheek with her fingertips.

He closed his eyes, a blissful expression on his face. "No."

Her breasts were exposed, and her dress was bunched up at her waist. Linda slithered off the tattered dress until she lay naked on the table. Leonard caressed her nipples. He lustfully looked upon her body, before lowering his mouth and sucking on her erect mauve buds.

Linda smiled with delight as she felt his warm tongue against her skin. She ran her fingers through his long blonde hair and tenderly pushed him down. He looked up at her with fire in his eyes. He understood what she wanted. He gave her a playful wink and kissed her on the lips, neck, chest, and belly until he reached her pussy. She gasped in surprised as she felt his hot breath against her thighs.

"So beautiful," he murmured.

Leonard then ran his tongue along her pussy. Linda gasped in surprised, but it quickly became a moan as she relaxed her body and enjoyed the pleasure he was giving her.

Leonard stopped.

Linda sat up and opened her mouth to make loud protests, but before a word could escape her mouth, he picked her up and threw her over his shoulder. She shouted, then started to giggle. "Where are you taking me?"

"To your room, I want to make love to you on a bed. Not like a savage animal."

"Take me anywhere you want, my love."

He carefully climbed the steps.

Linda loved the feel of his strong muscles against her abdomen. The way his shoulders moved and the firm grip he had on her with his arm. She felt weightless. She wasn't afraid of him dropping her, she knew that he would never let her fall.

He carried her into her bedroom and gently placed her on the bed. He lay down beside her and caressed her body. Linda sat on top of him and playfully covered him with kisses. She turned around and placed her pussy above his face. She looked at his hardened cock and grew wet at the thought of having it inside her mouth. She bent and parted her lips, licking the tip of his cock. She loved the warm and silky smoothness of it. She moaned when she felt his tongue on her pussy.

Her head bobbed up and down as she sucked on his cock. She heard and felt him moan as he continued to pleasure her with his mouth. She tasted the sweet and sour muskiness of his seed that slowly dripped from his cock. Her orgasm was starting to build.

"Enough, I need to have you now," Leonard growled, his hands urgent on her body.

Linda turned to face him, kneeling astride him and moaning softly as he impaled her pussy with his shaft. She grinded her hips in a rhythmic fashion, every once in a while, contracting her muscles around his cock.

Leonard gasped in surprise. "That felt good."

He did a half-sit-up and placed his hands flat on the bed behind himself to hold himself up. Linda twined her hands behind his neck. She shifted her legs forward, and Leonard sat-up fully, so that they were embracing one another. They moved only slightly, letting the sensations run over their entire bodies.

They kissed deeply, then Leonard worked his way down her neck,

sucking and nibbling at the base.

Linda ran her hands up and down his back, as her orgasm began to grow again. She felt his cock begin to pulse. She pulled away from his kisses and they locked their gaze together, staring into each other's eyes as they both exploded in orgasm. "Oh God!" She lay down beside him and pressed herself tightly against his body.

Leonard put his arm around her and drew her closer to him. "Marry me." It sounded like a question.

Linda smiled. "Yes, I will marry you." She kissed him tenderly on the lips.

Linda knew that she had found the love of her life. She was finally free.

Lover's Ball

Marie bent over the chimney and swept up the ashes. Her movements were routine and automatic from frequent cleaning.

She sniffed.

She had the sniffles from her runny nose, which was now pink from wiping it clean every five minutes to avoid having mucus on her blouse. Marie was used to the consequences brought about by the vigorous cleaning required of her: the soot underneath her nails, the sweat that ran down her back, the stench that at times she couldn't believe had actually come from her body, and the smudged dirt on her face.

Even her shirt was covered in ash and cinder. Nothing mattered anymore. What *did* matter was how she could stop the harassment she was receiving from her stepfamily.

There has to be a better life than this.

Her stepsisters stood behind her and watched her work. She knew they loved to do it because they *knew* it bothered her. For some reason, they found her amusing, but mostly, they watched because they never had to lift a finger to work in their entire lives. They whispered to each other and snickered.

She rolled her eyes and continued working. Grabbing a used, brown

brush from a bucket of water and soap, she went down on all fours and began scrubbing the floor. Her heavy breasts moved from side to side with the fluidity of water. There was nothing to keep them bound.

"Look at her," Laura said.

"Yes, sister, I'm looking...only I don't see anything," Margaret said.

"You're right, because Cinderella smells." Laura wrinkled her nose.

"Cindersoot, are you going to take a bath?" Margaret asked.

"Yes, Cinderslut. When are you going to take a bath?"

They both laughed, as though what Laura had just said was the funniest thing in the world. When they laughed, their fatty double chins jiggled.

Marie looked away in disgust. Their small eyes and upturned noses made them look like pigs. She imagined them both with their faces glued to the floor. She wanted to scrub them clean until they no longer had eyes, nose or a mouth. Ridiculous as it was, the thought brought a smile to her face.

Marie also knew they envied her figure. Even though she was constantly covered with ashes and dust from her cleaning, she knew without conceit that she was lovelier than the two of them put together. The only nice thing they had was their hair, which was a perfect golden blond. They knew it too, as they took very good care of it. Which was the reason Marie was always tempted to sneak into their rooms and snip their hair off with a pair of scissors she kept hidden in her room. But she knew that it was a bad idea and not worth the trouble.

"You must be going blind then, if you can't see me," Marie mumbled as she continued with her labor, only to be stopped abruptly by her

stepmother's foot on her stomach.

Marie gasped in pain as she fell to the floor, her hand massaging her stomach to relieve it of the pain. Anne's vicious action had pushed all of the air out of her lungs. When Marie took a deep breath, her lungs burned with fury.

"How dare you? How dare you speak to my daughters with such disrespect?" Anne hissed as she grabbed a fistful of Marie's greasy brown hair and pulled on it until Marie stood up.

"Cindersoot was being mean to us, Mother." Laura pouted. "You must punish her."

"Yes, Mother. Cinderella wasn't scrubbing the floor the way you told her to. That's why we were standing next to her, to make sure to tell you what she was doing wrong," Margaret chimed in.

"You're lucky I kept you after your father died. I should've thrown you out into the street." Anne drew back a hand and slapped Marie across her cheek.

Your guilty conscience is the only thing that kept you from doing it.

Marie's head snapped to the side with the force. When she turned back to look into her stepmother's green eyes, she was taken aback, as she had never seen so much hatred in her life. She didn't understand why her stepmother felt the way she did.

I don't want this anymore.

She wanted to shake the cinder and ash from her wings and fly far, far away from this place. But where would she go? She barely heard Anne's continued scolding.

Where can I hide? Of course! The only person I can trust—Aunt

Millicent.

Her aunt lived several towns away, but by the time Anne realized where she ran off to, Marie would be somewhere else. Somewhere safe. Marie wouldn't stay permanently at her aunt's house, of course, just long enough to come up with a better plan. But she needed to get sent to her room somehow, so she could have everything ready for that evening. She didn't want to give Anne the opportunity to keep her cleaning well into the night until Marie was ready to collapse from exhaustion. She would never be able to run all night if she was tired.

"Will you pay attention, you stupid little whore?" Anne pulled her hand back and slapped her on the cheek once more.

Marie wouldn't have minded it so much had Anne not slapped her on the exact same spot. Her cheek was on fire. "You can do so much better than that, *stepmother*," Marie spat out the last word as though poison were dripping from her teeth.

"Maybe I should just sell you to the neighbor. He's always had a thing for you." Anne's eyes narrowed. "I could get a lot of money for you."

"Why not your daughters? If you go by the pound, you'll be as rich as the king by the end of the month," Marie said, hoping that this would do the trick.

Anne's head shook with so much anger that her salt and pepper hair came loose from the tight bun that held it in place. "That's it! To your room, and no supper for a week! Don't even think about sneaking into the kitchen to get food. I've put locks on everything." Anne lifted her chin in triumph at having come up with that idea.

"Good, maybe those two can finally lose some weight," Marie muttered as she went up the stairs and into her room.

Anne followed closely behind her. She would occasionally prod Marie into going faster, making her trip and fall against the railing. "I swear you are here to be my torment!" Anne shrieked as she pushed Marie into her bedroom, slammed the door shut and locked it behind her.

Marie waited until Anne's footsteps had faded away before giggling softly at her success. It was exactly what she wanted. "I'll soon be free."

She lay on her bed and daydreamed about running away. She turned on her side and reached for the stash of food that was hidden underneath the bed. She unfolded a large, white napkin and revealed some cheese, day-old bread, stale crackers and a few apples. In a little sack hidden inside her pillow, she kept what little money she was able to steal while cleaning Anne's room. She was glad that Anne never noticed this. She was lucky that 'the pigs' stole money from Anne all of the time, which meant that Anne wouldn't notice how much money she had left in her drawers. Marie counted all of the gold coins and found that she had enough for a room and food until she reached Aunt Millicent's.

She packed some clean clothes and cleaned herself as best as she could with the water in the washbasin and waited for night to fall. The gentle cloak of midnight would shield and protect her. She sat underneath the window with her knees close to her chest for almost two hours. Anything to keep Anne from hearing the floor boards creak. Anything to keep her from coming up those stairs and finding Marie packed and ready to run away.

She waited until the house quieted down, as she wanted to be sure that everyone had fallen asleep. When she heard her stepsister's loud snoring, she decided that it was time. Opening the window, she climbed down the oak tree beside her window.

She made a silent prayer that she would have a safe journey to her destination. If she was caught, Anne would definitely sell her to anyone

willing to pay a high enough price for a young woman like her. She climbed down the tree and held on to every branch as if holding on for dear life. Finally, she landed on the soft ground, still as quiet as a mouse. She looked up at the moon and felt its cool light touch upon her cheek.

She was finally free.

* * * * *

With time on her hands, Marie wandered around the forest and explored everything in sight. She smiled. All of nature was beautiful to her. She couldn't believe she had allowed herself to remain locked up in the house for so long. She was so busy looking up at the sky that she didn't see where she was going and walked smack into a hard brick wall. Well, a warm, hard brick wall, certainly. "Oh! I'm so sorry."

His things were all scattered on the ground. She quickly dropped down and began picking everything up.

"It's quite alright," a male voice said. He went down on his knees and helped her gather his things.

"I'm so clumsy," she muttered and looked up. Her heart stopped beating when she looked into a pair of ice-blue eyes. She studied the man's face and decided she'd never seen a more handsome young man in her life. Feeling shy, she quickly diverted her eyes to the ground. "I must be on my way. I'm sorry for the trouble."

She dumped his things into his hands and started to walk away, but he gently held her hand and kept her rooted to the spot. She turned around and looked at him.

He gave her a bashful smile. "Then make it up to me by sharing my meal."

"I don't even know your name."

"I don't know yours either," the young man replied.

"I suppose we'll have to remedy that." She smiled, her heart beating in anticipation. Yes, she'd enjoy having a meal with him, and who knows if it could lead to more?

"My name is William. And what is your name, pretty lady?"

"Marie." Her stomach grumbled and groaned in protest.

They both laughed and sat in the middle of the woods and ate white bread and drank goat's milk that William took from inside his leather sack.

"What's a girl like you doing in the middle of the forest?" he asked as he broke off a piece of bread and handed it to her.

"I've run away from home," she said, taking the bread from him.

"Really? Why?"

"Because I'm tired of being someone else's slave." She took a bite off the bread and chewed. It was nice, fresh and soft. *He must be wealthy to afford such good bread.*

"Slave? What did they have you do?" he inquired with a mild tilt of his eyebrows.

"My stepmother forced me to clean my father's house when I'm the true mistress of my home."

"Clean? It can't be that bad."

"It's not the cleaning that bothers me. Sometimes I actually enjoyed working and taking care of my house. It's the abuse that I have had to endure from my stepfamily. The beatings and the name calling. I don't have a decent room, and I've nothing to wear but the clothes I wore to my father's

funeral. The day after my father died, Anne handed me a broom and made me move to the tower. That was four years ago." She wiped away a tear before it could finish its trail down her cheek.

"I see," he said, his eyes somber and sympathetic as they roved across her face and lingered for some time on the bruise on her cheek. His eyes became dark with anger. He reached out towards her, but Marie gasped in fear and quickly pulled herself, afraid of being hurt once more.

He held up his hands. "I wasn't going to hurt you. I just wanted to see your wound more clearly."

Marie blushed with embarrassment. She had not meant to react that way. "I'm sorry. I have to go. Thank you for the bread. It was a pleasure. Hopefully, we shall meet again soon," she said, rising up.

"Wait, don't go," he protested. "Let me accompany you. The forest is not a safe place for a young woman all by herself."

Marie had never been with a young man like him. When she thought about it, she'd never been with anyone who paid attention to her. She blushed at his intense gaze. He grabbed her by the waist and pressed her against his body. She gasped in surprise. He leaned over and kissed her on the lips. Her stomach jumped several times in excitement as his soft, warm lips moved passionately above hers.

Marie couldn't believe this was happening. She didn't kiss strange men in the forest. She didn't kiss strange men, period. But there was something different about William. As the kiss deepened, she felt herself letting go of her inhibitions.

William kissed her neck with desperation as though he was intoxicated by the smell of her. "Your skin is so soft. It smells like jasmine and earth," he whispered as he ran his fingertips along her arms.

She kissed him on the lips, because she couldn't think of something to say to him in return. A few minutes later, she came to her senses and pulled herself away from him. "We can't do this, William. Not in the middle of the forest like wild beasts."

"You're right." He ran a hand through his hair. "There's an inn not too far from here. Would you like to stay there with me?"

Marie thought about his request. She still wasn't sure about him, but there was something about his kiss that caused her to trust him. Besides, it had been a long time since she had been with a man. "Alright."

* * * * *

The small room William was able to get at the inn contained a sturdy bed situated right in the middle and a washtub by the window. It was a decent enough place.

"I apologize for the room. I wish it was something grander." William's cheeks turned crimson with embarrassment.

"Trust me. This is much better accommodation than I'm used to." Marie smiled. "It's certainly much better than a dirty floor in the forest."

They stood in front of each other for a few moments, just staring at one another. Marie couldn't remember the last time she saw a man with eyes the color of a winter sky. She took a deep breath and before she knew what had happened, William took a step towards her and kissed her. Within moments, they were on top of the bed, fumbling with each other's clothes, each trying to undress the other with desperate hands.

"You are so beautiful," William whispered, caressing her naked breasts.

Marie couldn't believe what she had just heard. No one had called her

beautiful since her father died. She almost wept. "Be careful, William. You might make me fall in love with you."

William smiled. He looked so much more handsome when he did. Once they were fully naked, they explored each other's bodies with leisure, discovering that each inch of skin was more marvelous than the last. Marie's body started to glow from all the warm sensations she was feeling.

William kissed her breasts, sucking on her nipples until they stood at attention. He pinched them until she moaned with longing. His cock grew harder and harder against her thigh.

Finally, he climbed up on top of her. She loved the weight of him over her body. He was strong and warm and more importantly, clean, which made her wonder about him. All questions and thoughts went out the window the second his cock thrust into her pussy.

She couldn't believe this was happening to her. She had never been one to fall head over heels over anyone. She had the feeling that this was something she couldn't fight. She loved the feel of his tongue against her skin. She put her hand against his chest to see if there was a heart beating underneath his rock hard chest. She was amazed when she felt the rhythmic beat.

He's real. I'm not making this up.

Marie wrapped her long legs around his waist, all the while wondering why his face seemed familiar. However, the questions vanished from her mind when the first waves of orgasm hit her. "Oh, yes."

Everything became blurry. She looked at the room and the shabbiness seemed to fade and disappear. Like magic, a beautifully decorated room stood in its place, and she was lying on a large golden bed, with royal blue satin sheets. Another orgasmic wave rolled through her and everything in the

room became clearer. This time, she could feel the satin against her skin.

Her pussy tightened around his cock as she started to come. She moaned with pleasure.

"I love you," he moaned.

"You don't even know me." She moaned again as she rocked her hips back and forth.

"I know enough." Having said that, he seemed to make love to her with more urgency. The bed creaked, and the headboard banged against the wall. Their moans turned into groans and shouts until they both came.

"Oh God," Marie whispered when William finally rolled off of her. She suddenly felt lighter, as though she could fly. He covered her body with light kisses. He held her as though he didn't want to let go. Ever.

Marie watched as the beautiful room returned to its original state. Did she cause that to happen? Or did William?

There was magic afoot.

* * * * *

William woke up the following morning and gazed at Marie while she slept. He hated leaving her. More importantly, he felt free with her. But this was not his life. He wasn't a commoner. He was Prince Charles William the Third, heir to the throne, no matter how many times he tried to ignore or deny it. He would never be allowed to be with a woman like Marie, no matter how beautiful and sensual she was, just because she wasn't of noble blood. He wondered if he would be able to take her with him and convince others that she was a lady. He was a prince after all. They couldn't accuse him of lying.

He brushed a lock of her brown hair away from her cheek, and noticed

for the first time that she had freckles, sprinkled lightly upon her nose. Then he saw the yellow and purple bruise that was on the right side of her cheek.

I wish she would tell me who her stepmother is, so that I can have her arrested for giving this young woman so much heartache.

What was it about her that made him notice these things? He never cared about minor details before. All that mattered to him was that the woman of his choosing was willing to do whatever he wanted.

He shook his head. "Get a grip, man," he scolded himself.

He groaned. He remembered what he had said to her in the heat of the moment during their lovemaking. He had told her that he loved her. Another first for him.

What is the matter with me? Did I mean it?

William looked at her once more and knew that he would love her always. The feeling took him completely by surprise. He always expected love to be something like a contract, an arrangement. That was how he was brought up. That was what he expected love and marriage to be. But this? Love, passion and lust. Never in his wildest imaginings did he think a woman like Marie could stir these kinds of feelings in him.

Marie slowly opened her eyes. She stretched from the tips of her toes all the way up to her fingertips. She turned to her side and arched her back.

William's cock swelled with wanting as her firm butt clenched. "Good morning."

"Oh!" She smiled. "Good morning."

"Did you sleep well?"

"Yes, thank you. And you?"

"I'm glad. I slept well, thank you for asking."

They looked at each other shyly and remained silent. He still couldn't believe how beautiful she was. Long brown hair glistened like bronze in the sunlight. Her eyes were the blue of the sky after a rain shower. She looked kind, yet sad. He wanted to make the sadness go away forever.

What am I thinking? I can't do anything with her except leave and hope she never discovers who I really am. I have to get out of here.

"I have to go," they both said at the same time.

Marie giggled. "At least we have something in common."

"Are you going to be alright? Do you want me to accompany you home?"

"No, I'll be fine," she said. "But thank you for the offer. That is very kind of you."

"Where are you going?"

"To my aunt's house."

"Where does she live?" He found himself intensely curious about her.

Marie just giggled again. Obviously, she wasn't going to make it easy for him.

"Aren't you going to tell me?"

She shook her head.

William leaned over and tickled her, causing her to burst into a loud, bubbly laughter.

"I'll never tell!" she shouted and then laughed some more as he continued to torture her with light touches and tickles.

"Tell me! Surrender!"

"Never!" Marie climbed out of the bed and ran around the room.

William chased after her and eventually caught her. He carried her back to the bed over his shoulder. Carefully, he placed her down on the bed and asked her once more.

"Why?" she asked, a puzzled frown between her eyes. "Why do you want to know?"

"To be honest, I don't know. I suppose I just want to know that you're out there somewhere and safe."

"You seem honest enough, William. I will only give you a hint since I have already made things far too easy for you."

"Alright. What are you willing to tell me?"

"The forest."

"The forest?" he echoed.

"Mhmm." She shook her head and pursed her lips, obviously not going to reveal more.

"That could be anywhere," he complained.

"Think of it as a challenge," she teased.

"Very well. I will find you and make you mine. You can count on that."

Marie leaned over and kissed him on the lips. She took his words very lightly as she found him amusing. Why would he promise to marry a woman he barely knew?

Soon, they parted and Marie returned on the path to Aunt Millicent's house. As she walked, she wondered who William really was. "Perhaps he's

a rich merchant's son. How lucky I would be if he were!"

* * * * *

"Ah. Hello, brother. How was your escapade?" Maxwell asked.

"Of all the times I've sneaked out of the castle, this was the most fruitful." William threw himself on the sofa in his brother's suite of rooms.

"You have my attention." Maxwell propped up a chair beside him.

"I met a woman." William grinned.

"So? I meet women everyday."

"You don't understand, Max. I think she's the one. I met her in the forest. Her name is Marie and she is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen," William confessed as he tried not to blush.

"Now, I know this is going to sound strange considering all you know is her first name, so, I need you to pay attention." Maxwell held his brother's face by placing a hand on each side of William's face.

"Yes?"

"Does she have any sisters?"

"You're an idiot." William pushed his brother's face out of the way and poured himself a glass of wine.

"And you're an even bigger one, Will. You know that Father already has his eye on the princess of Belgium for your wife, and no matter how many women you meet outside of the castle, there's no way you can change that. You'd be lucky if you can get her to be your mistress."

"You know, for a younger brother, I hate the fact that you're right about a lot of things more and more each day." William took a large gulp of

wine. *Belgium? Aren't those women supposed to be fat? I certainly hope not.*

"What can I say?" Maxwell arched an eyebrow. "It's a gift."

A sharp knock on the door caused both brothers to turn their heads at the same time toward the sound.

"Come in," William said.

Their manservant, Terrance, walked in through the large golden doors. He gave them a graceful bow. "Prince William, Prince Maxwell, your father wishes your company in the library immediately."

"Yes, of course. Thank you Terrance," Maxwell said.

Terrance bowed and walked out of the room.

The brothers looked at each other quizzically. It was a rare thing indeed when their father requested to speak with both of them at once.

* * * * *

King Charles was feeling nostalgic. He was remembering the first time he'd laid eyes on his wife—at a ball. He had never seen anyone as graceful. When she danced, she leapt into the air as if she were weightless. He looked at the miniature portrait they sent him of the Belgian princess, and even though she was slim and fair of skin, this girl would not do. His sons deserved a chance at the same happiness that he had with his dear, sweet wife.

"My darling Clara, how I miss you," he whispered as he glanced at the slipper she had worn so many years ago. It was made purely of glass and rested on a large, red, velvet pillow inside a glass box.

A knock sounded on the door a few seconds before the doorknob turned. With a soft creak, the door opened and his sons walked into the

library. He smiled at his boys. Clara had given him heirs immediately after they married. She made sure she was the one who raised them and tutored them. He was doubtful at first, but as he watched them grow, he knew she had done the right thing. They were intelligent, fair, and kind men. Just like Clara had been.

"Hello, Father," William said.

"Father, Terrance said you wanted to see us," Maxwell said.

"Yes. I do. I have received a portrait of the Princess Gretel." King Charles pulled the miniature painting out of his pocket and handed it to William, who looked at the picture and did his best to smile. It was a tight-lipped, unnatural grin.

"Thank you, Father. I will try to make you proud."

King Charles rolled his eyes and snatched the miniature from his son's hand. "Don't give me that horseshit. I know you don't want to marry her, and to be honest, you don't have to. I can always work something else out with the Belgians. But you must get married regardless."

"Yes, of course, Father. But may I ask, why the sudden change of heart?" William inquired.

"Because many years ago, my own father gave me a chance at happiness, and on one fateful night, your mother danced her way into my heart. I think you deserve an opportunity at the same kind of love. Don't you?"

William had a broad smile on his face.

King Charles almost burst into tears. William had his mother's smile.

"Thank you, Father." William embraced him.

"You're welcome, son."

"So, we're having a ball?" Maxwell asked.

"A ball?" William asked.

"That's how Father met Mother. Why not continue the tradition? Perhaps we can find a woman for me as well," Maxwell said, teasing.

"A masque ball. Just like when I was young. We shall make the preparations at once!" King Charles exclaimed.

* * * * *

Marie was ready to pass out from exhaustion when she arrived at her Aunt Millicent's house. She knocked on the door several times before a young female servant opened the door, who gasped upon seeing her. Marie didn't blame her, for she was sweaty, dirty and smelled awful from her journey.

"Can you fetch the lady of the house for me please?" Marie asked between pants.

"And whom may I say is inquiring?" the young maid asked rather smugly.

"Her niece, Marie Therese Sauvignon." She straightened her back and lifted her chin.

The maid's eyes grew wide. "Yes, miss." The maid gave her a quick, short curtsy before turning back into the house.

Marie slumped down on the ground as soon as the maid vanished. Just saying her name took a lot of energy from her.

Aunt Millicent appeared at the door only a few seconds later and gasped as she set eyes on Marie.

I must look terrible.

"Hello, Aunt Millie."

"Oh my goodness. Well, don't just stay out here, come inside." Aunt Millicent opened the door wide and gestured her in. "My dear girl, what happened?"

"I ran away." Marie stepped foot into the house.

"Why?"

"I couldn't take it anymore." Despite her control, her face contorted, and she burst into tears. She covered her face with her dirty hands as tears carved a path down her cheeks.

"There, there. You're safe now." Aunt Millicent enfolded her in a warm embrace. "No more sadness. It's over. No one is going to hurt you ever again."

They sat down in the living room and Marie did her best to control her crying. But it was as though a dam inside her very soul had broken and every emotion that she had suppressed came pouring out of her. She told her aunt everything—every beating, curse word and abuse that had been thrown in her direction over the past four years.

"Why didn't you tell me about this sooner?" Millicent asked, aghast.

"I thought it would end." Marie sniffed.

"You should have told me the second that bitch put a hand on you." Anger poured out of Aunt Millicent in waves.

"I didn't think she would let it go so far."

"Are you certain you didn't do anything to aggravate her?"

"Auntie, my very existence was enough to send her into fits of rage.

Trust me, all I've ever done is breathe, eat and clean in her presence. At least until recently." She pointed to the bruise on her cheek.

"Tsk, tsk, tsk." Millicent gently took her niece's chin in her hand and inspected her face. "It's a shame. I have nothing for that."

"It's alright. I've had worse."

"Would you like a cup of tea?" Marie nodded. She looked at her aunt. She had forgotten how much Aunt Millicent looked like her brother, Marie's father. They had the same ivory skin and blonde hair, though Aunt Millicent had some white hairs sprinkled about as a testament to her age and wisdom. But even that couldn't take away from the beautiful woman she still was.

"No, thank you, Auntie. I would like to rest and perhaps a bath, if that's alright?" Marie asked carefully.

"Why, of course, darling! How silly of me to have forgotten...you must be weary from your journey." Aunt Millicent stood up and motioned Marie follow her.

Millicent led her upstairs to one of the many rooms in the house. Marie waws struck by how she never had a nice room during the time when Anne was the mistress of her father's house. Marie had been stuck in the attic, though she didn't mind that so much, as she had the best view. She could see the village, the king's castle and the mountains. She sometimes wished she had access to paints and canvases though. She would've loved to paint the sun rising over the mountains and the green rolling hills. But Anne never let her do anything except clean.

Marie looked around her room and smiled. The bed looked most promising.

"I'll have Diana bring water for your bath," Millicent said.

While Marie waited, she used the water in the washbasin to rinse her face and arms. There was a knock on the door. "Come in."

"Here's water for your bath, Miss." The young girl who had opened the door earlier came into the room. *So, she's Diana.* She carried two large buckets of water, which she carefully poured into the small tub.

"Thank you," Marie said.

"You're welcome." Diana turned to leave and stopped at the door. "Miss?"

"Yes?" Marie lifted an eyebrow at her inquiringly.

"I'd like to apologize for my behavior towards you earlier today. It was unnecessary to behave in such a manner. I thought you were a beggar."

Marie gave her a soft smile and said, "Apology accepted."

"Thank you, Miss." Diana curtsied and walked out of the room.

Marie locked the door and stepped into the tub, enjoying the warm water against her skin. As she bathed herself, she realized that she had lathered her breasts a little too much. She stopped and bathed herself properly. Finally, she got out of the tub, glad to be clean at last.

She jumped into the bed and sighed as she felt the softness of the mattress beneath her body. She remembered how her body had reacted to her touching her breasts and gave a sly grin as she picked up where she left off. She fondled and played with her nipples, releasing a moan of pleasure as she pinched her nipples as hard as she could tolerate it. She enjoyed touching her smooth skin. She slid her hand in a downward direction until she reached her pussy.

Someone knocked on the door. "Marie?"

Aunt Millicent.

Marie jumped and quickly pulled her hands away. "Yes?" Her voice cracked.

"May I come in?"

"Auntie, I'm not dressed." Marie was amazed that she got that much out, her throat was so dry and her cheeks were warm. She knew that she was blushing.

"Oh, I'm terribly sorry, dear, but dinner is at six o'clock sharp. I thought I should let you know," Millicent said through the closed door.

"Thank you. I'll be downstairs momentarily."

"Alright, darling."

Marie let out a sigh of relief and decided that it would be best to pleasure herself another time.

* * * * *

The following morning, a royal messenger was standing at the entrance just as Marie was going down the steps for breakfast.

"Yes, how may I assist you?" Diana was asking.

"I have a message from His Royal Majesty King Charles the Second. A masquerade shall be held at the castle by the next full moon. All young maidens are to attend. At this masque ball, His Majesty's son, Prince Charles the Third, shall dance with all of the ladies that please him, and that night he will choose a bride," he announced imperiously.

"What maidens are to attend?" Marie asked.

"All young women from every household of the kingdom." He handed

Diana a red satin sack and walked away.

Diana handed the sack to Marie, who opened it to see that it contained several invitations to the royal ball.

"So, Anne and the two pigs might be there." She wasn't sure if she wanted to go or not.

"Who was at the door?" Millicent poked her head over the banister.

Marie went upstairs and showed her the invitations.

"Oh! How lovely! A ball! You'll look so beautiful in a gown." Millicent clapped her hands excitedly.

"I don't think I'll be going, Auntie."

"Why ever not?"

"Because I just know that Anne and the two pigs will be there as well. I don't want to endure a confrontation with them in front of the King and his son."

"Why, don't be silly, why would they ever wish to ruin their chances as well as yours?" her aunt inquired.

"Because they're mean and stupid." Marie threw her hands angrily up in the air.

Truthfully, she wanted to go, but she didn't want to see her stepfamily. She had too many bad memories. All she could think of whenever she conjured up their faces was the torment she had to suffer in her father's home. Hot soup thrown in her face, shoveling snow out of the pathway, pushed face first into the pile of dirty snow, the evil giggles from Laura and Margaret, and beatings from Anne. She didn't want to think about it anymore.

"I'm not going," Marie announced.

"Well, I guess you've made up your mind then." Her aunt shook her head sadly.

* * * * *

The rest of the day went by very slowly for Marie, rather boring actually. Aunt Millicent occupied herself by working on her needlepoint. The maids were no fun at all. All they were interested in was the local gossip.

Marie walked around the house and tried to find something to do. She wandered into the library and picked out a book. She sat by the window and read a passage or two. The library had the best light in the entire house. Yet, the bright blue sky taunted her, and the clouds sent her subliminal messages. They were all gently telling her to go outside.

Finally, Marie decided to give in. She sighed, tucked the book under her arm and decided to take a walk in the woods. She would try to find a nice spot to read about pirates and their adventures. She started to walk out the door, only to be stopped by Millicent's gentle query. "Where are you going?"

"Outside to read." Marie smiled. "I could use some fresh air."

"Be home in time for supper. Diana and I are making stew."

"Yes, Auntie." Marie walked out the door.

* * * * *

She found a comfortable little nook between two protruding roots of a giant oak tree. She tried reading but quickly became bored at the end of the first chapter. She put the book down beside her and closed her eyes.

She fantasized about how she wanted a man to make love to her. She lifted her skirt as she thought about the perfect room and imagined herself in a beautifully decorated chamber with all sorts of grand furniture and a big

canopy bed in the middle. Somehow, her hand found its way to her pussy.

In her fantasy, she was completely naked save for a pair of glass slippers. She loved the way they clicked against the cool marble floor as she walked towards the bed. As she pictured this in her mind, she stroked and rubbed herself. She plunged her index and middle finger deep inside her warm, soft sheath.

She continued to explore her pussy as she imagined herself climbing onto the bed. Red silk sheets and a man were waiting for her on the bed. It was William. He took her in his arms and kissed her passionately on the lips. She teased his tongue with hers until their tongues wrestled with each other. She nibbled and sucked on his bottom lip.

Two of his fingers impaled her pussy. She let out a loud moan, as he had caught her by surprise. He pulled his fingers in and out until his fingers were soaking wet with her juice. With his other hand, he fondled her breasts. Her nipples became hard and ached to be touched. He bent his head and licked her nipples, causing her to gasp with pleasure as his tongue drew circles around the rosy buds.

He left a trail of kisses as he created a path down to her pussy and nuzzled her clit with his lips. She released a small gasp as his warm and moist tongue ran up and down her pink slit. In reality, she stroked her clit with her thumb while two of her fingers were working in and out of her pussy, her juice gushing out and covering her fingers.

"Yes!" she shouted as her body grew increasingly warmer from the pleasure she was giving herself.

With her other hand, she pinched her nipples as hard as she could stand. She traded hands so she could shove her cum-lathered fingers into her mouth. The sweet and sour musk that filled her nostrils drove her wild.

A hard orgasm rocked through her body like a great warm river rolling up and down her body.

Back inside her fantasy world, William pulled his lips away from her clit and pushed his hard cock inside, knowing she was ready for him. She let out a loud gasp as she felt the full length of him inside of her. She raised her hips and placed her legs against his chest, as she wanted him to have a good look at her new glass slippers.

He gave her a smile as he pushed himself in and out of her. He kissed both her ankles and licked the glass slippers. They both climaxed at the same time.

"Until we meet again." She trailed a finger down his cheek.

They kissed and the fantasy world evaporated. She was disappointed when she found herself alone in the forest.

* * * * *

"Are you alright?" Millicent asked the moment Marie walked through the doors. She removed her spectacles and carefully studied her.

Marie wondered at her aunt's acute observation and nodded. She found out the reason when she caught sight of her reflection in the hallway mirror. A twig and several leaves were caught in her hair.

Millicent stood up and carefully pulled them out. "My goodness, child, what were you doing in the forest?"

Marie didn't want to tell her. She looked for the book to use it as an alibi but quickly realized that she had left it in the forest. "Shit," she hissed under her breath.

"What?"

"I was dancing, thinking about what it would be like to go to the ball. I didn't see where I was going and I bumped into a tree," Marie lied.

"Really?"

Marie nodded. "Yes, really."

"I thought you didn't want to go?"

"I still don't," Marie said carefully. "I was simply wondering what it would be like if I could go and not worry about Anne and the pigs being there."

"Oh, that can be arranged." Millicent's eyes twinkled.

Marie wanted to bite her tongue. She knew that her Aunt had some very interesting connections. She was friends with thieves, gypsies, pirates and witches. She would hide them in her home when they were being chased by the guards, and in return, they gave her furniture and money when she needed it, clothes, food, and on occasion, a spell or two.

"Auntie, I don't want you involving any pirates in this one. They can have their stupid ball."

"But you'll let them win, darling. Don't you want to win at something for once?"

"I ran away. That's winning enough for me." Having said that, Marie quietly made her way up the steps.

Her thoughts were scattered like dry autumn leaves caught in the wind. She longed to dance underneath the stars. She didn't want to have to hide in order to enjoy her newfound liberty. That's when she realized that freedom wasn't free.

* * * * *

Millicent invited her friend for twenty years over for tea. Gertrude came from a long line of gypsy witches. She had long, curly, salt and pepper hair, dark caramel-colored skin and bright green eyes.

"I want her to go to the ball, Gertrude. I want her to impress the King or his son, the Prince. I want her to dance and show off her beauty, but she doesn't want any of that. Instead, she stays in this stuffy old house all day," Millicent said in an angry tone of voice. She was frustrated. She wanted a better life for her niece.

"I can always bring the shoes," Gertrude said with a grin. She took a sip of her tea and waited for Millicent's reaction.

"Do you think they'll work?"

"They always work. I use them to torture my daughters all the time."

"I really want her to go, but she's worried about seeing her stepsisters."

"Trust me, all the women in the castle will be too worried about how to get the Prince's attention to worry about any of the other women at the ball."

Millicent nodded. "Alright, bring the shoes."

"Very well, Millie. Let's see where this one will leave us." The gypsy smiled.

* * * * *

Millicent went into town to find a gown fit for a princess, while Gertrude went to her house to get the magic shoes. Millicent looked through all the gowns the dressmaker had in her shop, but she couldn't find anything suitable. For a moment, she thought it was hopeless, until she saw something shimmering in the back of the shop. "What's that?"

"What's what?" the dressmaker asked, looking at her questioningly.

"That?" Millicent pointed as she walked towards the back.

"Oh, that. It's something I've been working on for the past few months. It's almost finished, but I don't know if I'll even put it up for sale. I'm not really pleased with it."

"This is perfect," Millicent gushed, fingering the smooth fabric of the gown. She picked up the dress and knew she had found what she was searching for.

The dress was cut in the Empire style, and the material was a light blue raw silk that she was certain would bring out Marie's bright blue eyes. The beading at the bust was impeccable, with an intricate design that could be appreciated only with a closer look. Beads were scattered throughout the entire dress until it gathered at the bottom of the dress near the hem.

Millicent turned to the dressmaker. "I'll take this one."

"It's not really finished," the dressmaker protested.

"How long will it take you to complete the dress?"

"Another day or so."

"I'll pay you double whatever the dress is worth if you have it ready for me by tomorrow morning," Millicent offered.

"Very well." The dressmaker nodded her head in agreement, her eyes lighting up at the thought of more money.

"Good. I will see you in the morning." Millicent walked out the shop, happy with what she had accomplished.

When Millicent arrived home, Gertrude was already there waiting for her with the shoes. They were slippers made out of white silk with stitched

blue and white glass beads. Gertrude chanted a spell as she wove additional beads on the shoes. "Did you get the dress?"

"Yes, it will be ready tomorrow morning. It'll go perfectly with your shoes!" Millicent gushed.

Gertrude snapped the thread with her teeth and smiled at her friend.

Marie would dance underneath the stars.

* * * * *

Millie and Gertrude waited until everyone was asleep, then they quietly sneaked into Marie's room. The gypsy gently put the shoes on Marie, who slept so soundly that she didn't even stir.

Gertrude took some sage, rosemary and other herbs, and sprinkled them all around Marie and her bed. As she did this, she chanted the spell that would activate the shoes.

"When can she take off the shoes?" Millicent asked when they stepped out of her niece's bedroom.

"After the ball."

"Midnight?"

Gertrude nodded. "Yes, midnight."

* * * * *

As soon as Marie opened her eyes the next morning, she had the urge to dance. She did a couple of pirouettes before she went downstairs for breakfast. "What's the matter with me?" Marie asked, bewildered. She looked down at her feet and noticed the silk slippers on her feet.

"Good morning, darling," Millicent said in a cheerful tone of voice,

looking up from her plate.

"What did you do?" Marie asked suspiciously.

"You have to come into town with me and get fitted into your dress. And we have to get a mask for you as well. How exciting!" Millicent clapped her hands like a girl, then took a sip of her tea.

"I'm not doing to the ball," Marie argued.

"You don't have much of a choice. You'll either go willingly or your feet will dance you to the castle." Millicent put down her cup and patted her lips dry with a napkin. "That is quite a walk on a pair of silk slippers. It would be such a shame to ruin such nice shoes." Millicent picked up her purse and walked toward the door. She turned. "Are you coming, darling?"

Aunt and niece stared at each other for a moment. Marie knew that she couldn't win this argument, and that she was going to the ball whether she wanted to or not.

"Alright, alright." Marie laughed and admitted defeat, "You win. I'll go. But..." She looked down at her shoes and said, "These shoes won't do at all. I was thinking of a different type of shoes." The shoes from her fantasy.

"Gertrude said that the slippers will change to whatever you desire," her aunt explained. "You just have to imagine it."

"Really?" Marie was delighted at the magical quality of the shoes. "Auntie, do you ever rest? You're always busy doing things for me since I came." Even though she still wasn't all that happy about the situation, she couldn't help but admire her aunt for being so clever.

"You know what they say, 'No rest for the wicked'. Don't worry about breakfast. We'll stop and get a bite at the bakery."

"Alright." Marie danced out the door and glared at her aunt as she did

so.

Millicent stifled a giggle and followed her dancing niece.

* * * * *

Marie was surprised to have so many different people fussing over her hair, makeup and clothes. She didn't know if she would ever get used to this type of attention.

"I think she's ready," Millicent announced.

"I agree." The woman she'd come to know as Gertrude, Aunt Millicent's friend and the one who'd supplied her dancing slippers, nodded.

"How do I look?" Now that she had no choice but to go to the ball, Marie wanted to look her best.

"Like a princess," Millicent declared.

Marie smiled and blushed a little at the compliment. It wasn't something she heard very often in relation to her. Enough time had passed that her face was now finally clear of any sign of abuse. When she looked at her reflection on the looking glass, she smiled for the first time in years. Her skin looked as white as ivory, and her shiny brown hair was set into a twist. Her lips were stained lightly with rouge so that it looked like she had spent the afternoon eating cherries.

Aunt Millicent looked at the timepiece. "You have to go now or you'll be late."

"Do you have your invitation?" Gertrude asked.

"Yes." Marie had put the white invitation earlier in her purse, which she now clutched in her hand.

They went outside to the carriage that was waiting for her. Gertrude's

servant had hopped down from his seat in front of the carriage and was already opening the door for her.

"This is what I'm going to ride in?" Marie asked, surprised.

"What did you expect? A carved pumpkin and white mice to take you there?" Gertrude asked.

"This is so beautiful." Marie marveled at the pearl white color of the cabin. She looked inside. The whole interior was covered in red velvet cushions. She touched the fabric and it sent chills down her spine. It was so soft.

"Get in already, you're going to be late." Millicent handed her the mask that they'd purchased. It was a simple, elegant paper Mache mask that was painted in silver and had glass beads scattered all over.

"Good night and thank you." Marie waved.

"Good night," everyone said in unison as they waved back.

She climbed into the carriage. She didn't know if it was the shoes or the dress, but she felt like she could do anything.

* * * * *

Marie arrived at the palace gates at around eight o'clock. She was nervous, but she knew that she looked like a princess. The shoes tingled as they wrapped themselves tightly around her tiny feet, as if knowing that she would be dancing tonight and they didn't want to slip off.

Marie stood in front of the palace, clutching her invitation nervously. Opening and closing her fist, crinkling the fancy paper. She was frozen to the spot. She wasn't sure if she would be allowed to go inside. She imagined her stepfamily waiting for her by the entrance, telling the guards that she was a lowly servant. She shook her head and made the negative thoughts leave her

mind. They had no power over her anymore.

"You goin' in or what?" the gypsy driver asked her.

"In a moment," she replied as she looked at the castle. "It's just so...big."

"I know. That's what all the girls tell me," he replied as he adjusted his pants. He gave Marie a wink and said, "Go in and have fun. You look like you need it."

Marie smiled at the driver and took a step forward. She then remembered what her aunt had said about the slippers. She closed her eyes and pictured the shoes from her sexual fantasy world. The high heeled glass slippers. She opened her eyes and looked down at her feet and saw her new shoes. They were as beautiful as she had imagined.

A few more steps and she'd be in the castle. "I can do this, I can do this, I can do this," she whispered to herself as she went up the steps.

One, two, three, four...she counted until she reached thirty. She clutched her invitation tighter the closer she got to the door. There were two royal guards in the entrance. The first one looked at her and arched his eyebrow. She handed her wrinkled invitation to him. He took it from her, studied it, and gave her a nod of approval. Marie picked up one of the dance cards that was cut in the shape of a butterfly and tied it around her wrist.

She walked on but she overheard him saying to the other guard, "So far, she's the prettiest one in there."

An involuntary smile came to her lips. *This might not be so bad after all.*

Eventually, she arrived at the ballroom. She gasped and stared at the room in awe. She looked up at the chandelier and was amazed to see that it

was as big as her bed, with candles flickering about making the crystals shimmer like little bits of a rainbow. The whole room glowed with a soft golden color, making the room feel warm and welcome. Marie had never seen so many women in one room, all of them dressed in haute couture. They were all revealing too much bust or trying to make a nonexistent bust look bigger. A lot of them wore far too much makeup, as they tried to hide their imperfections with little success.

Marie adjusted her mask and gasped when she turned.

There was a line of men standing next to her, all of them holding a pencil. The man in front of her motioned to her wrist.

"Oh." She took her dance card and handed it to him.

"I look forward to dancing the waltz with you, young miss." The tall, young man took her hand and kissed it.

"Me too," she replied.

One by one, the young men signed their names on her card until it was full.

From where Prince Charles William the Third stood, he, too, noticed the beautiful lady, just as the other men in the room had. Though he couldn't get a good look at her face, he could've sworn he recognized her from somewhere. Presently, she was dancing the waltz with his cousin Christian.

If only I could get there.

He looked around him and found himself surrounded by at least a dozen women, both young and old, all of them trying to get his attention, all of them hoping that he would chose one of them for his wife.

One of the younger ladies was speaking. "Mother said that..."

He rolled his eyes and tried not to look at the fat girl talking to him. "Will you excuse me?" he said as politely as possible and wove his way out of the crowd.

He watched *her* as she danced. He had never seen anyone move with such grace. He caught a glance at her shoes and marveled that such a creature could move in shoes with heels that high. He decided at that moment that he would be the only one dancing with her that night.

After the waltz was finished, Marie looked at her card to see who she would be dancing with next. A pair of perfect white gloves took the card from her hands and tore it half.

"Walk away, gentlemen. This lady shall dance with me tonight." A man with a royal air about him bowed to her.

The men all grumbled and complained amongst themselves as they walked away from Marie.

This must be the prince.

Her heart skipped several beats as she looked into his ice-blue eyes. That was all she could see as he hid his face behind a simple golden mask. She was almost certain it was made of real gold.

"Your Highness." She curtsied.

"Shall we?" He extended his hand to her.

She could feel all eyes on her. The whole room watched and waited with bated breath for her to decide. Nothing had ever been denied to the prince.

"Yes, of course, Your Highness." She placed her hand in his.

The whole room sighed in relief as they watched the prince smile.

Marie was surprised to note that they danced in perfect synchronicity, almost as if they had done this before.

William had never seen anyone move the way this beautiful girl in his arms did. He felt her firm body underneath the light fabric of her dress. He looked into her eyes and almost lost himself inside of them. They were robin's egg blue.

There was something oddly familiar about her. Almost as if he knew who she was.

Marie blushed. She caught herself looking right into the prince's eyes. He looked like he was trying to unravel the mystery behind her. For the first time all night, she was grateful that the shoes were doing all the dancing for her. If it had been left to her, she wouldn't have been able to hold herself up in front of the prince, much less dance with him.

They danced until the end of their fourth round, when Marie protested and asked to go outside for some fresh air. She also needed to rest her feet.

He looked surprised to hear her speak.

"I apologize, Your Highness. It's these shoes," Marie lied. The shoes didn't bother her at all. She barely felt them on her feet the entire night, but her legs burned and ached from all the dancing.

"No need to apologize." He guided her outside to a bench and helped her sit. They sat side by side and looked at the moon and the stars.

"You are so different from the others."

Marie smiled. "What makes you say that?"

"You don't try to impress me by bragging or by telling stories."

"That's because there's nothing I could possibly say that would impress you anyway. You've probably heard every story ever told. I would hate to bore you with silly stories about my life."

"That's not entirely true. You could start by telling me your name." He turned to face her.

"Marie," she said.

"Marie?" He repeated, looking flummoxed.

"Yes, is something the matter?"

"Take off your mask," he commanded.

Marie frowned and almost refused him. But remembering who she was speaking to, she removed the beautifully decorated disguise from her face.

An expression of shock and delight crossed his face. "It's you."

"I have done as you asked. Now, will you reveal yourself to me as well?"

"Very well." He removed his mask.

Marie gasped. "William."

"Yes." He smiled.

"You're the prince?"

"I am."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Would you have believed me if I did?"

Marie smiled and admitted, "No. Probably not."

"It seems that we have an audience." He was looking over her shoulder.

Marie followed his gaze. All of the women in the ballroom were pressed against the glass door looking at them. She quickly turned away, not wanting her stepfamily to see her face. "Is there someplace we can go and have some privacy?"

"Yes. Follow me." He took her hand and guided her away.

* * * * *

"Where are we?"

"This is a secret passageway that leads to my chambers," he explained.

William never let go of her hand the entire time they'd been walking. All of a sudden, they came to an abrupt stop.

"What is it?" she inquired, trying hard not to sound worried.

"I'm trying to find..." he touched the walls with his free hand, as he still refused to let go of Marie's hand, "...the door."

She heard something clank and slide open. A burst of light lit the dark hallway they were standing in, and he guided her in. She stopped for a moment to let her eyes adjust to the brilliance. It took a few seconds, but when she looked at the room, she couldn't believe her eyes. It was the room she had fantasized about. A beautifully decorated chamber with all sorts of grand furniture and a big canopy bed in the middle

This is all so very strange.

"Why don't you make yourself comfortable?"

Marie didn't need to be asked twice. This was her chance to make her desires come true. Slowly, she began undressing herself. She took everything off except for her glass slippers.

"What are you doing?" William was watching her undress.

Marie saw his eyes change from curiosity to lust in a matter of seconds. "Take your clothes off," she ordered.

He did exactly as he was told. Marie liked that. She grew wet watching him. It drove her senses into all directions. When he was completely naked, she guided him to the bed and told him to lie down. Again, he did as she commanded. She gave him a mischievous grin and kissed her way slowly from his lips way down to his cock. She took him in her mouth. He arched his back and moaned with pleasure as her mouth and tongue wrap itself around his cock. With one hand, she rubbed the part of his cock that her mouth couldn't take in, and with the other, she softly massaged his balls.

"Oh God." He gasped and roughly grabbed her by the shoulders and pinned her back against the bed, and in the process, dislodged his cock from her mouth. Guiding his cock to her entrance, he impaled her, burying himself to the hilt within her. She moaned as she felt the length of him fill up her pussy.

She wrapped her legs around him and raised her hips up and down, and eventually they found a rhythm. They moved as one. Her sight began to blur as she felt the beginnings of an orgasm slowly rising. She surprised William by changing positions by pushing him and rolling them over so that she was on top.

He ran his hands all over her body and played with her breasts. He sucked and nibbled them to his heart's content. Then he pressed his thumb

against her clit and rubbed it. Marie loved it. She could feel her orgasm roll inside her like a warm wave slowly rolling up and down her body. "Oh God, I'm coming."

"Yes, come for me." He moved his hips up and down and rubbed her clit some more.

She gasped and arched her back as she came. She heard the clock chime as it struck midnight.

* * * * *

He made sure she was safely in her carriage and kissed her before he closed the door. Neither of them noticed when one of Marie's glass slippers slipped off her foot and landed on the floor with a soft clink.

"Good night." He bowed.

"Good night, Your Highness," she said.

He watched as the carriage took her away from him. He stood there until the carriage was nothing more than a distant spot in the dark. He walked up the steps and found the glass slipper in the middle of everything. His heart stopped as he looked at the shoe, so small and still warm to the touch. He knew what he would do. He would go to her house in the morning, put that slipper on her foot and ask her to be his wife.

About Isabelle Rose

Isabelle Rose is a novelist and a poet. She currently resides in Elsmere, Delaware with her husband Kurt. She loves reading fairy tales and finding new ways to twist them. She has always enjoyed reading erotic fiction and fantasy novels.

When she's not writing, she can be found drinking large amounts of coffee and staring off into space daydreaming about what to write next.

She's currently at work on a new novel and another collection of erotic fiction.

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Sweet Assassins

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*What do a ghost from 1865 and
a woman from 2004 have in common?*

Haunted Embrace

© April 2007 by Terra Kent

Isabella Magdalene Reynolds, an independent, feisty young woman moves to the mansion on Whick Plantation, a home that used to belong to her grandmother and, generations before, an ill-fated Confederate soldier named Elijah Whick. Rumors abound that this man's ghost haunts the plantation, seeking his true love, and the future they never had. Isabella doesn't believe in ghosts, though, and she's determined to restore the mansion and make it her home.

When Elijah visits her, trying to convince Isabella that she is his beloved Maggie reincarnated, she denies him. His tenderness leaves her desiring more, his nightly visits and sensual caresses along with memory-like images that haunt her, offer clues to a past life. She seeks the truth, the reasons behind Elijah's death, searching through letters and an old journal and her own disturbing memories.

Together, can they turn back the hands of time? Can fate be changed? Can they realize their destiny, an unfulfilled commitment that spans time and death? Or is a haunted embrace all these two lovers shall ever know?

Enjoy the following excerpt:

Isabella couldn't wait any longer after yearning for so many years to see the face of the woman who was her twin from days gone by. She threw back the cover, and forced herself to her feet. She rushed out of the living room and into the entryway. She sprinted up the long, winding stair case. As she reached the landing, she took several deep breaths. She walked to the end of the hallway until she faced the door leading into the attic.

Tentatively, she reached out a shaky hand for the knob, and froze. Once she stepped through that door, there would be no turning back. Fear knotted in the pit of her stomach. Get a grip on yourself, girl! She entered the lower room of the attic. Each step creaked its protest at her added weight. Cobwebs hung everywhere. The air was stale and chaffed.

Boxes littered the floor blocking her path. Thick layers of dust covered the contents of the attic. She maneuvered around the crowded boxes, letting her eyes adjust to the dim lighting filtering through the window panes. I'm never going to be able to find it in here amongst all of this junk.

Taking a deep breath, Isabella summoned what courage she had in order to face the unknown. As if in slow motion, she reached for the light, tugging its cord. Light spilled forth. She scanned the room searching for the portrait. The sharp end of brown paper caught her eye. A tall, thin square package stood over in the corner off to her left. Her breathing came in shallow, short gasps.

Her mouth was dry and her feet felt as heavy as lead. This was it, the moment of truth. Do I really want to know the truth, or not? God, am I ready, for this? She made her way toward it. Her throat felt tight, and she could hear her heartbeat racing loud in her ears, or was that her own imagination? She turned the brown, wrapped package toward her. She withdrew her hands, unable to tear the paper away.

She reached out to tear the covering off. The crackling, tearing of the startling rips rose to meet the tension within her. She felt a stinging sensation race through her fingertips as the wrapping fell away. Her blood raced through her veins so fast, it made her dizzy.

"Oh my God!" she gasped, falling to her knees as she stared at her own image.

The Grim Reaper has finally met his match.

The Immortal Ones: Death Takes A Holiday

© April 2007 by Imari Jade

Thantos, King of the Ghost Realm, is known for his formable temper and deadly deeds, and thus, is feared by both mortals and gods. Angels of Death are his only companions, and demons quiver at his feet. Giving immortality by the Fates of Mount Olympus, he is resigned to a lonely existence---until he rescues a gorgeous woman from the pits of hell.

Rianna is instantly taken with the suave good looks and haunting blue-grey eyes of the man who saved her from a fate worse than death. But even as her desire for him grows, she's haunted by a past of tragic events that nearly pushes her to the brink of insanity. Besieged by a secret of his own, Thantos must help Rianna forget about the past and come to grips with her destiny, where she must leave her world behind to have a future with him.

But before Thantos can convince Rianna that her place is beside him, he must protect her from a powerful demonic entity that has set his sights on ravishing her, ridding her of her humanity and making her his bride. Rianna finds herself caught in the middle of a testosterone war between two larger than life immortals where it's good versus evil and light against dark. Can she decide between one male who she knows isn't good for her, but who knows what turns her on, or the other who offers her a world of unlimited carnal delights?

Enjoy the following excerpt:

"Of all the times to have to use the bathroom," Rianna murmured to herself. She and Andrew were right in the middle of some serious foreplay when the urge arose. She made quick use of the facilities, washed and dried her hands and headed back to the bedroom.

As she reached the door, she heard a muffled sound. She hoped he wasn't finishing up without her. She turned the knob slowly, trying not to make a noise, and walked in with hopes of finding him stroking himself to keep it hard just for her. Just the thought made her giddy.

She stepped inside the room and stopped dead in her tracks. There were two men standing over Andrew's prone, naked body. One of them was speaking in some sort of gibberish. He held both of his hands over Andrew. He was dressed entirely in black, which made him blend in with of the room. The other man stood by looking, not at Andrew, but towards the ceiling above the bed. He was completely dressed in white. She recognized him. It is the man from Mr. Jacobson's room! She looked up to see what held his gaze. She gasped. Something black and filmy floated over Andrew.

Both men turned toward her. They appeared to be as bewildered to see her as she was to see them. She froze in the doorway. "What are you doing to him, and how did you get in here?" She covered her breasts with her arms.

The man over the bed scowled at her. He was tall, dark and bald. "You can see us?"

Rianna put her hands indignantly on her hips. "Of course. What are you doing to him?"

The dark one turned to the other one. "This is not good. Atropos is going to be pissed, Thantos."

The man called Thantos did not move, except to nod.

Rianna turned her attention from the men. She raised her eyes and whimpered. The black film was lowering itself to the floor. She looked over at Andrew. He hadn't uttered a sound since she returned to the room. He just lay there with his hand clutched at his chest like he'd just had a heart attack.

There was a look of serenity on his face as if he were dead. Rianna focused on his chest. It was still. Tears welled in her eyes as realization sunk in. Andrew wasn't breathing. She bolted over to him.

The fair-haired one caught her and hugged her to his muscular chest. He was so tall and strong that her feet never touched the floor. "There is nothing you can do," he whispered in her ear.

Sobs racked her body. "Why did you have to kill him?"

"It was his time," the dark one replied.

Rianna struggled to free herself from the one in white. He looked down on her with eyes as luminous as his skin and hair. He released his grasp and she slowly slid down his god-like body. Her hand made contact with a mammoth erection as she passed his waist. Rianna quickly removed her hand and stepped away from him. She headed toward the door.

"We cannot let her leave," the dark one said. "She has seen too much."

Rianna made a dash for the door. "I won't tell anyone. I swear." Of course she was lying. She'd call 9-1-1 as soon as she made it outside of the apartment building.

The gorgeous one in white reached for her, but she escaped his grasp. She stumbled slightly and then ran toward the living room with both men hot on her heels. In her mind she kept repeating that she had to make it to the door. Then there was the matter of getting off the eighth floor where Andrew's apartment was located. Waiting for the elevator was out, so she knew she had only two other alternatives. The first choice was to take the stairs, but the two men blocked her access to the stairs as if they had read her mind. That left her with one other option—the window. It was a seriously big drop. She shrugged her shoulders. What did it matter to her? They were

going to kill her anyway.

Rianna ran toward the open window.

"Don't," Thantos screamed.

"It's a sin," the dark one said.

"So is murder," she replied sarcastically. "It's better than dying by your hands." She hurled herself toward the window. Pain ricocheted through her entire body as she made contact with the glass. The cold air hit her body as she soared through space.