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CHIMERA ROSES:

A FAIRYTALE

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By  
Susan M. Bynum

Thesis Committee:  
Rodney Morales, Chairperson  
Steven Curry  
Todd Sammons

*To M.H.W.,  
My Support, My Inspiration, My Joy.*

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**Part One:**  
**The Magic Mirror**



Princess Jezzalyn was tired of making young girls pregnant. It was a game she had concocted to battle her innate boredom—introducing young maids to handsome young footmen, messengers, and other servants then watching the romance and hormones bud between the two. Of course, she encouraged the innocent virgins to follow the throbs of naïve loins, telling them it was natural and that everyone in the palace did it; it was just hidden from view. It amused the princess to watch bright young eyes glisten with anticipation then dull with realization as they found their panties white instead of red month after month. As breasts heaved and grew with anxiety, so did stomachs, and the queen was forced to fire yet another young maiden for her immoral decadence.

Though fun as it was to watch another woman's life shatter like broken mirrors, especially when these maidens found no support from their handsome suitors, it got to be a bit dry after a while. So on this warm autumn day, Jezzalyn was bored. With a heavy sigh, she blew charred locks from her forehead, and leaned against the cold gray stone of the castle walls, her slender body angled towards the open window. And it was there that the dullness of this otherwise tedious day ceased. Standing at the edge of the ruby and citron forest in all his rustic glory, was a huntsman, his clothes filthy, golden hair matted with dirt and sweat. Though he epitomized the handsome, rugged huntsman cliché, it wasn't really he that she was attracted to at first. It was the rabbit. Clutched in his hand by its feet, the purity of its white-as-snow fur was tainted by the blood red which seeped from its slit throat. The creature's ebon eyes were wide-open-stunned, and rightly so, she supposed, for she was sure it probably hadn't expected this grisly ending to its otherwise simple life.

There the huntsman stood, in his barbaric splendor, a bloody rabbit grasped in his hand like a peasant sacrificing to his goddess, and she watching from her tower perch. He noticed her. She made sure he noticed her. It wasn't that she was particularly beautiful, she was pretty enough, but there was something about her, she was told, that captivated, like magic almost. She didn't smile, but her eyelashes, or splash on any perfume. She needed only stare at him with her dark, ebony eyes and she had him. She led the huntsman to the dungeons, and it was there that she took him, the rabbit forgotten in the shadowed corners. She let him think he had control. Crimson smeared upon gossamer inner thighs as his hands sought the way to where he thought she would give in. She let him take her, and when she felt his release, she smiled. He had done what he was needed for.

"Go," she commanded, as she lay naked upon the dank floors of the dungeon, the pale of her skin almost glowing in the gloom, dark hair spilling out, molding into the black of the windowless room.

He looked at her in disbelief at her utter detachment. "What?"

"Go. I've no need of you anymore."

He stared at her and she ignored him, her eyes now closed. She could hear his steps striding out of the room, perhaps in anger, perhaps in embarrassment for being used. Either way, it did not matter; he had filled his place for now.



The Queen Elena was not a weak woman when it came to matters of the heart, and more importantly, the matters of decency and morality. As desperate as a chamber maid could be when she came to the queen with her story of pregnancy and woe, the disgraced had no place in her kingdom. As strong as Elena was, however, her new place in the castle with a nearly grown daughter made her feel a bit unsure, and this was not a feeling she was accustomed to. Never mind that the queen was barren and could never be with child. Never mind that her stepdaughter made sure it was known that her new mother was not welcome in the castle. Never mind that Jezzalyn had a way with her husband that she never would, a light touch of the arm got the young girl what she wanted, the perpetual smirk playing on her face giving her an air of arrogance none other could see but the Queen. It was the girl's mysterious beauty that got to the matriarch. Elena had always been considered one of the most beautiful women in her land, something she had prided herself upon. Though vanity was against her way, she felt this sin was of the least offensive and gave into it, though, she thought, it was well hidden. But the Queen was now growing older, and her beauty, something she was once so proud of, was now challenged by youth.

It happened that one autumn's morning Queen Elena found the mirror while exploring the castle. The room was within the middle corridors of the castle, where sunlight did not filter through. The Queen lit an oil lamp before entering this curious place. The room was filled with many strange objects, odds and ends, things to be forgotten, tossed into this space. The place held an air of darkness, of foreboding, and it frightened her, though fear was something she would not succumb to, and to the inner sanctions of the room she dared. There were vials filled with powders of earth brown and



moss green, bottles with dried insects. Pungent aromas clung to her nostrils, her tongue, chalky, bitter, refusing to release their grasp on her senses. Hung from the ceiling were animal pelts of a vast array, from the hide of the tawny deer, to the black fur of the wolf. Upon one of walls were shelves filled with books that looked quite old, perhaps ancient. Parchment was scattered about the room covered with strange symbols, perhaps of a language forgotten long ago, she thought. She lifted the lamp higher, and it was then that a light flashed into the room. She started, thinking that she had been caught by the owner of this perplexing place, when she realized that the glint of light had been from her own lamp reflecting off of a mirror. She chuckled to herself as she studied her reflection, the fear in her eyes slowly being replaced by amusement.

“Fancy a woman like me, a queen, being frightened of my own lamp,” she spoke to herself within the frame of the mirror.

A soft light began to emerge from the mirror, and Elena stepped back quickly. “Ah, but fear does become you, my dear highness. I doubt that any emotion could mar the beauty which is you.”

“Who’s there? Who said that?” asked the queen, casting her lamp about the room.

“Do you not want a confirmation of your beauty; for I can feel that in your heart it is the thing which you worry about most. You wonder if one younger outshines you. Do not fear, your highness, for you are still the fairest of all these lands.”

“Who are you, and what would you have with me?”

“I am the mirror of truth, and a soother of fears, and I wish nothing but to guide you and alleviate your worries. Would you not take me with you? I grow weary of sitting

here alone in this dark room. We would be of great benefit to one another; you with your beauty, me with my knowledge. We could achieve great power.”

The queen smiled. Perhaps coming here had been a good thing. She lifted the gold-framed mirror off of the wall, crossed the room and peered into the hallway to see if she was alone, and headed towards her boudoir.

Within her own chambers, Jezzalyn looked up from her vanity mirror and smiled.



In the next few months which winter followed, the household had grown accustomed to seeing Jezzalyn with a rabbit muffler, its coat pure white, placed about her neck. It seemed she was never without it, unknowingly stroking the soft fur with a seemingly satisfied smile upon her face. It was this rabbit’s white fur, in such close proximity to her wan face, which birthed the princess the nickname of Snow White. The contrast of her lily face and the white fur to her black-as-night hair was so stunning, the purity of the white so innocent, yet the look in her eyes so intense, that the princess began to create fervor amongst the kingdom, especially amongst the young men. This caused the Queen anxiety, for no one clamored at her feet.

Snow White would see these men yet offer them no hope as to having her for their wife. She enjoyed the company, or rather seeing the Queen’s reaction to her company. The winter’s afternoon was dazzling, crisp white set upon an ocean of blue; it seemed as though the sea was chasing the sun. Upon her way towards meeting one of her suitors, the princess turned towards the Queen with a smile. “Pity they don’t come to see you.

Perhaps you begin to look rather matronly, dear mother? Or maybe they come to see youth, not an old hag like you.”

“Perhaps they come to see one who so easily sways to the wishes of men, rather than one they truly respect.”

“Do not delude yourself, Mother Dearest. You know that they’d rather see a pretty, young woman like myself, than a wrinkled, withering thing like you. You are the spinster aunt that no one likes, but humors because you’re family. Even father thinks so. After all, he spends all his free time with me, does he not? I think I’ve spent more occasions

in his bed than you ever have. Perhaps if he spent half as much time with you, you’d actually have some semblance of a child by now. Or at least be an actual woman, instead of just the image of one.”

Elena felt her shoulders tense, as hard as the diamonds she wore in her crown. “Do not speak of your father that way, Jezzalyn. He would never carry on with his own child that way.”

Snow White’s lip curved sharply, a knife waiting to strike. “You’re so droll, My Queen. I never said he did. It’s funny though, isn’t it? He thinks me, his daughter, to be the most beautiful thing he’s ever set his eyes upon. He tells me this often. I wonder, does he ever say anything of the same to you?”

Elena made no response, but instead walked slowly towards her bedroom. The waning sun glinted upon her mirror, and she hurried towards it. She needed to reaffirm that she indeed was still the most beautiful, not old, not unwanted, as the mirror had repeatedly told her throughout the last few months when autumn had faded into winter.

The Queen peered into the mirror, her voice tight with barely controlled panic.

“Mirror, I pray you tell me, am I still the fairest in all these land?”

Within her sanctuary of potions and powders, the mirror in Snow White’s hand began to illuminate. She smiled, for the answer she would give this day would be different from the others.

“Though you are lovely, fair is no longer coupled with your face, Your Highness. There is one far more beautiful than you will ever be again. Snow White is the fairest of all these lands, for your beauty fades as years you gain.”

The Queen flinched as if the mirror had shattered before her. Her hand, still smooth, rose to her face, feeling for creases, for drooped skin beneath her chin. Her hair, once a brilliant and fiery ruby beneath a gold crown, now seemed to turn grey before her eyes and her eyes, which were once described as the most perfect emeralds, now looked to be as dull as pools of pea soup. She stepped away from the mirror in horror, staring at her reflection, seeing it change from her youthful self to someone much older than she should be. Elena sat upon her bed, her head dropped in her hands, unable to look at herself within the gilded frame of the mirror.

“I suppose all queens must fall into disgrace sometime or at least into hysterics.”

Snow White smirked as she stepped into the Queen’s boudoir. The princess had chosen to dress in gossamer and silk for this occasion, a pure white gown, finished with the muffler which had christened her with her new name, but her garb made her look anything but angelic; she rather looked more like the harbinger of death, the depth of her dark eyes endless and glinting with knowledge and a hint of triumph.

“What is it you want, Jezzalyn? I’ve no want for any visitors right now.”

“I just thought you might want some company, your *highness*. You do look ever so lonely, especially when father’s been gone so long on his hunting trip. You must have need to speak to some person, and since it seems no one else volunteers for the tedious task, I took it upon myself to do so.”

Elena watched the princess with contempt, the spite barely hidden from her voice. “As you’ve never had want for kindness or pity upon me, and as I’ve never had need for it, especially from you, state your business and be gone.

Snow White chuckled softly, her hands running across the queen’s shoulders before she sat upon the bed next to her. “Tsk, ts, Queen Mother, you seem to think you know me well. Perhaps you deserve more credit than I give you, for I do come in revelation of important information I thought you should know.”

Elena sat upon the bed in silence, resisting the urge to flinch at the girl’s touch, wanting to refuse to give into her bait, but wishing even more for the girl to be gone from her quarters. “And pray thee, tell me what would be so important that you must bother me within my chambers?”

“You see, dear mother, I met a huntsman a few months ago. He was quite stunning, smelling of forest, of earth, of game. I couldn’t help myself, my Queen. I snared him, captured him within me, and it would seem there is a blessing out of all of this.” Snow White leaned closer, her lips nearly touching Elena’s ear. She whispered, “It would seem that I am with child.”

Elena could feel the heat of the girl’s breath upon her face, and with it the blood drained from her body, back growing rigid and tense with the revelation of Snow White’s pregnancy. Her own barren womb constricted, as if it knew the inherent loneliness of

never being able to conceive. Fingers gripped the chenille bedspread beneath her, and she let out a slow breath, trying desperately to remain calm. “I suppose you are betrothed to this huntsman?”

“And why should I shackle myself to any man, mother dearest? It would seem that marriage,” her eyes flickered over the queen, “is a formula for a woman’s unhappiness. It also seems the cause for a rather dry spell within the bedroom chambers, unless, of course, one takes in strange bedfellows.”

“I have always been faithful to your father, Jezzalyn. Unlike you, I hold a certain amount of decency in my life,” Elena snapped.

“And unlike you, my father doesn’t seem to hold that amount of decency in his. His hunting trips always do seem to produce an astonishing amount of foxes. Not that I mind; Those foxes were always more interesting than you.”

“Your father loves me. Unlike you he has been nothing more than kind to me.”

“You really do believe that, Elena? Poor deluded woman. Age must really bring misguided illusions to your mind. For you know, my father always has, and always will love me more than you.”

The Queen gritted her teeth and shot to her feet. She stood over the girl, her blue eyes blaring with frost. “The subject is closed. You will marry that huntsman, Jezzalyn. Your life in the castle depends on it. The life of your child depends on it.”

“You threaten me? Idle threats do not sit well with me. We shall see who survives this game.” Snow White smiled coyly, then paused, her ebon eyes radiating with challenge. “And I never lose.”



*Dearest Father,*

*I write to you in a time of great urgency and fear. My life has been threatened, so I must run. A few months ago, I met a man, a huntsman, who I must admit I had taken quite a fancy to. I am ashamed to admit that I approached him, even flirted with him, but I never meant for anything to go quite as far as it did. You see, one day he took me down into the dungeon, claiming he had something to show me. I was naïve, Father, in believing that he really did have something hidden downstairs, and I followed him. It was there that he took advantage of me. I am embarrassed and ashamed, Father, for I could not protect my virtue, and he stole it from me that night.*

*A few months later, I found that I was with child, and implored your wife, my mother, for understanding, guidance, and perhaps even nurture. Of these I found none. Instead of the kindness and sympathy I expected from her, I found wrath. She says we are the cause for grace's downfall within the kingdom. Her words are filled with threats of murder, for not just me, but my child as well. You have seen her, Father, with the chambermaids, unforgiving of their lack of decency. It was the same with me, and she banished me, telling me if my face was ever shown in the castle once more, my life and the life of my child's would be ended. It is with these last words with which I run. Do not worry about me, but beware of Elena, for her temper and wrath are greater than any I have ever witnessed. Her sense of morals seems to be above her duty for her family.*

*It is with deep sadness that I go, for I know the chances of my seeing you once more are slim. I only wish that your eyes could grace the beauty of your grandchild, and I will tell the babe of the wonderful man that could have been its grandfather. I love you, father, and I can only hope that the fates one day will bring us back together again. Please bestow my love unto Elena, for I feel that she will one day realize the wrong of her doing, and regardless of her words, she will always be the only mother I ever knew.*

*With my sincere love forever,*

*Jezzalyn*

“What is the meaning of this, Elena? What have you done to my daughter?”

Marcus stormed through the boudoir doors, his dark eyes turbulent as he hunted for his wife.

“Welcome home, darling. I didn’t expect you so soon. Now if you’d kindly inform me of this travesty you speak of?” Elena didn’t rise from her seat before the mirror, but instead studied her husband through his reflection in the mirror. His clothes were rumpled from a days travel, and his normally combed hair was disheveled, a snow bank that had been raked over.

He held the letter before him. She knew the handwriting on the parchment and through Elena knew not what was written in it, she knew what it more or less contained. “This. Have you murdered her? She’s gone, and you were the wicked wretch who did



this to her. How can you sit in front of your mirror, knowing the blood is there upon your hands?”

She stood from her chair and turned to him. “Sit, you fool.” She placed her hands on the shoulders of the tall man, and forced him down upon her bed. “I did nothing of the sort. She came in here, that whore—”

“You dare call her a whore, when you—”

“--telling me,” Elena paused, challenging her husband to interrupt her once more “that she had been impregnated, by a huntsman, no less. How could I let such shame be brought upon our house? How could the royal family be represented by a girl who could not keep her legs together?”

The Queen looked towards Marcus, waiting for an answer. He seemed, for the moment, at a loss for words. “I do not know what she wrote of in that letter, but rest assured, none of it is true. I merely told her that if she remained in our good graces, she had better find herself wed before the babe is born.”

“I will not have my daughter marry the very fiend who raped her!”

“Rape? She claims rape? Nothing of that sort happened. She willingly let that peasant lay her like a common bar wench. I’m sure she’s just off throwing a tantrum somewhere. Have no worries, My King, she’ll be back within the day.”

Elena took a breath, seeing that her husband seemed to be weakening in his resolve. She smiled, and sat next to him, running a finger along his bearded jaw line, pressing her chest against his arm, her voice husky. “Besides, my love, now that we have no more interruptions, it will give us ample time to begin a new family; start fresh once more. What say you of this?”

“Don’t be absurd, Elena. I have no interest of that now. My daughter is out there somewhere, perhaps lost and afraid for her life. She takes first priority, not your silly little daydreams.” He glanced at her carelessly as he stood getting ready to leave the room. “I think it be best for now that we take separate bedrooms. It seems your womb is inept to bring me a child, and there is no reason for us to sleep any longer, not while I worry for Jezzalyn. I’d not be paying any attention to you anyhow.”

She watched as he left, the imprints of his boots tracking dirt and melted snow upon her white carpet.



For nearly a fortnight, Elena and Marcus heard none about their daughter. On the night of a waning moon, he began to dream about what had happened to his dear Princess Jezzalyn.

*The forest glade was swathed in a white fur coat, its normally rugged edges softened by plush mounds of snow. The forest was silent. No animals stirred, for the air was crisp and cold and a burrow beneath the mounds of white was more ideal than frolicking in the ice. Despite the frigid air, Marcus felt warmth, an urge to plunge beneath the warm embrace of the snow, the softness calling to wrap him beneath the fresh drifts. He treaded through the woods, towards the glade, the snow cushioning his footsteps as the plush carpets of the palace would. The place was surreal, serene. He reached the glade, and immediately sank to his knees, sifting the snow through his hands,*

*the snow like fine grains of sand and the down of a newborn rabbit, then sank beneath the welcoming blanket, bundling himself as an infant, feeling protected in its tender arms. He closed his eyes, drifting upon his cloud of snow when footsteps interrupted his daydreams. They echoed through the glade, the feet of a scared animal running for its life.*

*He lifted his head unable to move beneath the welcoming body of snow. Marcus watched as a girl came running through the forest, her ebon eyes wide in panic, hair as dark as the snow was white flying wildly behind her. Her white dress resplendent beneath a cloak trimmed with fur, a hand upon her abdomen as if she were trying to protect something on or perhaps inside it. She scrambled, her feet sinking in the deep snow, nails clutching at trees, bark peeling as she struggled to keep her balance.*

*A fervent glance backwards told Marcus that she had yet to lose her pursuers. He looked where her eyes focused, and through the trees he could see his wife, accompanied by a man. The green of her dress, her eyes, seemed to penetrate, hurting them with the obscenity of color in this otherwise pure place. Her lips, red as her scarlet hair, curved into a smile, and she turned to her companion and embraced him until it seemed they melded into one, her green swallowing his rustic garb. She turned back to the fleeing girl before them, and pointed, sending the man to hunt his prey.*

*The girl ran towards Marcus. He could see beneath her hand was a rabbit's pelt. Her eyes wide open in fear, and she stumbled before him as the hunter grew near, the rabbit dropping to the snow-laded floor, and he could suddenly feel the biting cold of the winter, seeping beneath his clothes, the soothing blankets now slowly freezing out his life.*

*She looked directly at him and uttered the words "Father. Help me" and as a hand grasped her shoulder, a red rose blossomed where the rabbit had once been.*

Elena woke hearing a voice within her room. She lit a candle beside her bed, the flame's growing light bringing her husband quaking out of the darkness, his eyes deadened, unfocused. He seemed lost, not knowing where he was going, blindly walking where his footsteps led him.

"The rabbit. She dropped the rabbit and a flower bloomed."

"Marcus? What is wrong, my love?" She sat up in her bed and watched as he walked towards the mirror, leaning his head upon it.

"My angel. Hunted. The snow must be so cold. So very cold."

Elena slid out from beneath the covers and walked towards her husband. "I pray you, please explain yourself. What angel do you speak of?"

His hands streaked down the mirror, his image blurred by the smudges left upon the glass. "Oh, how wrong I was to leave her here with that vile witch."

"What is wrong, Marcus? You're shivering! Have you come down with fever?" Her hand reached out to touch his forehead, and he slapped it away, disgusted, his eyes suddenly alive and focused upon her.

"You know what I speak of. Jezzalyn. You and your...your lover have hunted her mercilessly. I saw you capture her! What have you done with her?"

“You must have been dreaming, Marcus. This fever of yours.”

“I was not dreaming! What have you done with her? And this lover of yours? Who is he?” His hair was wild, hands pulling at the strands. She could see her own fear in the mirrors of his black eyes.

“You wish to take a lover, Elena? Then you shall repent for your sins.” He seized her arm and threw her upon the bed. She cried out as her head hit the bedpost, the pain echoing night beneath her eyes. He lifted her dress, and tore off her undergarments easily beneath his strong fingers.

Elena struggled beneath him, trying to push him away, trying to find a way to bring sanity back to him. “You don’t need to do this, Marcus! We’re married. I am your wife!”

“No wife of mine shall take another without the proper punishment.” She could feel herself tearing as he took her then. She bit her lip and could taste blood mingling with tears.



It was nearly a month before Marcus’ illness was subdued, though it seemed he never fully recovered. His eyes would glaze from time to time, and he continued to speak of his Angel and the wicked witch who had hunted her, rambling about needing to grow her rose in the dead of winter. Men had been sent out for a thorough search of the forest for Snow White to no avail.

It took another month beyond his recovery for Elena to mend from his attack on her body. She sat beside the bed, her emotions of hatred towards him alternating with

love, and also pity for his condition and the daughter he had lost. Weeks went by without Marcus having focus, any comprehension of who she was. He would often look just behind her, speaking to his Angel, asking how she was and telling her how beautiful she looked, but never did she see anyone standing there.

He recovered, and daily life resumed in the household. Elena continued to give orders to the servants, while Marcus recommenced his hunting, his trips to the forest seeming more fervent than before. No mention was made of his abuse to her; both seemed to want to forget it. Four moons went by without any disturbance, any dream, and in late spring when the roses Marcus ordered planted in the garden first bloomed, he was haunted once again with dreams of his daughter.

*Jezzalyn kneeled upon the floor, a rag in her hand as she cleaned the floors of a small house. Her stomach was slightly rounded, and she would occasionally stop her housework to rub the babe, which grew within, as if to assure the child that everything would be all right. It seemed she was at peace and this relieved Marcus greatly, that she had found sanctuary despite the previously perilous conditions. She was dressed full pink this time, her cheeks rosy despite the soot marring her perfect features. Her hair, tied back with a strip of cloth, fell against her face as tendrils escaped their hold. Again, he could hear no sound.*

*The door opened and a group of Creature-Men, seemingly identical, entered the cabin. They were things to Marcus, for he could not describe what they were; they*

*seemed to be part human, part demon, and something inexplicable, origins impossible for the King to determine. Their stature was smaller than the normal human, features rugged and worn from hard living. Their noses were crooked, their teeth yellowed, and their eyes green. The Creature-Men had faces livid with scars and pockmarks, twisted mouths sneering hungrily through their beards of varying hue as they spied the young woman on her knees. Their hair, loose and wild, fell to the floor, strands reaching out waywardly as if to capture someone in their locks. As Jezzalyn spied their entrance, she began to hurriedly scrub at a spot upon the floor, trying desperately to remove the grime. One of the Creature-Men approached the young girl. He was more repulsive than the rest, if one could imagine so. His eyes were green, slick as kelp beneath the sea with no other color except for a lone dark spot in the middle of each orb which signified sight. His beard was long and earthy and covered with spittle. He seemed to be the leader as the other six Creature-Men laughed and clapped as he reached down and squeezed her breast, now heavy and full with milk. They watched with glee, lips glistening with anticipation of the fun soon to come. Jezzalyn scurried back, slapping his hand away, her eyes terrified as she realized what he had done. Her head snapped back as the thing slapped her across the face, blood running from her nose and spilling upon her dress, upon her future child. He curled his hand into a fist and though Marcus could not hear the man, he knew the monster threatened the life of this baby. The Creature-Man reached out once more and fondled her breast. She remained silent, trembling, as her arms folded across her stomach.*

*As the others began to close around Jezzalyn, she backed away trying to protect her child. Marcus moved to attack the things, to hit them, but his fists went straight*

*through them, his shouting unheard. Jezzalyn's eyes locked upon her father's, and she crawled to him, thrusting a rabbit pelt into his hands.*

*"Please, take this! Save her. One day you will need this to save her. Please help us!" She pleaded with him, and as the men began to surround her, lust possessing their hands and faces.*

*And through the window, by the light of the moon, a face with laughing green eyes watched and smiled.*

"Your highness, it's the king. We believe he is ill once more! Hurry!" One of maids woke Elena. She slipped on a dressing gown and hurried towards her husband's chamber.

The Queen entered the room, and found Marcus at his table, clutching a rabbit pelt in one hand, a pink rose in the other. His face was streaked with tears, his eyes webbed with red. She approached him slowly.

"Are you ill once more, Marcus?"

He didn't answer. His fingers curled around the stem of the rose, the thorns pricking him, cutting into his flesh. She could see the blood pooled around the green, but he made no attempt to release the flower, nor did he seem to notice the pain. She moved towards him, her devotion stronger than her fear of his temper, and tried to gently pry the flower from his hand. He freed the blossom surprisingly easily, though his grip upon the hide was firmer than his mind.



“Marcus? Marcus?” She questioned, her brows knit as she attempted to clean the blood from his hands. He moved away from her, wandering towards the window.

He ran his hands upon his face, the blood from his fingers smearing upon his cheeks, his eyes. “How I have failed her. Those little men, those demons. Oh, what terror she must feel this night! And how I was unable to help her.”

“Do you speak of Jezzalyn, darling? Please. How can I help you?” She pleaded to him, wanting to cure whatever illness had befallen him.

The King ran his fingers through his hair, weaving crimson in white. He reached a hand out the window, his body hanging perilously over the edge. “Jezzalyn! I will help you! Come to me, I will protect you.” He began to tip towards his death, reaching for ghosts he would soon join. Elena grasped at his arm, her lighter frame trying to pull his burly figure in. With a cry, she leaned back with all her might and managed to save him, his body falling upon hers. He seemed not to notice, but merely lay upon the floor unmoving. Struggling, the Queen managed to pull herself from beneath him. She helped Marcus up, as a mother would do for her child, and without resistance he yielded. Elena led her husband gently towards his bed as he continued rambling unseeing.



Elena’s body had begun to round, as Marcus’ rape had proved fruitful. Violent as the conception was, she was overjoyed to be with child and was soon planning for its entrance into the palace. Try as she might to share the good news with her husband, her exaltations fell upon deaf ears. The only sign he showed of hearing this news was his heightened agitation whenever she told him of her pregnancy.

The King was in purgatory. He remained oblivious to anyone but to whomever he spoke to, spirits of the night that no one else could see. He ate when fed, barely bathed and refused to give up his possession of the rabbit's hide, which had mysteriously appeared that night. Summer brought about warmth and joy, but he felt none. It was now the ending of summer, the sensual times of heat and the waning days of carelessness. Nature would soon dabble fiery colors upon her trees, Her morbid humor in making a slow death beautiful. The days were spectacular, soft whites on a crisp turquoise, a triumphant finale of another season. It had been nearly two since Marcus' last dream, and yet he still remained silent to anyone but his Angel.

He dreamed once more of his daughter. She wore a crimson dress in this dream, her stomach heavy with the child soon due. Jezzalyn stood behind a haphazardly built cabin, an apple in her hand. She lifted it to her mouth looking pleased at this unexpected treat. She bit into the fruit and her eyes widened as she fell to the forest floor and remained still. Marcus knew she was dead.

Marcus ran into the forest dressed only in his bedclothes and a rabbit muffler on this chilly night. His feet were bare, covered in dust as he ran, barely flinching as he stepped on rocks. He had to find Jezzalyn. He knew not where to look, but somehow he knew he would find her. His hair was tangled with fallen leaves and twigs, a red rose tucked over his ear, eyes frantic with his urge to find his beloved daughter.

He ran for hours, never slowing, never tiring, and letting instinct take direction as it wished. Instinct proved to be correct as he happened upon a cabin deep within the heart of the forest. It looked hastily put together and unadorned—no paint or ornament upon the outer dwelling. He tried to enter the front door, but found it locked. Marcus ran

around the house, seeking entrance into this jail that had kept his daughter prisoner, and upon reaching the back he found his daughter biting down upon a brilliant red apple. He cried out, trying to stop her but his warning proved to be too late, for she fell to the leaf-strewn ground. As the king rushed to aid her, the seven Creature-Men emerged from the forest.

“Stand back,” the king said, “lest you find your doom this night.” Though he had no weapon, the wild gleam in the king’s eyes revealed that this threat was not an idle one.

One of the creatures stepped forward. “We mean you no harm, Sire, for we only wish the best for our mistress.” They then spotted Snow White lying on her bed of leaves and reached for their daggers. “What have you done with her?”

“Nothing fools! Stand back if you wish her alive again!” Marcus kneeled by his daughter, his head on her chest as he listened for life. Finding none, he pressed his lips upon hers, trying to revive her with his own essence to no avail. He slapped her face, trying to wake her. Over and over he would not stop, until one of the creatures grabbed his hand.

“She’s dead! Dead. Dead. My Angel has gone back to her maker.” Marcus grasped his hair, tearing it from its roots, a hint of madness in his grief stricken face. His hands curled into fists and began to pound the ground over and over until his knuckles split upon the earth. “Cursed maker! So Holy, indeed. Holy for taking such a beauty away from this earth? Selfish Lord for keeping her to himself. Oh Angel. My Angel. Sweet Angel. Gone.” He covered his face with his hands, dazzling drops from his knuckles budding upon her snow white dress, and wept laying himself upon her womb.

“But what is this? Movement?” He looked towards one of the men. “Quick you, come here!”

Marcus took the dagger from the man, and sliced through Snow White’s dress, the blood blossoming into her clothes, her white-dress turned crimson. He pulled apart her garb, searching through the layers of cloth for the infant. The King plunged his hand into his daughter’s womb and finding the sac that held the child captive he tore it. From this gushing of fluid and her mother’s blood, the babe was plucked by her feet and born. The child was blue, silent. Marcus shook the child, trying to revive it, yet failing.

“What hell is this? I’ve not only lost my only daughter, but also the only child of hers. How can destiny thwart me twice? What have I done to deserve such a fate.” Weeping, he caressed the child, saddened by this double loss of life. With care, he took the rabbit pelt from his neck and swaddled the child within, then placed her on her mother’s breasts.

Marcus laid his head upon his granddaughter, kissing her forehead and stroking her fair hair. From within the blanket of fur he began to feel the child stir. Marcus lifted his head, his ebon eyes focused upon the infant in amazement and watched as her eyes opened and her lips parted as she screamed for her mother. The child’s wail filled the forest.

“Miracle of miracles. She’s alive!” He stood, his hands clasped together as he turned towards the Creature-Men standing at the edge of the clearing. “Blessed Lord, thank you for sparing this child.” He leaned forward, lifting the infant into the air and showing her to the creatures, his elation greater than his fear of them. “I must get her home! I must save her!”

He cradled his granddaughter in his arms and walked past the creatures. Leaving the clearing, he heard no protest, and in amazement at his good luck Marcus glanced over his shoulders to see if he would be followed. The men, the cabin, the body had all disappeared. Marcus rubbed his eyes then held a hand above them to be sure he wasn't deceiving himself. There remained nothing but the forest clearing.

"What magic this must be. What magic, indeed." He murmured as he continued into the forest, holding the child firmly in his arms.

**Part Two:**  
**The Juniper Tree**



The child should be tossed out the window.

Elena started at the thought. What was she thinking? This was her daughter and she was oath sworn by her husband to care for the child. The queen stared at the girl's golden-haloed head. It would be so easy to make it look like an accident. After all, four-year-olds were curious creatures and curiosity didn't only kill cats. The girl could have spied a puppy out of the window and reaching to grab it, fallen out of the castle's high windows. Oops, indeed. Elena reached towards the girl, meaning to pick her up and be rid of her, but resisting, instead stroked the duckling soft locks.

What the girl needed was affection, not death.

As if reading her mother's thoughts, Rosella turned her head to nuzzle into the queen's outstretched hand. The child opened her mouth, as if to ask a question, then swiftly bit down upon the woman's index finger and suckled at the ruby droplets forming at the ridge of broken flesh. The Queen pulled back in pain and shock, then lifted her hand to slap the girl but hesitated. Her hesitation cost her for Rosella kicked her mother in the shin and ran off giggling to her father's bedroom.

Elena clutched her hand, the red blooming stains upon her chartreuse bodice. A demon could only spawn the devil.



Marcus sighed softly and settled against the trunk of an ancient oak tree. It seemed that from the moment Marcus had ripped the child from her mother's womb, the

child's life had been ill-fated. Why had she been born as blue as her eyes, without breath? Was she not meant to live? She must be, for why else would she have been brought back to life? The magic of her mother's rabbit pelt had been the miracle cure to her stillborn birth, but it seemed now not even that could save her, for the child would not eat.

The King struggled to find something that the child could live on, some sustenance for it to feed on for he had no breast in which to suckle her. Marcus had prepared a concoction of mashed berries and fed her these. When her stomach rejected the berries, he had tried other fruit and roots to no avail. It seemed as though his granddaughter would now die. The child was weak, too tired to fuss and cry, so Marcus cried for her. He held her close to his chest and stroked her head. He must find something for her to eat; he would not lose her again.

He was desperate. Marcus glanced wildly around him, searching in vain for something that she might eat, something that her stomach might be able to accept. His eyes caught sight of the dagger he had stolen from the Creature-Man, and all at once he felt relieved. Marcus knew what he must do. He took the dagger within his hand and held the tip to his finger. He didn't wince as he watched the metal blade dig into his fingertip and watched as the crimson began to pool within the cut. He held the tip to the child's mouth, squeezing gently so the blood could flow more freely and smiled as the child first seemed to sniff the air, then suckled, softly at first, then greedily as she got her first taste. He was feeding her with his own life substance.

For the next few days Marcus continually fed her from cuts upon his fingers. The more she fed, the stronger the child became and soon she grew to be pink cheeked and



rose lipped. Because of this, and her mother's love of roses, Marcus decided to christened the child with the name Rosella.

Marcus and Rosella journeyed through the forest together for two cycles of the moon trying to find their way back home. During this time, it seemed as if most of the woodland animals avoided them. In the rust-hued forest, rabbits fled when the King and his granddaughter would cross their paths. Birds, deer, raccoons were all scarce at this time of harvesting and gathering, leaving the forest silent except for the sound of wolves baying at the moon and the sharp squeaks and scuttles of rats through the dried leaves as they hunted for prey left behind by larger animals. The rodents and the wolves seemed to be the only animals to approach the duo. The red-coated mammals seemed to be unafraid and in fact seemed to befriend, if not the two of them, at least the little girl. At first Marcus feared that the hunters would hurt him and the child and have them for an autumnal meal and the king foolishly tried to hold them at bay with his dagger. The pack, however, never bared their teeth and when Marcus grew weak from feeding Rosella, the pack would bring game for the child to suckle blood from the fresh wounds. It was in this way that Marcus knew the wolves would not kill them. The wolves would protect him because he was Rosella's protector. The rats would provide Rosella companionship, for even as a newborn the child seemed to be unusually curious and observant of the world. The rats, their size not unlike the rabbits that ran away, would curl up around the child and provide the babe with extra warmth at night. It was in this way that the little family survived.



The Queen had been in her garden, cradling a large bundle to her chest when a guard ran through the garden gate. He looked pale, his eyes glassy and his body shaking. Elena's brows knit with concern. Perhaps the castle was being attacked?

"My Queen," The guard paused to catch his breath and to slow the quivering of his voice. "The King. He has returned."

Elena groaned low in her throat as the worry about the possible death of Marcus lifted from her body "Where is he," she asked, her voice urgent with the need of seeing her husband.

"He emerged just behind the stables, My Queen. He..." The guard hesitated, not knowing if he should tell her of the strange sight he and the other men had seen.

The Queen froze, her fingers and toes tingling at his hesitation. "What is it? Is he hurt? Ill?" Elena feared that some animal had attacked him, or worse, that witch had found him and tortured him mercilessly.

"No, My Lady." The guard's eyes lowered. Elena tried to meet his gaze, to be certain that he would tell the truth, no softened versions, but he stared at the ground, feet shuffling, as he began to recount what he had seen.

"They emerged from the forest, silent, like wraiths, covered with filth, with blood from their hair to their bare feet. The sun was just falling over the horizon and against the bronze of the forest it seemed as if they were demons surfacing from the very depths of hell. That wasn't the strangest thing about it all. Following the two were a pack of devil's hounds, red as the Under-God himself, and with them a mischief of rats of the same color, not in chase, but in companionship. As they...we...approached the king to

save him, they growled. Not just the wolves and the rats, but the king and even the child.”

“Child?” The queen questioned. “Was Jezzalyn carrying it?”

“Jezzalyn,” The guard replied with apparent confusion. “She wasn’t there, Your Highness. Just the King and the babe.”

Elena had been so sure that Marcus had found Jezzalyn in the forest. Why else would it have taken him so long to come home? He’d been gone two months with no word, no sign of either he or his body. She was relieved, however, to find that she was wrong. No witch in her castle—it seemed that she was at last out of her life. But where did the child come from? With a clutch in her abdomen she remembered. Elena pulled the bundle away from her chest and stared at her sleeping daughters born on the night Marcus had disappeared, two-week old twin faces, doppelgangers of one another, hardly any marks distinguishing one beautiful child from another. Born two months early, Elena was scared they would not survive. They escaped her womb minutes apart, and were tiny; two small rabbits struggling for their breath. But both had lived and they were here, healthy and swaddled together, sleeping soundly. Elena held the girls closer to her body. The Witch. She had been with child as well; a little she-devil spawned by the blood of a common huntsman.

“Why did you not save Marcus? You’ve got swords and other weapons. You should be there protecting his life with your own.” *And ripping that little devil from his arms and dashing her against a tree.* The Queen was suddenly furious with the guardsman.

“I...I came to tell you that King Marcus was home, My Queen,” The guard stammered and grew pale once more. He looked frightened and stepped a few paces back. Elena could see the cowardice in his eyes and knew then that he had run away with fear.

“And a good job you have done, dear Sir. Go inside and fetch a pint from the kitchen. You deserve it after what you have done.”

Elena strode over to where her own guards were standing at the entrance to the garden. She turned to watch the coward enter the castle then glanced to her men. “Follow him. Make sure it’s off with his head.” The Queen headed off towards the clearing her husband had just made his appearance in.

Hurrying along, Elena reached the clearing and stopped in her steps. The guardsman had been right—even in the fading twilight, the sight she beheld was a strange one. Amidst the citron hues of the ancient oaks stood Marcus and his entourage of wolves and rats, the child, tinged brown from the blood which soaked her and the rabbit’s pelt around her, cradled in his arms protectively. That rabbit’s pelt she knew so well, that Jezzalyn wore around her neck which titled the wench Snow White. She wanted to rip it from the child, rid it of any vestiges of its mother so it could grow up normal and nothing like her.

“Marcus. Are you alright?” Elena approached her husband. The wolves began to snarl and she quickly stepped back, holding the twins to her chest as they began to wail at the unfamiliar noise.

At her voice, or perhaps the twins' cries, the King seemed to come to. He looked the trio, a smile creasing his face. "Elena. I've found her. I saved her. Her child. My daughter. Our daughter."

"Marcus. Whatever are you speaking of? These are your daughters, not that...that creature." Elena held the children out towards him, making sure that the animals were far away.

"She is my daughter. And yours as well." Marcus stepped over to his wife, his eyes glittering with rapture and perhaps a little madness as well. "You may have those two if you wish. But she--she will be my princess."

"You have your princesses," Elena cried, trying to get sense into her husband, trying to have him accept the twins as his own.

Marcus stepped quickly towards his wife. "Promise me, Elena, that you will always care for my daughter no matter what."

"But—"

"Promise me!" The wolves encircled Elena and her daughters. They trained their eyes upon the bundle she held and growled, saliva hanging from their lips.

With fear that her daughters would be eaten, Elena nodded. "I swear it, Marcus. She will always be cared for."



Four-year old Rosella stood giggling in her father's room, licking droplets of blood from the corner of her lips. What fun it had been biting Mother's finger! She

loved giving people surprises, and naughty surprises were the best of all. She knew wouldn't be scolded for it; Daddy never let anyone punish her. Still laughing, she climbed upon her father's tall bed and began bouncing upon his black sheets, white eyelet dress billowing around her as she jumped up-down, up-down, a rabbit's pelt clutched in her hand like some sort of stuffed animal. After a few minutes she got bored of this and sat sprawled upon the obsidian bed, blond tendrils stuck to her sweaty forehead, cheeks a pink blush with exertion, never with shame.

Rosella glanced around the room when something glinting on her father's table caught her eye. Though heavy curtains blocked any sun from entering the room, the object glittered from its place beside the vase of red roses, tempting the child to come and play with whatever it was. The girl slid off of her father's bed, stocking feet padding lightly upon the wooden floor as she crept towards the table. As she grew close to the object, she saw that it was a mirror. It looked old, worn, like someone had used it constantly for many years.

The child picked up the mirror, and with a giggle began to primp her hair in the mirror. Humming a song her father often sang to her, she twirled around, staring at her reflection on the mirror. She danced, footprints streaking the glossy floor as she became enchanted with her own world. She was a princess and *both* her daddy and mommy loved her, not just daddy. Her hair was brushed just like her sisters' and she could lay snuggled in Mommy's bed telling stories all she wanted it. It really wasn't fair that she was always left out, just because Daddy loved her more than Mommy or Elizabeth and Emmeline. Rosella stopped her dancing and slumped down against Marcus' bed, staring at her face in the mirror. Was it that Liza and Emi were prettier than her?

“It must be. The twins are much prettier than me, and all the pretty people are loved more than the ugly ones,” Rosella pouted into the mirror. After all, her mommy was pretty and all of the men around the castle seemed to love her.

“Dear child, how could you ever say you’re ugly? You are the most beautiful creature I have ever set my eyes upon. I should know because I created you in that way...”

Rosella shrieked as her reflection changed into another woman’s, much older, almost the Queen’s age, yet much more beautiful and very familiar looking somehow. This woman had dark eyes like daddy, but her hair wasn’t white—it was as black as coal she found under her pillows at Christmas. The girl was frightened and wanted to drop the mirror but found that she couldn’t; something kept her hands attached to the mirror, her eyes unable to leave the enclosure of this strange woman’s face. Rosella began to cry.

The woman chuckled softly. “Hush now, child. Do you think I mean to scare you? What kind of mother would do that to their only daughter?”

Rosella sniffled softly, and used her free hand to wipe away the tears. This woman’s words had caught her attention and had, at the least, stopped her crying for now. “But you’re not my mommy. Mommy is.”

“Silly girl. Of course I’m your mommy. Do you think that horrible Queen is your mother?” The woman’s eyes flashed with slight annoyance as she mentioned the Queen, but softened back to affection for the child.

The girl nodded fiercely. “My mommy’s the queen. She...takes care of me. Sort of...when she’s not too busy.” And there weren’t many of those times, Rosella thought. Mommy was usually too busy with everyone else to play with her.

“Has she ever told you that she loved you? Has she ever stopped to listen to you, to hug you when you’re frightened, to comfort you when you’re sad? Think of it, child. Doesn’t she love the twins more than she’s ever loved you?”

Rosella’s face crumpled. What the lady was saying was absolutely true, but the child had denied the thoughts up until now. With her free hand, the girl pulled close her rabbit’s pelt and began to cuddle it for comfort.

Jezzalyn crooned to the child, calming her, making her feel warmth. “Rosella, has your father ever told you where that rabbit came from?”

Rosella nodded. She was easily distracted and stopped crying. “Daddy told me that when I was born I was blue and almost died. He says that he wrapped me up in the rabbit and like magic I became alive.”

“And doesn’t it seem that the Queen hates that rabbit?”

Once more, the girl nodded. Jezzalyn continued. “Doesn’t it seem strange that your mother would hate something so much that somehow saved your life?”

Rosella paused. What this woman was telling her made lots of sense.

“Do you want to know why she hates it so much? It was because she hated me. Your daddy never loved her like he did me. I made that rabbit, Rosella. It was because of my love that you’re alive today.”

The child’s blue eyes became wide. It was the first time she had ever heard a woman telling her that she loved her. It was the first time it seemed that any woman had cared about her. “You love me?”

Jezzalyn laughed softly. “Of course, silly child of mine, I’ve loved you since before you were born.”



It seemed as though Rosella's heart was being contented. For once someone other than her father loved her. Before the child could think too much, Jezzalyn hurried on.

"Do you want to see something special? A secret only you and I shall know about?"

The child nodded. "Yes, please, ma'am."

"Call me mother, dear child, for it's what I am."

"Yes, please...Mother." Though it felt strange for the child to say it, she nevertheless felt a thrill of pleasure as she did so.

The reflection in the mirror began to change shape, colors whirling about in the glass. When the vision calmed, she could see her sisters sitting in the room, playing with their dolls.

She could hear their voices chattering about what they would do tomorrow. Rosella clapped her hands together, delighted. "Am I really seeing them...Mother?"

Jezzalyn's voice came through the looking glass. "Yes. You're seeing exactly what they're doing in their bedroom at this exact moment."

"Can they hear me?"

"No, they can't unless you want them to."

The girl bounced excitedly in place, pondering the possibilities of pranks she could pull upon her sisters. "Oh, Mother! This is the best present I've ever gotten."



For the next few years, Rosella used the mirror to pull silly pranks on her sisters. She would watch the twins in their bedroom and listen to their conversations to see where

they would go on their adventures. Rosella would then race to whatever destination the twins had chosen and dig a trap in their path for one of them to fall into (with often a wolf waiting for them at the bottom; they never hurt the twins, just helped them to soil their dresses) or set snares for their gowns to get caught on. She would pop up unexpectedly in places when the twins had taken great pains to hide their destination from their outsider sister. When this happened, Rosella would stand smugly with her arms crossed, a rat perched upon her shoulder like a pet bird. She knew how afraid of rats her sisters were and laughed uproariously when double shrieks emerged from the redheads as she held the large rodent out for them to pet. Once she even slipped cow's dung into a present the twins had made for their mother. Rosella claimed credit for the real gift they'd gotten their mother. Though it didn't win Rosella any of the Queen's love, the twins did get sent to their rooms. For ten minutes. Time and time again, Rosella would reveal secrets she had overheard, sometimes embarrassing ones, causing the twins to accuse one another of being a gossip and standoffs that would last for days at a time. She never tried to befriend her sisters, but continued to cause them torment and strife for the fun of it.

Alongside the power of the mirror was learning the ways of her mother. Secured in a room away from the main quarters of the castle, Rosella would enter her mother's sanctuary and learn the magics of her ancestors. The shelves resembled an apothecary filled with marvelous things she could not yet identify. Some resembled dried insects and animal parts, the other jars housed stranger aromatic powders in multicolored hues which stung her nose when the curious girl tried to smell them. She began her education here, reading spells out of books, mixing various salves and tinctures. Many were beneficial; coming from the natural ingredients in the forest they would cure fevers, rash,

and many other ailments that may affect her. Others were more mystical, causing personalities to change, forgetfulness, and love. Soon, her mother said, she would no longer need ingredients to create this magic. She would be strong enough to harness the power within herself.

As she grew older, Rosella began to reject the ministrations of her mother. She wanted to live a teenager's life and that included tormenting her sisters by use of the mirror and other potions. She would use the mirror to her advantage and a simple love tincture to steal the would-be courtiers of Elizabeth and Emmeline. Though she was never interested in romance herself, the fact that she would and could move in on the girls' crushes before they had a chance to would delight Rosella; seeing the twins' faces as they caught her kissing a potential beau painted a picture in her memory, the endless disappointments and anger playing over and over again. This proved to be an even more enjoyable game because of the fact that the queen and the twins seemed to ignore her existence otherwise. Caught up in her need to assert her independence and selfish interest in her own joy, Rosella ceased to learn her mother's way and began to live what she considered to be a "normal" life of continual strife with her stepmother and sisters. From her mystical realm which Rosella could never quite discover, Jezzalyn was patient. She knew her daughter would need her and once again come back to her ways.

Because of the continual torment to her daughters, the Queen began to take revenge on Rosella by treating her as a servant and trying to subject her to chores like scrubbing floors and washing the clothes. Each time, however, Marcus would save his daughter from the labor, causing resentment to rise even higher in his wife.

During this time it seemed that Marcus began to pull away from his household. He began to resume his hunting trips once more, leaving Rosella on her own for weeks at a time. She would catch him occasionally muttering to himself something about finding his angel in the depths of the forest. He spent great deals of time in the cellar, but would never reveal what he did down there. Though she was concerned for him, he seemed to be snappish when she questioned him about it. He was otherwise gentle with her, so she left him to his own accord, and though she felt lonely without her father, she continued her games with the twins. With her magic tinctures and special mirror, Rosella felt powerful. At fifteen she felt that nothing could bring her down.



“Father?” Rosella opened the cellar door and stepped in.

He stood there, alabaster hair unkempt, shiny with grease at the roots, trailing to dull streaks of soot. He rocked back and forth—toe-heel, toe-heel—eyes clenched, hidden in his hands, black-tipped nails clawing into his head as if to block out unwanted thoughts. But the half-smile on his face showed that maybe those thoughts were not so unwelcome.

Rosella stepped towards her father, arms reaching out to grasp him, to help him out of his seeming pleasure-torment. At sixteen, she was still dwarfed by him. She stood upon her toes, her hands lingering inches above his shoulders when he lashed out. His fist met the wooden wall with a solid crash, splintering beneath his large knuckles. His

knuckles had been mere inches from her face. Shaking with surprise, with fright that her father would be any kind of violent with her, Daddy's Girl, she stepped back quickly.

"Daddy, what's wrong?" She folded her arms around her own shoulders, clutching close the rabbit's muffler she'd put on before descending into the chilly cellar.

He stared at her, black holes of eyes darker than the secret corners of the room where rats hid. His hands slammed against the wall once more in answer. Marcus covered his face once more in his hands and began to rock toe-heel, toe-heel. Her stomach tightened and began to sting from the onslaught of acids building up from the shock of seeing her loving father so suddenly ill. She could hear the cracking of his ankles as his body swayed.

Rats began to hiss from those secret corners, scuttling out to protect their mistress from this unexpected outburst. At the sound of the rodents, Marcus kicked the cellar door shut and continued to kick at it until the doorframe splintered. Rosella was terrified. For all the violence she had caused and seen, she had never seen her father this way. She watched in horror as he retreated once more into the dark recesses of the cellar, staring at Rosella venomously then disappeared into the shadows. The rats ceased their hissing. She yanked open the cellar door and hurried out of the underground room, her stomach lurching, her feet stumbling as she ran down the hallway and up the stairs into the fresh light. It was there that she vomited, her fear exiting blood red lips.

Elizabeth and Emmeline stood at the top of the steps, identical smirks upon their faces, two pairs of green eyes glittering with glee as they watched their sister, sweaty and red-faced, wiping the vomit from the corner of her lips.

“Mother tells us father’s gone crazy. Absolutely insane. We figured it would happen soon enough, seeing how badly he treats Mother and us,” one of the twins taunted. Both were dressed in the same jade gown, red hair pulled back and crowned with emeralds and pearls, and with her worry for her father she couldn’t tell them apart.

“He’s your father, too,” admonished Rosella, blue eyes hardening with grief, with anger. “And he’s right to treat you the way he does, you wicked, horrible things.”

“Haven’t you learned by now, peasant?”

“He’s your father, not ours.”

“He’s never treated us like we were his.”

“We don’t even look like him.”

“Just like you don’t look a thing like us.”

The twins slowly circled around Rosella, their voices coming rapid fire, confusing her, making her dizzy. “So if Daddy isn’t your father, then your mother’s the whore I’ve always said she was.”

“No, you stupid peasant, Father’s our father, he just never acts like it.”

“But in all honesty, he’s not really *your* Father.”

“What are you talking about? How can Daddy be not mine? We’re sisters, you idiots.” Rosella’s mind felt foggy. With the dizzying turns of the twins and her thoughts still on her Father, she felt as though comprehension was swimming in a thick moat. She couldn’t think clearly.

“You’re really stupid, aren’t you?”

“Yes, really dumb. Figures for a peasant like you.”

“We’re all the same age, dear Rosella, yet you don’t look a thing like us. How is that? Shouldn’t we be triplets instead of twins?”

“We’ve got mother’s hair and eyes, father’s nose and smile, not that we’ve seen it much. You’ve not one of her features, hardly any of Father’s if any.”

Rosella lifted her chin. Her pride began to take over her grief. She knew that Elena wasn’t her mother—that had been resolved years ago by the appearance of Jezzalyn in the mirror. But her Father not being her own had never occurred to her. He was her protector, her only friend besides the rats and the wolves. She was so unlike her sisters, so less interested in boys and gowns. She had always assumed it was because she had gotten her traits from her mother. They were their Mother’s daughters, she was her father’s. “Liars. You trick me, trying to make yourselves seem so superior when in fact you know you’re not.”

“Mother says that Father is your grandfather.”

“Your mother was his daughter, her lover a common huntsman, if that be the case.”

“We think that your mother was Father’s mistress.”

“Mother always told us how close they were.”

“How his ‘angel’ would always stroking Father’s arm, whispering things into his ears.”

“So that makes you nothing but a bastard child created by her Father-Grandfather and his loving lover daughter.”

Rosella closed her eyes, the stress of her Father, this revelation crashing around her and pouring down her face. “Stop it!”

The twins leaned in close, reflections on either side of Rosella’s face, whispering in her ears. “You’re worse than a servant-girl’s bastard.”

“You’re a love-child made of sin.”

“Shut-up. Shut your goddamn mouths.”

“A creature of incest.”

“And now your father’s gone mad with grief.”

“That his poor Angel is dead.”

“And lives in the dark cellar.”

“Amongst the rats and soot and cinders.”

“And you, Rosella, shall be his Cinderella.”

“Taking your Mother’s place.”

“Shut up!” Rosella pushed the twins aside ran off towards her room

The twins burst into laughter as they watched their sister hurried departure. “The rosebud has broken, now nothing but a Cinderella,” taunted Elizabeth as she shared a satisfied look with her sister.



The taunting continued for weeks as Rosella moved into cellar to take care of her father. “Cinderella,” her sisters would call as she headed towards the room her father sojourned in. She grew exhausted in trying to keep her own sanity as Marcus continually



lashed out against her, splintering his hand with fragments of wood. Each time his fist hit the walls, her stomach tightened and she could feel the bile linger at the base of her throat. She tried to nurse him, to pull the wooden pieces from his hand, to wrap his fists with bandages, but he didn't seem to feel the pain as he pulled away from her, aiming his kick at the shelves beside her. His hand grew swollen with pus, and his eyes looked feverish, but still he remained standing, rocking. Her Father didn't speak to her and remained retreated in the dark corners.

The rats were her only company.

She spoke to them to hear a human voice, even though it was her own, and they seemed to understand what she said to them, their squeals comforting to her. She often took them into her hands and held the rats against her face, feeling their soft fur against her cheek, their tails wrapped around her wrist in friendship.

Rosella only emerged from the cellar to fetch food for her, the rats, and her father, though he refused to eat any of it. Her once golden hair was nearly black from sleeping atop piles of cinders, the softest thing she could find for a bed down in the dank room. Her clothes were streaked with ashes, her face grey with coal dust. On the twelfth day of her father's sickness, she climbed the stairs to find the twins at the top.

"So, Cinderella, has your father been having fun with you? From your rumpled clothes and your ashy hair, it would seem that you've been having a party down there." Elizabeth's lips curled in amusement.

"Go to hell," Rosella motioned to pass the twins, but they blocked her path.

Emmeline laughed, leaning close to Rosella's ear. "Perhaps you're going as crazy as he is, Cinderella. We hear you talking to the rats as if they're your children. Maybe

they are...after all, what else kind of children would you and your Father-Grandfather spawn? No doubt they'd be as ugly as rodents."

Rosella could hear her Father pounding upon the walls in the cellar beneath her, and the twins chortled with laughter.

"He's mad, completely mad."

The pounding upon the walls, the spiraling laugh of her sisters entrapped her mind, and Rosella struggled to maintain a hold on her self. Though her body shook with anger, with exhaustion, she refused to let the twins see that inside she was falling apart. Head held high, she slid between the two girls and headed towards her room, silent tears in her eyes, but none on her cheeks.

In the confines of her bedroom, Rosella sat surrounded by the billowing ruby gossamer canopy which enveloped her massive wine-sheeted bed. Her gown perfectly matched the sheets and blended, so it seemed she was an apparition, red rosebud lips upon a white face and nothing more. She held a golden-edged vanity mirror front of her, staring deeply at her trembling face reflected in its smooth surface, breathing deeply to calm her shaking limbs. The metal handle and frame were antiqued, dulled from years of handling, yet the mirror remained intact, glass unscratched, unscathed even through constant use. The room remained dim, heavy cream curtains keeping the sun's cheerful rays from entering.

“Please help me. I don’t know what’s wrong with Daddy. Please, I need help.” Rosella whispered to her reflection, looking into frightened cerulean eyes which stared back at her. Slowly the eyes began to darken until they were coal black, calm ebony upon sharp ivory. She breathed a sigh of relief as her mother’s face smiled at her from the mirror.

“Now what is it that’s wrong, my dear Rosella? Your eyes look as if they hold Atlas’ weight within them,” Jezzalyn questioned her daughter, though her words seemed casual, not overtly concerned.

Rosella clutched the mirror tightly, tears running down her cheeks. “Daddy. He’s not himself. I went down to the cellar and he was rocking back and forth, covering his eyes like something was eating him, like he was haunted by something horrible. He looked to be in pain, but at the same time he seemed pleased. I don’t know what to do, Mother. I don’t know how to help him.”

“Dear girl, don’t worry about your father. I’ll take care of him. He’ll be fine.”

“But Mother. Daddy....he almost hit me tonight. I think he was trying to hurt me.” Rosella whispered the words as if she were afraid someone would overhear, holding the mirror close to her face to lose herself in the sanctuary of her mother’s eyes.

Jezzalyn looked annoyed with her daughter. “Silly child, your father would never hurt you any more than he would’ve hurt me. He never laid a hand on me; do you think he could ever do the same to a creature conceived by me? We are his flesh and blood.”

Her words brought to mind the horrid thoughts her “sisters” had taunted her with. “Mother...,” Rosella hesitated, not knowing if her questions would bring about her mother’s wrath. She had never experienced it towards herself, but seeing her anger

towards Elena and the twins, she suspected that Snow White would not be any gentler with her than she had been with the other three.

“Yes, Rosella,” Her mother seemed composed once more, and though her eyes were dark pools of tranquility, her voice soothing, calming, Rosella didn’t feel at peace. Thoughts swirled about her mind, whispers of infidelity of sin. She knew that her mother was a woman of enchantment, but she didn’t know she was a succubus as well, or at least something like it. She couldn’t believe that her Father would ever do such a thing.

“The twins told me something...something about you and Father. That you’re my mother, and he’s actually my grandfather. That you two...” She trailed off, wanting to look away from the deepness of her mother’s eyes reflected back at her in the mirror but knowing in order to seek the truth she would need to train her own eyes upon Jezzalyn’s.

Her mother smiled. It was not the reaction she had expected. “And since when do you believe in anything the twins tell you?”

“But they said that Elena told them...”

“Foolish creature. I thought you would know by now that those three would do anything to hurt you. They’re the ones that would love to see you snared within thorns or attacked by your own animals, not your Father. But we shall pay them back for the rumors they spread.” Jezzalyn’s smile curved a wicked check of crimson.

Her daughter’s smile mirrored her own.

“You look to be the wolf that swallowed the girl, dear Mother.” Her mind was finally at rest; Mother was right. The Queen and the twins had never done anything to make her life easy. Cinderella, indeed. “What is it that you have in mind?”

“The twins prepare for a ball. It seems that the Prince is looking for his bride-to-be. We both know that your *sisters* deserve nothing more than an ass.”

“And what shall you have me do, Mother?”

“Go and plant your rabbit’s pelt in front of the rosebushes in the garden. In three days time, you will find everything you need for the ball. Smile, darling, you will soon have yourself a new husband.”



Rosella did as she was told. Though the rabbit’s pelt was one of her beloved treasures, a vestige of her mother which had saved her life, she buried the snow-white fur and covered it with earth. She checked upon it for the next two days and found nothing changed or out of the ordinary, but upon the third evening when the sky was bruised and dotted with welts a juniper tree appeared in front of the rosebushes. Its trunk seemed to be strips of bark fused together, twisted and shaped in human form; branches, arms which held up the weight of twigs and leaves; leaves, instead of green needles, of unflawed white, starkness upon brown. Just beneath where limbs met in perfectly formed V’s was a knot. This knot looked like a woman, so much like her mother that Rosella gasped. It was then that she heard the wind through the Juniper leaves, each leaf playing with another until it sounded like laughter surrounding her.

*Climb me as the day you first were born.* The tree seemed to whisper to Rosella. She understood and obeyed the command, slipping off first her shoes, then her azure gown and naked she began to pull herself up into the Juniper’s arms. There, within the clefts of the branches, she found laden within the white leaves three fruit, full and red and

bigger than her father's large fists. It seemed that the girl knew what to do. She picked the first and upon the Juniper's limbs she broke the fruit and lifted it close, its sweet musky scent wafting up to her nostrils. The juice spilled over her body, binding, enveloping, caressing her limbs, her breasts. She moaned softly and looked down. Rosella saw that the juices had created a glistening gown upon her, opalescent gossamer over flesh, satiny to the touch and delicate to the eye. The dress was cut low and caught the light without the help of jewels or glittery things. It was a dress created just for her.

She plucked the next fruit and cracked it carefully over a limb, as one might do an egg. With great precision, she peeled away the top half of the fruit. It was hollow, save for the fluid within its skin. She sank her feet within the warmth, and felt the liquid massage her toes, her heels, and mold something upon them. As she pulled her feet from the moist confines of the fruit, she found a pair of glass slippers encasing them. Fragile and almost invisible to sight, they molded her arches and toes perfectly.

Rosella plucked the final fruit from the Juniper's arms, and the branches swayed and cradled the girl gently to the ground. She broke the fruit upon the base of the tree and found the flesh of the fruit ripe within. Her wolves and rats came bounding towards her, and she fed them the fruit. They transformed before her eyes, the wolves into sable horses and the rats into auburn footmen. The rind of the fruit became her coach and she was now ready for the ball.

"Thank you, Mother," Rosella whispered. She was reborn, a new woman. As she climbed into the coach, the branches of the juniper tree waved in the wind, and she smiled as she closed the door. The sable horses howled and carried her off to the castle.

In the confines of her chaise, Rosella leaned back against cushioned seat. She knew that her sisters had been planning for an event like this almost all their lives. Though they were princesses themselves, the Prince's kingdom was adjacent to theirs and marriage would prove to be wise addition to their fortune. Though the sisters pretended to spat over who would marry the prince, Elizabeth and Emmeline knew it didn't matter which one of them were the bride; both would benefit from the union. The Prince also had younger brothers, and one of them could be paired up with whichever sister remained unchosen. The Queen had stressed that the twins both look and act their best tonight and to do whatever it took to win themselves His Royal Highness' heart, even if might mean offering up their chastity for sake of a proposal. It was a night which would change their lives.

Rosella had watched the girls in her mirror, primping for the ball, curling their hair and tightening corsets so that their chests would almost spill over. Elizabeth would be dressed in a red gown tonight, rubies and diamonds to accompany her wardrobe. Emmeline would be green with emeralds and jade. They both giggled excitedly and gossiped about how handsome the prince was, though the girls knew he was only mediocre looking and spoiled. His wealth made him the most attractive bachelor in the lands; after all his money could afford to bring brides-to-be from miles away. The twins didn't know that his desire to feed his ego had caused a tantrum so large his parents felt they had to throw the ball, not their wishes for him to be married at such a young age, for he was only eighteen. But women throwing themselves at the prince's feet seemed to be a great sport to him, and the king and queen generally gave their eldest son what he wanted. Fortunately Rosella knew this. She would get him to settle down.

The coach rolled to a stop and the door opened. Against the black ink of the sky, the castle loomed like a great host inviting its guests to try their hands at catching a genuine prince. Her footmen accompanied her to the door, and as she entered the large ballroom she saw the forest of women standing to wait their turn with the prince and the many men hoping to lift the spirits of those rejected. Near the front of the room, where a grand golden throne sat, she saw her two sisters, Elizabeth with her finger running up the Prince's chest, and Emmeline whispering in his ear, her lips seeming to be tickling his lobes. He didn't look too displeased and in fact reached around Emmeline and grasped her rear firmly to which she merely threw her head back with a peal of laughter.

Rosella stepped into the crowd, seeming to be fluid, invisible as she weaved amongst the throng towards the trio. No one seemed to take notice of the girl, but yet it seemed they parted allowing her passage towards the back of the ballroom. She could hear Elizabeth's voice as she drew near.

"You know, my dear Prince. They say two is oft' better than one. Imagine the possibilities you could have with a set of twins."

He was about to remark, when Rosella appeared before the three.

"Good evening, my Liege. Might I have the pleasure of having this next dance with you?"

The Prince turned from the twins and set his sights upon Rosella. He seemed to forget about the women beside him as his eyes tasted the sight before him. The Prince gazed at Rosella's finely etched features then stared as he took in the nude gown which looked to be a part of her body and molded her womanly shape to perfection. Her



décolletage was sublime, unmarred by blemishes and smooth until it rose into two generous offerings tempting an admirer to try the fruit beneath the peel.

He nodded his consent than took Rosella's small, white hand into his won.

"You must not reside within my Kingdom, my fine lady, for I've never seen you in these parts before and I know all of the beautiful women in my lands."

Rosella inwardly smirked at his trite comment. She was sure he had used that phrase with many other women before her. She was also sure, by the dazed and dreamy look in his brown eyes, that this was the first time he meant it.

"Why, my Prince," Rosella answered, her voice a soft purr, "Surely you must know that the best treasures are hidden. After all, you are a connoisseur of fine and luxurious things, are you not?"

"It would seem that you are right, my Lady." The prince chuckled softly. "How, pray tell, did you know, might I ask?"

"Why I could tell by the way you dress and how you well you hold your head. It seems you are a man of the best stock, even as elite as princes are." She smiled at him as he whirled her around the marble dance floor.

The twins had been completely forgotten by their suitor.

It seemed that the Prince was enchanted, besotted with the image before him. With a backwards glance over her shoulder, she smirked to her sisters knowing they recognized her and began to dance with their beloved Prince.

"In all my years, I've never seen anyone quite the vision as you were. You seem to be an Angel, dropped into the middle of the room for only me to behold," The Prince

whispered to Rosella, his eyes fastened upon her face almost unblinkingly as they continued dance.

Rosella refrained from rolling her eyes and merely smiled sweetly at the man. “Why, of course, my dear prince. At the moment I saw you it seemed that I knew you would be meant for me.”

The Prince led her then to the sweeping drapes of the high-ceilinged ballroom. He dipped Rosella backwards, and placed his lips upon her neck, hungrily nuzzling the porcelain skin. His lips made their way down towards her chest, and he buried his face within her breasts. Rosella smiled softly and let him have his way with her. She felt his tongue flicker beneath the low cut bodice of the gown and find its way towards the pink nubs hidden beneath the gossamer. She moaned softly, letting the Prince think he was exciting her, and from the hardness she could feel between his legs, she knew she was exciting him. His hands reached lower and crept towards her skirts, lifting them slowly. He ran his hands along the silken skin of her calves, her knees, to the moistness of her thighs. He gasped as he found no undergarments beneath, nothing but freedom to his probing fingers. He slid his fingers between the slippery crevices and felt the hard knob within. She moaned once more and pressed her body closer to him. He slid his fingers lower, to the precious depths within her, but before he could slide within her, however, Rosella stopped him.

“Cease, darling. We’ve plenty time for that later, and I promise you will feel and taste things more exquisite than you’ve ever experienced. For now, let us dance the night away.”

She nuzzled his neck then pulled him out from behind the drapes. The duo glided across the spacious floor, dance after dance. The high ceilings of the ballroom, the luxurious décor of silk tapestries and golden flora, made it seem for most that this was all a dream. For Rosella this was not a dream, however, but a job she had set out to accomplish.

She could feel the twins' eyes boring into her. With satisfaction she pressed her body against the prince's and weaved her fingers within his. She could smell her musk on his hands. Around and around they spun and as they passed the twins once more the Prince asked Rosella, "My beautiful and most precious nymph. What is your name? I must know it?"

With a soft laugh, she looked over to her sisters and in a clear voice she knew Emmeline and Elizabeth could hear she replied, "Why, my name is Cinderella."

"Cinderella? But how could such a creature as you be named after soot and ashes?"

"Like cinders I remain in your mind until you jostle me. Then I will be airborne and leave nothing but fragments in your memories."

He seemed to be satisfied with her answer and tilted his head down to kiss her. She obliged him and let the Prince embrace her time and time again between whispers of devotion, love, and lust. She let his fingers roam over her body as she slipped her hand between them and into his pants, feeling the smooth hardness that ached to enter her, then releasing as she felt him quiver with excitement. The Prince groaned as she teased him, pulling her closer, running his lips over her neck, her ears, and Rosella cared not who

watched them. In fact, she preferred that everyone see the devious acts that further cemented the fact that she had the Prince wrapped about her.

It was midnight and Rosella knew that she must leave in order to lure the Prince away from her sisters and into marriage. The Prince was a hunter by nature and the chase of such a provocative rabbit would snare him instantly. With one last embrace, she pulled away from his arms and began to run through the crowd, the magic of her mother allowing Rosella to slip through the crowd easily. As she reached the steps of the castle leading towards her waiting coach, she pulled off a glass slipper and set it upon the stone then hurried to footmen. She allowed the Prince one last glimpse of her and she vanished into the chaise and rode off towards home.

“Wait, my Cinderella,” The Prince called after her and knelt in lust and in grief as his love flew from him. At his knees he found her glass slipper and held it within his hand. “A fragment is all I have left.”

The twins, seeing their sister flee, ran towards the castle entrance. There they attempted to comfort their prince in hopes of salvaging their former place with him, but he merely shoved them aside as he spoke sternly to his Father and his guards. “Come. We must begin to hunt for Cinderella.”

The search for the Prince’s bride spanned five kingdoms; of course the name “Cinderella” proved to be fruitless, for there was no such woman. With determination to find his princess however, the Prince went with his servants to each household to try each woman with Cinderella’s glass slipper, but no woman’s foot seemed to fit the delicate

shoe. Although it seemed to be of a common size, the glass slipper either shrunk or enlarged when being tried upon a lady and therefore no woman would ever fit the infamous slipper left behind by a beautiful and mysterious lady.

The story of Cinderella spread far and wide, and it seemed that everyone volunteered to try and fit the shoe of the mystical woman. The Prince finally came upon the last castle where he knew the twins to be living. Though he knew that neither woman was his precious Cinderella, he could not withhold the offer to try on the glass slipper, it was a promise to every woman in the land that whoever fit the shoe would become his next bride.

The Prince knew nothing of Rosella.

Through both Marcus' and Elena's decisions, for very different reasons, Rosella had rarely been let out of the house and introduced to the outside world. Marcus wanted to keep his daughter chaste, and Elena simply refused to acknowledge that Rosella belonged to her. Because the twins had never shown any particular interest in the Prince before the ball, Rosella had never had the desire to meet the man in the adjoining kingdom.

The twins squealed with delight as the Prince arrived with his servant, the shoe perched precariously upon a pristine velvet pillow. The Queen hovered about excitedly, hoping that one of the girls would fit the shoe and marry the prince. Rosella watched from the upstairs floor as Elizabeth sat down to try on the shoe first. The servant gently took a hold of her foot and began to slip it into the glass slipper. With a triumph, Elizabeth began to smile as it seemed that her foot would fit the shoe.

“It fits Mommy, l..” Her smile faded, turning into a howl of pain as the glass of the slipper began to cut into her heel, slicing off the end of her foot as the shoe slid on. The glass slipper turned red as blood began to trickle around the clear glass. With fury, Elena yanked the shoe off of her daughter’s foot. She threw it upon the ground shattering the glass. In rebound, the glass few upwards, striking Emmeline in the eyes. With a shriek, Emmeline held her face in her hands, tears of pain mingling with blood.

“I can’t see, Mommy. I can’t see,” She wailed, her arms outstretched as she tried to find her mother, her sister, someone.

Furious, the Prince stepped to Elena and slapped her across the face. “You, wench, you have cost me my wife!”

Stunned with pain, with grief that she had blinded her daughter, the Queen took Emmeline into her arms and held her, sobbing with guilt, stroking the girl’s red hair with her hand. She turned and took the bleeding Elizabeth into her arms as well, and the three wailed as the Prince continued to curse around them.

Amidst the chaos, Rosella appeared.

From within the confines of her skirt she produced the twin of the glass slipper and slipped it on her foot. The Prince rose, his eyes locked upon his ascending angel as she transformed once more into his Cinderella. She smiled at him and approached, her eyes triumphant as she viewed the clump of women who were her relatives.

The Prince dropped to his knees. “My lovely Cinderella, it would do me a great honor if you would become my wife.”

With a shriek, Elizabeth tore herself from her sisters and hobbled towards Rosella, streaks of red trailing behind her upon the grey marble floor. “No! He was mine. You had Father...leave me my Prince.”

With a laugh, Rosella leaned towards the Prince and placed a kiss upon his lips. “I would be honored if you would be my husband.”

Rosella left with the prince, leading him towards her bedroom. She left Elizabeth in a crumpled heap upon the floor, her mother and her blind sister clinging on to one another and prepared herself for her new life as Queen.

## **Part Three: Chimera Roses**





She fell. Splayed naked upon the cold marble on the edge of the wolf skin rug, Rosella cradled her wine stained cheek and smiled demurely at Johnson. She was obsessed with him. Since she'd won him at the ball, he'd been brash, rude, and often violent with her. After the first few months, anyhow. He began their marriage with romance. Roses, lilacs, pearls and diamonds were presented to her upon pillows of silk. He wooed her, whispered sweet somethings into her ears, though they meant nothing to her. Johnson tried to coddle her into their wedding bed and she would have none of it.

When none of these schemes worked, Johnson began taunting Rosella, alternating between calling her a prude and a whore, a tease and tainted. And when these tactics still resulted in all hardness and no relief, he began to use his aggression, taking what was his rather than begging for it, for in his mind she was his wife and therefore his property. Johnson shoved his wife upon the bed, tore off her laces and frills and possessed her. And she loved him for it. His animalistic behavior and refusal to listen to her pleas for him to stop created a delicious excitement for her; she was his apple. She knew now she would never be given, but always taken.

As she smirked at him from atop the wolf skin, he grasped a handful of her hair to bring her face close to his.

"You will get him to leave. Your father is nothing but a disgrace to this household. I don't need that insane man running around, scaring my guests away with his babbled nonsense."

Rosella tried to shake her head, but he grasped her hair tighter. She merely smiled at him. "Johnson, darling, how could I ever get rid of my dearest father? He's the love of my life."

In the beginning of their marriage, Rosella had convinced Johnson to let her family move into his castle. Her father, whom she loved dearly, was a necessity. She didn't trust any other to care for him, and since his violent rampages had lessened and he began to receive her well again, she wanted him close to her. Her stepmother and sisters, however, were a different story. Those three she wanted to taunt; she flaunted her marriage and perfect body in front of twins' deformed bodies, holding her prize above their heads.

Oftentimes the pranks she played as a child would surface once more in a crueler manner. Once, Rosella linked arms with the blinded sister, Emmeline, and began to limp as the heelless Elizabeth would. Slowly, they trod down the hall, Rosella thumping along, leading the blind one towards her bedroom. Suddenly, the wicked trickster gasped and her gait became smooth. Excitedly, Emmeline turned to Rosella and, unable to see, hugged her tightly for she thought that Elizabeth had overcome her crippled foot, and Rosella began to laugh. With horror, Emmeline pushed her stepsister aside, and with tears in her unseeing eyes felt her way down the hallway towards her sister's chambers.

In front of Elizabeth, Rosella would procure the single glass slipper. She would put the clear shoe upon one foot, and because it was heeled, would limp across the room. With a smile, she would look directly towards Elizabeth, and her limp would become more pronounced. Rosella would then make her way to her husband's room, her laugh trailing behind her, wrapping Elizabeth in a shroud of ridicule.

Amidst all of the cruel teasing, Elena was nowhere to be found. The former Queen secluded herself in her boudoir, sitting in front of a mirror, fixated upon her reflection. She stared at the lines and wrinkles which now creased her once youthful face. She combed her graying hair as if the brush could bring back the vivid red. Oftentimes, Elena would send her servant out to the village to visit the town apothecary. The apothecary would then supply Elena with various tinctures and potions he claimed would miraculously bring back her youth and restore her vitality. Elena would provide the apothecary with several gold coins in exchange for these bottled miracles. Rosella made sure the healer had many things to sell to Elena, enough to keep her locked in her room for days at a time.

With a sneer, Johnson roughly released Rosella's blond tresses. "I thought I was the love of your life, *dearest*. I offer you a proposition then. Choose your father, if you must, but if you do I will be gone. Perhaps I could have the twins as double mistresses."

Rosella froze. She could feel a trickle of fear curdling her stomach. Her obsession with Johnson was intense, clamped around her heart like a vise. The thought of losing him suddenly overwhelmed her, though she couldn't understand why. It annoyed her greatly.

She sat up, her blue eyes looking directly into his brown ones. When she had lost her hold over him, she wasn't sure. "You would never leave me. You're too enamored with me, too weak to even try to leave me." Though she sounded strong, she knew she wasn't as confident as she felt. Johnson knew it as well.

"Try me."

He left the room. Rosella lay back upon the grey wolf skin, her eyes closed, her hands running over her naked body. His aggression turned her on, and she could feel moistness between her legs. This was not acceptable. She was just about to lose her father and she was supposed to be upset.

“I suppose a girl has to grow up one day.” And with that remark, her hands trailed to her thighs and her sighs began to fill the room.



Within her own chambers, Rosella lived in a forest of drapery and sheets. A canopy of gauzy deep and sea greens surrounded her, suspended from the rich sable of four posts. Beneath her, a rich brocade of velvet moss was spread upon the bed. The walls were painted emerald green and the floors covered with an earthy plush carpeting.

The only living things beside her were the roses—ruby toned and settled in dusky gold jugs—and Ozra. Ozra was a wolf-hound, born a eunuch and albino; he was the gentlest of crooners. Rosella had saved the wolf from a sure death when, without any testicles, he had no aggression to fight his brothers and sisters as they stole his food and bullied him into submission. Docile and meek, he would merely whimper and cower with his paws over his muzzle. Rosella had taken pity on the pup and raised him as her own and he had proven to be useful. Unnaturally perceptive, even for a wolf, Ozra seemed to be attuned to her every need, as today when he trotted to his master with a jar of salve in his mouth that she used to soothe the bruises Johnson gave her in . Ozra also gave her more affection than she'd ever received in her life.

Scratching Ozra on the cuff of his neck, Rosella sighed. “Johnson wants me to get rid of Daddy, dear Ozra. I suppose I’m in quite a bind. Or perhaps not. After all, every girl must break away from her Father eventually. I’m sure I could find a few good nurses to look after him. Perhaps his wife could finally take care of him as she should do.”

As Rosella affectionately nipped Ozra upon his muzzle, the wolf-hound began to whimper, his red eyes staring fearfully at a corner of her room. Puzzled, Rosella glanced at where Ozra stared. “What is it, my love? It’s probably nothing, just the rats coming out to play.”

Ozra continued to whine, climbing on the bed beside her. Rosella began to chuckle softly and chide the wolf for his cowardice when, from the corner of her blue eyes, she saw a mist rising in the corner.

“What is that?” she murmured softly, watching the strange occurrence swirl into shape like breathing fog. Two figures began to emerge, flickering at first, intangible, one taller than the other. Their features began to sharpen, and with slight trepidation Rosella began to rise to greet the unearthly spirits.

“Hello, mother, what brings you to visit?”

Jezzalyn was beautiful. Though it had been seventeen years since Rosella’s birth, the woman still looked as young as the day she had disappeared. Her eyes were still a deep black, inky as the forest night, and her hair as dark as coal, no white upon her head. Her face remained unlined, her lips a perfect petal against a snow-white painting.

The smaller Thing with her mother had a hideous face. From the vivid descriptions in the tales her father had told her as a child, she guessed that It was a

Creature-Man, but Rosella could not think of this abomination as anything but human; it remained a Thing in her mind. She also assumed that It was a He-Thing, unless Shes of that particular race wore browned beards as well. The He-Thing's face was twisted, gnarled, old, and browned as the great oaks which stood in the forests behind the castle. Its teeth were yellowed claws of the mouth. His large eyes were green slick mold, no whites to be seen; no color save the lone dark spot in the middle of each pupil which watched her with obvious delight at her discomfort and longing at her young, supple form. Rosella was no birch.

She forced herself to remain calm though the incessant lascivious staring of the He-Thing was beginning to make her feel sick to her stomach. Drawing a breath discreetly as she could, she forced a smile, though her split lip from Johnson's ministrations pained her, to her mother.

"I see Henry likes you. Perhaps you two could become *friends*." Jezzalyn's voice flowed like juice from the Juniper's fruit. Rosella's stomach clenched with disgust as the He-Thing leered at her, drops of saliva beginning to slide over his lips into his earthen beard. Jezzalyn laughed at her daughter's obvious revulsion.

Jezzalyn slid onto the bed next to Rosella. By looks, one would never know the two were mother and daughter for they seemed to be the same age. The dark mother slid a finger down her daughter's shoulders. "Rosella, darling. We seem to have a bit of a misunderstanding going on about this household. Now I know your husband tends to play into your...sexual excitement, but really, when did he ever hold a candle to your dear father?"

“Whatever do you mean, mother? I’ve no clue as to what you’re speaking of.”

Like mother, Rosella was well educated in the school of false adoration; her voice oozed with sincerity. The He-Thing’s eyes oozed with animal desire.

Her mother’s dark features were never more contrasted to Rosella’s fairness until this moment. Jezzalyn’s dark eyes were filled with rage at her younger daughter’s composure, but mother was like daughter and an air of mock calm settled about the bedroom chamber.

“Don’t be coy with me, Rosella.” Jezzalyn’s eyes flickered to the bruises on her daughter’s face. “I know you and Johnson had a little talk. Since when did that beast of a man ever have a say in regards to your personal life? Your father is not to be removed from this castle.”

“That’s where you’re wrong, dear mother. Johnson is my personal life—more so than you, or father, has ever been. I’m afraid the old eventually has to be replaced with the new. Besides, father’s become quite a bore recently, always down in the cellar not speaking with anyone.”

With a resounding crack, Jezzalyn’s lily hand made contact with her daughter’s smooth cheek. From his hiding place in the corner of the room, Ozra growled. Rosella’s head snapped to the side, and though the pain stung her skin and bloomed roses on her violet-stained cheeks, she refused to give her mother the satisfaction of seeing her in pain. The satisfaction that she had caused a reaction out of her mother was more rewarding.

“Insubordinate, spoiled child. Your father’s been the only man to love you. You will listen to me, girl. Do you forget who I am? What I am?”

“Of course not, Mother.” Rosella pretended to stifle a yawn. “But you are getting a bit tiresome. Perhaps it is time you’re replaced as well.”

All at once Rosella’s room seemed to spin. The emerald walls, the browned carpet seemed to grow before her eyes. Trees seemed to line the borders of her room, and the sounds of the forest began to fill her ears. Grass grew beneath her feet. From the vestiges of her chamber only her bed remained as it was. She could hear Ozra whimpering from a distance, but wasn’t sure where he was. From beyond the trees, hidden within the mass of trunks, eyes began to appear, glinting through the darkened room.

“It would seem, dear child, that you’ve been enchanted by your husband’s bestial behavior.” Jezzalyn leaned near her daughter’s ear and whispered. “If it’s beast you want, then beast you shall have.”

In a flash of darkness, Rosella felt the sensation of bearded lips upon her chest, then nothingness. As the room began to brighten, she could see that her room was once again her room, and Ozra came cowering out from his corner. Rosella pondered her mother’s words. What exactly did she mean? She must go and warn Johnson at once—she would not let her mother win. With a look of resolution upon her face, Rosella wiped the spittle from her chest and made her way towards her husband’s study.



Over the next few days, Rosella tried to warn her husband about a possible encroaching attack from her mother. Johnson, however, would hear none of it. The fact



that he had never seen Rosella's true mother coupled with the fact that her "father," or grandfather (for he always saw the man as both, not one or the other) was insane led him to conclude that his wife was perhaps delusional as well. How else could he explain the fact that Rosella claimed that her bedroom had shifted into a forest or that there were such things as Creature-Men? Sure he had seen strange things about his home, but he attributed it to the fact of having one too many pints. Perhaps, he mused, he should stop hitting his lovely wife over the head and relegate the beatings from the neck down.

He was beginning to win the battle and reinstate himself as the man and head of the household. Johnson's parents had passed away a few months after his marriage, though how he could never figure out. They were found in bed, untouched and cold, naked with a fearful look upon their face, one moment in perfect health, dead the next morning. When told of their deaths, Johnson replied with a dismissing wave of his hands that the sights of one another's wrinkly, old nude bodies had probably frightened them into death. After all, their son was in his prime of life, a lithe beast of a man, and they had probably realized their inferiority to him.

After his parent's death Johnson sent his brothers he sent on a quest. He told them that in order to gain his respect and a place in the royal family, they must bring back the Holy Grail, or otherwise face imminent death. They left the castle, and Johnson sent assassins to follow their trail and end their lives. He hadn't heard a word from his brothers since.

Upon their marriage, Rosella had insisted that her family move in with them. She, he knew, wanted to flaunt her success and riches in her stepmother's face and was concerned also that in spite, her sisters and Helena would cease to care for her father.

Surprisingly, the trio of women agreed to move in. Apparently since the descent of Marcus into his madness the income of the house began to wane and it was the fear of a drop in status from royalty to mere noble that prompted the ladies to take the offer and move into the splendid castle. In the disillusionment that Johnson had mistaken for love, he had also agreed to the move. The illusion had now worn off. He was no longer a man to be toyed with; he was the king of his castle and had proved it to Rosella just a few moments ago.

She had come to his bedroom to plea half-heartedly for her father's safekeeping in the castle. Rosella claimed that it was for Johnson's own good that Marcus remain in his underground habitat, spouting some madness about her Mother's impending revenge upon her through her husband. Exasperated by this second line of pathetic bargaining, he slapped her. Beatings always left him excited for her, and he took her, uncaring that her head was knocking upon the wall. After this, she acquiesced. Rosella was downstairs in the cellars telling her father it was time for him to leave the castle. Satisfied in both mind and body, Johnson settled down in his bed for a nap.

Rosella had no intention of telling her father he had to leave without finding a way to retaliate against her mother's possible attack on her husband. Though her head ached from its being incessantly pounded against the wall, she was determined about this task. With expertise stealth she'd learned from her wolfish friends, she exited the castle unseen and headed through the forest to her old home. Dressed in a gown of bronze and a cloak of rust, she mimicked the autumnal surroundings of the woodland. In a hidden

pocket within the vestiges of her dress was her mirror. Rosella lifted the hood of her cloak to hide the bright blonde of her hair and trod barefooted over the rocky dirt and pinecones without so much of a wince. The forest was her second home as the wolves and rats were her only childhood play friends.

There was no path leading towards her own home, but she knew the way by heart and found it within an hour. It hadn't been but a couple of years since they had moved away from their old home, but it seemed as if the castle was aging prematurely, saddened by the loss of its family. It was decrepit, thorny vines creeping along its crumbling stony grey walls. The once cheery red-capped turrets were now dotted with the black of missing tiles and faded to saddened hue. Even the windows and the grand archway entrance of the castle seemed to be sagging—an old man pining for lost memories. Despite its dilapidated exterior, Rosella smiled; glad to see her childhood residence. Her memory sustaining her, she headed towards the back grounds of the castle and into the garden now wild and untamed. The rose bushes were still there, flourishing, an anarchic spray of red and white blooms growing wherever they pleased to be. The weeds and the flowerbeds were rebelling against their rigid boundaries and the garden was now amidst a glorifying chaos, the bright petals of violet, scarlet and fuchsia giggling their delight at freedom despite the oncoming threat of winter. Only the Juniper tree remained dignified, standing in all its elegance amidst the hurrah of the garden, no weeds daring to infiltrate its personal space. Through a side entrance she went and entered her past.

The halls were empty, the heirloom furniture long ago delivered to her husband's home. She didn't light a torch as she wound her way through the passages; her eyes were accustomed to the dark. Stone stairs echoed their welcome as she padded her way

towards the sanctuary, the smell of mildew strong on the old tapestries. Johnson hadn't wanted those; he didn't care to save the vestiges of her lineage if it didn't add any value to his home, and a fallen king was worth nothing. She reached her mother's hidden room and pushed open the door. It was as she had left it. Rosella was surprised. She had thought that perhaps her mother would've relocated this sacred place so her daughter would have no access to its mystical tomes. But it remained intact for some reason, and though Rosella was suspicious, she went towards the shelves and pulled a large, green leather tome free from its place and began to read.

Johnson woke in pitch blackness. He tried to blink the grains of sleep from his eyes though made no move to get up. How long had he slept? It had been midday when he had taken his post-beating nap, and now it seemed to be midnight. How odd it was that teaching one's wife a lesson would drain a man so much of his energy. With a half smile of pleasure as he remembered the feeling of Rosella's face connecting with his hand, he sunk back into the pillow to relish the joy he felt.

She appeared out of the darkness, bare feet padding softly as she stepped across the cold marble surface. Johnson sat up halfway in his bed, well-manicured hands rubbing his bleary eyes. He didn't recognize this woman, but by heavens she was beautiful enough to make his member rise in pleasure for the sheer artistry of her perfectly etched features. Though the room was dense with lack of light, her eyes and hair shone like dazzling onyx beneath a brilliant light. She wore a robe of the sheerest material, gauzy and as milky as her skin, revealing the nothing she wore beneath. The

hazy outline of her body hinted at her perfect breasts, pink nipples aching to be captured and the dark patch below waiting to be invaded. She pushed the robe from her shoulders and revealed fully what she had to offer him. The dark-haired seraph of the night climbed onto his satin fitted bed. She smelt of apples dusted with musk. Her lips, spongy and scarlet crushed Johnson's with eagerness and a hardness he had not expected. She bit him and he smiled. Rough woman. He would let her have her way with him for a while; then the hunter would spear his prey. His sensuous angel with the snowy skin lifted her body above his, her thighs parting to allow him to penetrate.

As he entered her, thousands of pinpricks began to pierce his skin. Johnson pulled out of her and tried frantically to brush off whatever it was that tried to colonize his skin until he realized that the pain came not from some external invader, but within. Thousands of centipede legs, wiry and black, pushed out from his pores. He tried to stop the offending intruders with his hands, slapping at his arms, his legs, his body, trying to crush the insects that crawled beneath the surface. But the legs grew longer and as the burning pain of the centipedes thrust over his body, he knew that they weren't centipedes at all, but dark bristles of fur. The fur began to grow more rapidly now, covering his hands, his feet, his back. The pain began to cease as the fur stopped forcing through his skin and he lay back in bed breathing, exhausted.

Jezzalyn, naked, sat back upon the pillows, her dark eyes watching him and amused at his pain. She reached out a hand to stroke his fur and chuckled. He struck her hand away.

"Who the hell are you, you witch. What have you done to me?" His voice was low, a gritty growl of beastiality.

“Now really, Johnson, do you not know who I am?” Jezzalyn lay back upon the bed letting her hands run lazily over her naked body then patted one of his paws.

“Do you think I’m your pet? Get the bloody hell away from me,” he growled at her, rolling off the bed and landing upon his haunches. At the sight of this, the snow white creature tossed her head back and laughed.

“What the hell do you think you’re laughing at?” He howled with rage, spittle flying from his lips. “Does seeing me in pain amuse you?”

Jezzalyn’s smile grew wider. “No. I’m laughing because you’re not done yet.”

Pain. Exquisite pain and agony of bones reshaping, elongating. His nose. It lengthened, his jaw grew, cartilage stretching and hardening into a muzzle. He could smell the musky odor of his sweat, the seduction of Jezzalyn’s sex. This sense now fine tuned to see anything through the trail of scents his prey left behind. *The better to track you with.* His ears. They stretched and thinned until they were as delicate as a rose petal, and as soft, the intricacies of veins and bone melding. He could hear the whistle of the kettle from the bowels of the kitchen two floors beneath him through the stone and marble of the castle. *The better to hunt you with.* His nails. Each perfectly manicured tip bowed into individual scythes, claws clicking together hungrily. *The better to gut you with.* His teeth. White ivory tapered into points sharper than the laughter of the witch that had done this to him. *The better to eat you with.*

He sat upon his haunches, a low rumble in his chest as he watched the ebon haired raven, hatred coursing through his still human eyes.

“Now, now, Johnson,” Jezzalyn cooed mockingly, “No need to be angry. Is that a way to treat your mother-in-law?” She reached out to ruffle his wiry black fur and pulled back her hand instantly as his jaw snapped the air where her fingers were.

“Well if you’re going to be wolfish about it--” She slid off the bed and headed over towards her fallen robes. Instead of dressing however, she slipped her hand into some hidden pocket and procured a fine shimmering powder, almost invisible to the human eye, but easy to see for one that was half wolf. Jezzalyn’s lips puckered as if she would blow him a kiss, and with a whisper of breath, the powder floated towards the beast and snared him. His solid form began to recede until it became opalescent, shimmering like the powder and vanished into a place only Jezzalyn knew.

Jezzalyn picked up her robe and smiled as Henry’s form appeared from beyond the darkness. “Come now, love. It’s time we dealt with that child of mine.”

Henry’s jaundiced mouth grinned at his mistress, and hand in hand they headed towards the old castle.

Rosella kneeled on the floor, cerulean blue eyes fixed upon the pages of the ancient tome she was reading. Though it had been a while since she had studied these spells and theories, she was surprised over how much of it came back to her, an astounding freshness in her interests of her mother’s pagan ways. She could feel her fingertips buzzing with excitement, urging her body to make its way over to the jars of unknowns, but Rosella knew discipline was needed—first she needed to learn how and why before she could try the actual things.

She rubbed her eyes; they were aching from the hours reading in the gloom of the sanctuary, and she longed for the light. She knew, however, that to remain undetected she would have to keep up her studying in the darkness. With a soft sigh, she went back to her books. Before she could read on, she heard a soft clicking noise behind her, echoing through the darkness. Rosella quickly jumped to her feet and with tense shoulders turned to search for the intruder. It would no doubt be her mother. She would know that Rosella had invaded her private study. Though Rosella wasn't ready to face her mother, she would fight for her life and her husband's. She crouched, eyes slowly circling the room. She felt a wet nose upon her arm and nearly shrieked.

"Ozra! You naughty wolf. How did you ever get in here?" Rosella laughed softly, relief relaxing her tense body. She ruffled her wolf's white fur, wondering how she had missed the brightness of his coat in contrast to the dark. She would need to be more careful, more observant from now on. Nevertheless, she was glad to see it was him rather than Jezzalyn; Ozra would keep an excellent watch for her and alert her to anymore visitors.

Rosella settled down upon her knees once more, bronze satin spilt about her as she resumed her studying. Ozra began to whine softly, his red eyes filled with almost humanlike concern as he gazed about the room. He didn't focus on one particular thing, but kept glancing about. The wolf began to nuzzle his master, pink nose lifting her chin from the tome. Distractedly, Rosella glanced into the darkness. There were eyes all around the room, glinting from beyond the darkness. She stood up quickly, ready to defend herself if she must. Rosella trembled, for she feared her mother's power, but she would not be the one to back down. From the nothingness she could hear soft giggling.



She felt hair, skin brush past her body, caressing her, touching her, but as she tried to reach out, to push the thing aside, her hand grasped air. The giggling grew louder; a man's giggle, but somehow still a child's. Again, and again hands rubbed against her, feeling under her skirt, petting her hair. Prodding. Poking. Laughing. Maddening. She could hear Ozra whining, snapping his jaws at the air, at the invisible hands assaulting her. The room began to spin about, and she closed her eyes as her stomach complained at the multitude of sensations battering her. Rosella fell upon her knees, trying to grasp something solid, something to keep her in reality but found nothing but the floor. She began to giggle as well, her hysterical laughter in duet to the giggles of delight. And still the hands moved against her body. They pinched her nipples through her bronze dress and tore at the satin until she wore nothing. She vomited, her revulsion spewing through her lips, and the hands moved more furiously. They caressed her buttocks, and felt the moistness of her sex. Rosella's body began to convulse, shaking from fear, from fury, and she screamed into the darkness. Everything stopped. The hands, the spinning had ceased to exist.

She kneeled naked upon the stone floor of her mother's study, curled to protect herself, her head buried in her arms. She could smell the acrid vomit, felt the warmth of it on her body. Ozra's tongue caressed her, licking her body clean. Her body began to calm itself, the shakes ceasing slowly. She sat there, for how long she didn't know, when she felt the urge to be rid of this place. She stood and ran, down the twisting hallways of her home, up the stairs which led into the light and into the garden she once loved as a child. The garden was not there. Her home, as the hands, had ceased to exist.



The castle stood alone in the middle of the sea, erected upon an island as yet uncharted by explorers. The island was new, born from the eruptions of undersea volcanoes, swallowed by an unruly sea. It had risen suddenly, its appearance sending tremors and wild waves across multiple countries, leaving destruction in its anarchic aquatic path.

The island was edged by rocky slopes, huge boulders fused together by the immense power of the ocean crashing upon its surface. This slippery sloped sprouting blue-green algae and deep moss kelp led out to a shallow reef for a few feet, then dropped into an sapphire oblivion. Rosella imagined that the fathoms just beyond the reef housed her mother's underwater caverns. After all, if Jezzalyn was a creature of the forest, who was to say she wasn't a creature of the sea as well?

Uprooted by some magic of her mother's, half of the island resembled her home; the forest was a mass of pines and oaks. Brambles of thorny bushes offering wild berries fed the inhabitants of the woodland. Her wolves lived here. They preferred the cool air, the eternal cold of the night where one could see her soul trying to escape with each breath. These were nights of autumn and winter, of dying and death, eternal shifts of seasons in one moon's cycle.

The other half of the island housed a tropical wonderment. The air was moist, thick and sensuous to the breath. The trees here offered fruits of delicacies unknown to Rosella. One she called rabbit's nest for when she sliced the spotted yellow fruit in half within the meat lay a nest of soft black pellets. Another she called woman's desire, for

beneath its ripe red skin was the slippery orange-yellow fruit, its sweet, oozing juice leaving a sticky mess on one's mouth until the consumer found the hard seed within. But despite the wonders of these new and decadent treats, her favorite was the common apple.

On the island they grew abundantly in both the wetlands and the pine forest. As a child, her father had not allowed her to apples, citing it as a most dangerous and forbidden fruit. He had ordered all apple trees to be cut down soon after her arrival at the castle and had commanded all farmers to burn their orchards. Because of their rarity in the kingdom, the prices of apples were high and the taste, though common in many lands, was thought to be exotic. To be caught with one by the King or his men would mean death. Because of this Elena would sneak the fruit into the castle for her daughters. Watching the other girls enjoy the treat, Rosella had been envious. They would lick the juices off their hands and their lips, oohing and aahing over the delightful taste. They offered Rosella the fruit, knowing that she would abide her father's law, for in her mind his law was sacred.

When she first discovered the fruit on the island, caution whispered in Rosella's mind. Her father had prohibited her from eating apples for a reason, but what reason she had never known. There was none to stop her now, however, and no reason not to eat them. She was on the island with no mother and no father, with only herself to rule. With her heart beating quickly, Rosella plucked the fruit from the tree and bit into its red skin. She savored the sweetness of the scarlet fruit and the juices as it dripped upon her hand. And as she continued to eat the succulent tempter, she began to forget. Her father, once the foremost thought upon her mind was now the faintest ghost of a memory, a fragment which would nag her occasionally, a thought immediately placed out of mind.

When she tried to remember her past, her present, and what she thought was to be her future, her small world instead revolved around her mother: her mother who had saved her; her mother who had loved her father; her father who was now buried with the other great kings of the past.

Rosella had forgotten; a chimera had been born.

Rosella chose to dwindle her time in what she called her Garden of Eden. With no other companion beside Ozra, she roamed beaches nude with no shame. Her skin, once translucent porcelain became tan. In contrast, her once golden hair brightened, becoming so light it was almost snowy. She resembled her mother's silver-leafed juniper tree which still stood proud in the castle's garden. Rosella reveled in this magical place, binging upon new fruits, pleasing herself wherever and whenever she wished. She lived within a fairyland, her world a chimera in which her father was dead and her mother was a goddess. It was a world where she was a princess, a fairy queen, a beautiful rose.

A rose held captive by a beast.

Rosella feared the Beast. The Beast was lithe, wiry, familiar. His fur bristled under her fingers when he moved to nuzzle her, hairs short and tuck which burned and rashed her skin when he flicked his tongue over her mouth, her face. Part wolf, part human, Rosella could not tell which he more was of. His voice growled deeper than the trembles occasionally heard beneath the island, yet when he spoke her name it was with some kind of affection. When his clawed hands raked against her skin, it was not to hurt, but to caress. Nevertheless, Rosella outwardly shuddered at his touch, but somewhere deep inside there was longing. And that longing frightened her.

He treated her well enough. In the old castle which was once her fathers, her boudoir was now a glass-walled chamber in the middle of the garden next to her mother's juniper tree where the season was always mild and the roses flowered constantly. Here she bloomed and grew pink checked with health. The sun collected moisture beneath her glass roof and kept her skin dewy. Her hair shone like the early morning's deposits upon fresh buds, a pale gold sheet of the sun. With her pale green dress and a garland of flowers upon her head, Rosella was Titania in wolfish Oberon's lands. Rosella thrived. And grew more lost within her self each day. She practiced her forgotten arts within the main castle out of the ancient books within the study that had transported her here. Her mother lingered in her mind, guiding her as she learned. She was a faint voice telling her what to practice, which tinctures to mix, what potions to spell. This woman, her mother, Rosella remembered with fondness. Though she hardly knew her life before her appearance upon the island, her mother seemed to be the one point in clear focus, a guiding angel which shaped her mind.

Her studies were punctuated by visits from the Beast. He came mostly to speak to her, to inquire about her health and her happiness and find company in the lonely castle. He told her many stories, one in particular about a beautiful woman in glass shoes bewitching a stupid prince at the ball. When telling these stories, the Beast looked at Rosella eagerly, as if trying to share a memory or two with her, telling her that these events actually happened, perhaps even to her. Instead, at each of these house calls, Rosella pouted. If she were to be his plaything, than she would not play along. With a wave of her hand, she dismissed the stories as old folk tales and refused to share in the joys of story telling. The Beast tried to tickle her, to cajole her, but none of these worked.

When she refused to laugh or even smile around him, he became sardonic, trying to jostle her out of her bad mood, but he never touched her—not to hurt her, anyhow. She had thought once that he would hit her, to throw her down upon the bed like the animal he was and take her—all of his advances seemed so familiar, creeping up from some part of her fog-filled mind that she had seemed to forgotten. The strikes never came, however, and the strangeness of not being hurt brought up an almost affectionate feeling for the Beast and his kindness that Rosella refused to give into.

When Beast did mount her, she lay still for fear of his teeth sinking within her and truly taking her flesh. She never touched him when he did this; her hands clutched the sheets until he was done, knuckles white and face emotionless. He seemed to acknowledge her reluctance to his advances, for he never took long, and his dark, human eyes looked both sad and annoyed at her rejection.

Beneath the glass roof of her bedroom the Beast tossed up his paws in frustration. A month's worth of childish pouting had finally gotten to him. "Oh what's wrong, Rosella? I mean it's awful hard to get excited when you lay there stiller than a dead rabbit. Is this life not paradise for you? I would think living beneath the trees amongst the woodland animals would thrill you. After all, I see you prancing naked around enough with that *other* wolf of yours." The Beast sat back upon his haunches, his head cocked to the side. If Rosella had not been so determinedly despondent she would've laughed at his canine ways.

"Oh, Beast," she sighed, calling him by the only name she had for him. "It's not the place, it's wonderful. But how can anyone be happy when held captive in a prison, even when it's beautiful as this one." She looked at him pointedly

With as wry of a smile as a beast could muster, the wolf-man let out a snort. "You act as if you're the only one trapped on this island prison. I can't get off this bloody place either, you know."

Rosella sat up quickly, her blue eyes narrowing in confusion. "What do you mean, you're a prisoner. You're the one who's got me locked up in this glass house refusing to let me go."

"Me? You poor deluded child." The Beast pealed out in bitter laughter. "Dear girl, don't you know that your mother's got us all trapped here? We're like her pets on this stupid bit of paradise."

"My mother? Why in the world would she have us trapped here? My mother's a wonderful woman." Rosella's eyes were icy blue as she stared at the wolf-man with contempt.

"That witch? Wonderful?" He stared at Rosella incredulously. "How could you say that about a woman who turned your husband into this? Don't tell me you like me better as a monster."

"I don't know what you're rambling about, Beast. Perhaps you've gotten into a few poisonous mushrooms, have you? Obviously, I haven't got a husband. If I did, I wouldn't be stuck on this stupid island with you, would I?" She settled back into the bed, muttering softly, "Unless, of course, he's like any other stupid man and gambled me away to you."

The Beast was quiet. The low rumbling in his throat ceased as he regarded the young woman lying upon the bed. He licked his chops slowly before he spoke. "You really don't remember anything, do you? I suspected as much when you never took to

any of the stories I told you, but I never knew to what extent.” His eyes were filled with pity at her lack of recognition.

“Remember what? That I’m trapped here in my glass cage? Don’t tell me you actually believe in your fool’s stories about some girl in glass slippers. I told you, it’s nothing but peasant tales. Shame on someone as smart as you for believing silly superstition like that.”

“But, what about your father, Rosella. Surely you would remember him. After all, you clung to him tighter than sap upon silk, though I never understood your attachment to a derelict old man like him.”

Rosella’s face was stone still. “My father’s dead. Mother told me so.”

“Dead?” The Beast slid off the bed and began to pace across the floor.

“Somehow I doubt that. Your mother protects him too much. She could probably keep him alive for hundreds of thousands of years if she wished.”

“Liar,” Rosella hissed. “My father passed away when I was a child.”

“Your father is well and alive, Rosella. I know. I’ve seen him in that silly little mirror you always carried around.”

Whispers of truth floated within Rosella’s mind. Webs of knowledge spun and linked together in the corners of her memories, but refused to cling true and capture. “I know of no mirror.”

“Then see for yourself. The mirror lies within the pocket of your cloak you’ve forgotten the ancient study. Perhaps if you come to your senses you can get us off of this miserable island. God knows I’m more than bored with just you as a companion.”



The Beast stood. It was his way of dismissing her. With long, graceful strides he left her glass chambers and through the walls she watched him make his way out of the garden into the forest beyond. What he was saying could not be truth. She knew her father was dead, must be dead.

The sun was setting low within the sky and the evening air began to cool leaving a mist upon the slick walls of the garden bedroom. Through the haze she could see a white form make its way towards the door, and with arms outstretched Rosella received Ozra within her arms. She buried her face in his soft, snowy fur and contemplated all that the Beast had told her. Could her father perhaps still be alive? She hardly wanted to believe what he was saying, but yet somehow there seemed to be some truth in it.

“Ozra. Perhaps we’ve been living in a little bit of a fairyland, have we?” With a soft breath of reluctance, Rosella stood from her bed. She needed to find the truth, and in order to do that, she must seek the mirror the Beast spoke of. Perhaps the mirror might be jinxed, some magic the Beast procured in order to trick her, but it wouldn’t hurt to look, would it? Rosella nodded resolutely. She would head over to the sanctuary and see for herself.

Exiting the glass house, Rosella noticed a fine mist had crept over the garden. She mused it was just as well—an appropriately mysterious setting for such arduously unsure task. Her dress, the color of new leaves, wisped softly over the dark earth as she began to quicken her steps. Ozra lagged not far behind; she could hear him panting as he kept up with her. In the thickening fog the woman and her wolf looked like wraiths of the forest on silent foot; her skin shone with moisture, radiating beneath the moonlight; his fur shone with droplets of vapor. They strode past the Juniper tree, and its leaves

quivered although there was no wind. It seemed to speak to her, to question where she was going, to laugh once it knew. But Rosella was determined. She crossed the garden and headed into the familiar hallways of the castle, following the twists and turns down into the darkened study below.

True to his word, Rosella found the cloak the Beast had alluded to in a forgotten corner of the study. The bronzed velvet lay covered in thin film of dust, wrinkled yet still in good condition. Fingerprints could be found within the dust upon the edges of the cloak as if someone had recently been gently sifting through the material in search of some hidden object. And that hidden object, Rosella knew, was the mirror.

Ozra snuffed his nose within the rusty velvet and sneezed, dispersing some of the tension from Rosella's shoulders. With a soft chuckle, she shooed the animal away and slid her hand within the satin undercover of the cloak. With surprising ease of remembrance, she pulled the small, gold encased mirror from the hidden pocket. Her mind began to move from its month long hibernation. She began to remember, slowly, but surely.

With the fluid ease of habit, Rosella lifted the mirror to her face and gazed within the clear reflection. The glass was smooth, unmarred by years of use. A soft glow began to emit from somewhere within the mirror, and Rosella began to smile. Yes, she thought, this was how it once was. However, her smile began to fade as she viewed the image within. It was her father. She remembered he hadn't been right of mind when she had left, but healthy nonetheless. He had been pink cheeked and white haired, standing tall and living in his world of dreams. Now he looked frail, old. Remnants of her father lay wasted upon the black sheeted bed. Rosella watched as his once great body struggled to

pull in breath; his skin, once tan and supple like well cured leather, was now pale and flaking like last winter's snow. He lifted his arms towards the ceiling, and with a gasp Rosella could see that his limbs were shaking even with this small effort. His hair once a bright white was now grey, and matted. He was gaunt, lifeless, uncared for.

Tears filled her eyes as Rosella sunk to the floor. Her father was dying and she was here stuck on the island because of that horrible Beast. She continued to watch, feeling helpless, finger upon the fragile glass of the mirror as if she could enter through to get to her father. Her eyes widened as she gazed at her father, could almost hear his voice as he clearly mouthed her name then shut his eyes. Her breath held until she saw the quivering of his body as it worked to take in another breath of air.

She needed to find a way home. Must find a way home. Would find a way home.

Rosella picked up her cloak and fastened it around her neck. With the mirror resolutely within her hand, she beckoned to Ozra and strode out of the study and towards the castle entrance. She would find the Beast in the forest and make him release her. If the man had any compassion about him he would let her go; or she would kill him trying.

She headed towards the cooler half of the island and tightened her cloak around her. Rosella knew that with his thick fur, the beast would prefer the winter's season to the lush, tropical atmosphere of perpetual summer. She stepped over pinecones and nuts and could feel sharp flints of rocks cut into the bottom of her tender feet. Though she winced, she didn't stop. As she reached further north, Rosella could see pockets of snow begin to form as she climbed a slight incline towards the low apex of the island. She pulled the cloak over her flaxen hair, and shivering, she continued. Ozra had no trouble

navigating the rocky terrain of the winter forest—it was his natural habitat and where he was most happy.

When she reached a clearing, Rosella stopped. She could hear the howls of wolves around her, but she wasn't scared; after all these were her cousins from her childhood. Rosella tipped back her head, cowl sliding off her shimmering golden hair and howled with them, calling the Beast from hiding, challenging him to confront her.

"Beast! I know you're here somewhere. Leave whatever cave you dwell in and meet my challenge." She stood panting, her blue eyes dark, menacing, and perhaps a little crazed in her determination.

She heard the shrubs behind her move and spun to face her opponent.

"Rosella? What are you doing here? I suppose your screaming like a banshee isn't some kind of mating call?" The Beast yawned, his fur matted where he had slept upon. He rubbed his eyes looking slightly dazed and confused.

She placed her hands on her hips. "Let me go, you monster. I know you've got the power to free me from this island."

"I told you, daft girl. Your mother's the one that's got us trapped, not me."

"Liar!" She ran to the Beast and began to pelt his chest with her fists, her desperation to get to her father getting the better of her emotions. "I'll kill you if I have to. You must let me go! My father is dying!"

"Dying?" The Beast began to laugh as he swept her hands away from his chest.

"I assure you there is no way he could be dying."

"The mirror. It showed him lying upon his bed, taking his last breaths. I must get home to him, Beast. Can you be so cruel to retain me here just for your pleasure?"

With a shake of his head and a sigh of pity, the Beast stepped away from Rosella. As he gazed at her, he looked older and more human than she had ever seen him. “Dear wife of mine, so confused, so tricked. Ask your mother to let you go. It is, after all, her choice to keep you here. Now leave me. I need my sleep.”

And with those final words he walked away from her towards the hidden entrance of his cave dwelling. Feeling defeated and helpless Rosella sank to her knees and began to sob. Ozra trotted over and began to lick her face and her hands in sympathy, but Rosella merely pushed the wolf away.

*The Beast was right, you know. I can get you out of here.*

Rosella’s head snapped up. Where had that voice come from? It sounded just like Her.

*You want to go home to save your father. There is nothing more I would like you to do as well. After all, you do know how much I love him.*

“Mother?” Rosella peered into the dark forest. She could see the yellowed eyes glinting through the night.

*Yes, it is I. The Beast may not want to let you go, but remember, my dear girl, we’ve got magic on our side.*

“Can you really help me, Mother? Help me get home to daddy?” It was as if Rosella was four again and discovering her mother for the first time.

*Come, Rosella. Let us go back to my study. We will get you home once more.*

Tearfully, Rosella stood from amidst the forest trees. It was time to trust in her mother once more. Her mother, her angel.

Back within the study, Jezzalyn's voice whispered from the darkness. She held no form, but her voice was more solid than even the tomes around her. Jezzalyn instructed her daughter in the art of potion making. She would recite the different ingredients to use and obediently Rosella would pull these from the shelves and jars, measuring out just enough and mixing it into a thick, dark concoction within a deep, crystal bowl. The liquid was thick and bubbling although there was no fire beneath the crystal. Its color was a dull ashy gray and smelt of singed meat and fur. Although she wanted to retch, Rosella continued her work over the tiresome hours of the night into the cool periwinkle dawn.

*Only two more ingredients, Rosella, then the potion shall be done.*

Rosella smiled and wiped the sweat from her brow. For the last half hour she had been busily crushing the egg shells of lizards into a fine powder. She poured this into the crystal bowl and watched as a waft of smoke drifted from the putrid mix. She stirred this with a birch mixing spoon and waited for her mother's next instructions.

*Rosella. I'm confident that you would do anything to get home to your father, am I right?*

"Yes, Mother," Rosella whispered softly. The love of her father was beyond all others except perhaps for the love of her mother.

*The final ingredient of this potion may require some sacrifices upon your part. If you are unable to meet this requirement, my child, you will not be able to go home to your Father. Are you sure you will give up anything for him?*

"I'm sure, Mother. No sacrifice can be too great for him."

*The final ingredient must be from something pure, unadulterated in any way. It must be free of guilt in thought and in body, a soul uncorrupted and also unmarred upon the surface. In other words, the chosen object must be a faultless object. Living flawless, breathing perfection. Can you think of something like this?*

Rosella's eyes began to search the room in vain of something so untouched and wondrous. Was it within one of the many jars and vials which lined the shelves? Perhaps the essence of roses, the juices of the juniper tree? Surely an object like this must be a gift sent straight from the gods. She plucked a tome from the shelves and scanned its pages for some clue to what it could be, and still she remained clueless.

"Mother, I don't know what it could be. What could be so pure and still walk upon the earth? Surely only an angel could meet those criteria." Rosella gazed into the darkness, trying to pluck her mother's form from amongst the various shadows.

*Think, child. You will know the answer if you ponder hard enough. Use your mind.*

Rosella moved to turn her gaze once more upon the powder lined shelves when she heard a soft whining behind her. Her eyes widened with realization, then in horror.

*Yes, Rosella. You know what you must do. Use Ozra. His blood is the only thing uncorrupt enough to find your way back to your father.*

"But Mother. Ozra is the only thing...he's like my child...my only friend. Surely there has to be something else we could use. There *must* be." Rosella's voice was panicked, wavering.

*If a pet be more dear to you than your father, then so be it.* Jezzalyn's voice began to rescind from the room and the feeling of her presence began to fade. Rosella

could feel the only chance to be reunited wither father begin to float away like old spider webs from a doorway. She gathered her jade gown in her hand and ran after the detached voice, grasping and groping amongst the shadows.

“Wait,” she plead, glancing fretfully at Ozra behind her. With a long breath released she conceded. “I’ll do it.”

Jezzalyn’s voice was pleased. *Good girl. Now we must prepare. Call the hound over to you.*

Rosella beckoned Ozra with her hands for she was unable to make a sound for fear of losing control of her emotions. The wolf-hound padded over to his master, his friend, and sat at her feet gazing up at Rosella adoringly.

*Reach into your pocket. Within you shall find a blade. You will need the animal’s essence to add to the elixir. Slit his throat above the crystal bowl and let it pour into mixture.*

Rosella hesitated. Could she truly do this? She had to. Her hands quivered as she reached into her pocket and found a dagger. Its silver handle was ornate, encrusted with garnets in a rose design and pearls shaped as lilies. She pressed her fingers upon the blade and the slice upon her finger told her it was sharp. Wincing, Rosella wiped the blade upon her cloak, than glanced at the cut to ensure she would not let it mix with Ozra’s blood. To her astonishment, the cut had healed. With a soft sigh, Rosella leaned down and planted a kiss upon the wolf’s white furred head.

“Goodbye, my friend,” she whispered softly. “We’ve had many good times together. And because of you I can now go home to my father. Thank you, Ozra. I love you.”



She closed her eyes and quick drew the blade across Ozra's throat. He yelped once and grew silence as the warm blood began to seep from the slit, staining his white fur red. Rosella drew the crystal bowl near and held the still warm body over the mixture. The gray potion began to smoke, acrid plumes turning the crimson fur ashy. Tears slid down Rosella's cheeks, though she made sure none dropped into her well-brewed potion. As suddenly as the smoke had appeared, it stopped. The potion was now scarlet.

*You've done it, child. It has been completed.*

Rosella barely heard her mother. Her blue eyes stared blankly at the dead wolf's body still in her hands. She cradled it close to her, humming quietly, trying to soothe the animal into the next world, or perhaps trying to soothe her conscience. "I loved you, Ozra. I love you. Be well, my friend, be well."

Slowly, gently, she placed the wolf upon the floor and removed the cloak from her shoulders. She covered him with the velvet, tucking the edges around his body to keep him warm though he was dead. It was the least she could do for so great a sacrifice. She wiped the tears from her face with a sleeve from her dress and stood ready for her mother's next instructions.

*Place your mirror next to the bowl and call for your father. When he appears, dip your hands into the mixture and spread it upon the mirror.*

Rosella did as she was told. She watched as her father's emaciated form once again appeared in the mirror. Determined that she had done the right thing in sacrificing Ozra, she dipped her hands into the mirror and spread it on the reflective surface. The scarlet potion began to give off a glow. With a gasp, Rosella watched as her father's figure began to rise out of the mirror and appear before her, translucent like an apparition.

*Now, Rosella. Reach for his hand. You will be taken straight beside him.*

Rosella reached for her father's withered hand and felt her body being yanked like a puppet master's plaything. Colors swirled around her, the fiery oranges of hell, the blues of heaven, the browns and greens of the earth. She was dizzy, rapturous, scared. All at once the world stopped it spinning and she was plunged in the middle of where she did not know.



The streets were in chaos, and Rosella stood strewn in the middle of the maddening anarchy. There were throngs hoarding the streets, and all of the people were dressed in bright colors. Some were masked, others wore nothing but masks. There was laughing, crying, shouting, people fighting, people kissing, people eating. In the square upon a stage, there was a man in a throne wearing a crown and masque and a man dressed as an ass dancing next to him. It was wild. It was untamed. It was Carnival.

Rosella felt suffocated in the insurmountable raucous crowd. There were too many people, too many colors—bright magentas, loud turquoise, noisy lemons—whirling together around her, entangling her in costumes, snaring her in sound. She ran as quickly as she could, shoving her way through pressed bodies, squeezing past various conversations. Her senses were shocked—she had been transported from her still, harmonious woodland to a dystopia of chaos and Rosella had no shoes.

She winced as one reveler after another stomped on her toes. She cringed as her bare feet came in contact with sharp flints in the unpaved road. To Rosella, it seemed as

if the whole town, even the whole countryside, had ventured out to participate uninhibitedly in this festival of fools. She needed to get out and find her father.

Finally, Rosella spotted the town's iron gates and, in the distance beyond a grove of trees, the majestic castle. There her father would be waiting for her, in his death bed. She must get there in time to save him. Rosella quickened her steps, dodging pirates, gypsies, angels and jesters. And she was caught.

"There she is my fairy Queen!"

Rosella felt her hand being grasped and tugged. Her cerulean blue eyes widened and rosebud lips parted in shock. She turned to look at her perpetrator and saw it was the donkey which had been onstage near the town square. She struggled to pull free, digging her nails into the donkey's hand, anything to be off on her way again. He wore gloves on his hands, however, and felt none of this. The donkey continued to drag her on the stage, and the masked king stood with his arms open. Rosella saw that two women had joined him upon the stage, both masked and wearing silk gowns of bright scarlet which pooled around their feet like puddles of blood.

Rosella was brought upon the stage in her spring gossamer gown, the flowers still weaved into her hair. She kept trying to pull herself free and the crowd roared with laughter at her efforts. She ceased her struggle, however, when she heard the king speak once more.

"Come to me, my Fairy Queen. Dream the dream that devils dream Dance the night away with the moon, for the morning's light will come too soon. Drink the drink of the star's pure light; give yourself to the dark of the night. Come with me, my Fairy Queen. Dream the dream that devils dream."

His voice was so familiar, as was his form. Rosella peered at the king's masque, as if she could see beneath the intricate jewels and ornaments. He seemed to be reading her mind, and with a flourish, the king pulled off his mask and smiled.

Rosella gasped. It was her father, looking healthier than she had seen him in years. Gone was the madness in his dark eyes, the thinning hair, and the gaunt frame. Dressed in clothes of brilliant white, he shone; his skin was tanned, his hair a pure alabaster. He was handsome, strong, his old self. Marcus put his arms around the two women with him, and with an immense smile, he beckoned his daughter to join him. Rosella stepped forward, unsure what to make of the scene unfolding before her. She had seen Marcus, dying upon his black sheets. That vision had seemed so real and true. Perhaps the beast had devised some scheme to rile up her emotions. But she knew that her father had been deemed insane for the last few years. What had happened to him? Was it her leaving that had made him well once more, or was this all some kind of strange dream?

She stretched out a hand to her father, wanting to take him in her arms, but before she could do so, the two women pulled off their masks. Rosella stood shocked. Standing in front of her were Emmeline and Elizabeth, but neither were as she had left as well. Instead of closed sockets, Emmeline's eyes were whole once more, green and lovely as an emerald sparkling under the warm summer's sun. Rosella paled. What magic was going on here? She glanced down at Elizabeth's foot. With a soft, triumphant giggle, Elizabeth obliged Rosella's curiosity and lifted the scarlet satin of her dress from the ground. As the hem rose like a curtain, Rosella could see not one, but two perfectly

formed feet. Rosella blanched. It seemed that the twins were two perfect peas once more, perfectly formed creatures in their shared pod.

Somewhere behind her she could hear the giggles of a man-creature.

Rosella was confused. How was it that her father and the twins had been cured from their illnesses? *Elena*. That could be the only reasoning. Somehow, the Queen must have found someone or something to play mistress of healing. It would be just like her to try and draw the attention to herself. As Rosella thought this, Elena appeared like a vision of her nightmares. The Queen was beautiful. Her red hair shone in the sunlight like waxed mahogany as she wove through the crowd and climbed the steps leading to the stage. She wore a gown of red satin, as her daughters, and perched upon her head was a gold crown studded with rubies. Her face was free of wrinkles once more—she seemed to be back in her prime, and her green eyes were as brilliant as her twins'. Elena smiled at her adopted daughter, smiled not in gladness, but of superiority. As she reached the main pulpit, she reached for her husband's arm and linked her own through it.

From somewhere beside her, she could hear the giggles of a man-creature.

“Come with me, my Fairy Queen! Dream the dream that devils dream. Tell me of your love for me, and I'll have rewards for thee.

“Wh...what? What are you speaking of, Father?” Rosella was confused. What was going on? She looked from her father, to the twins, to Elena. They all stood there, watching her, smiling at her.

Marcus’ grin widened. He took his daughter’s hand within his own. “Rosella fine, my daughter true, this is what you must do. Tell me of your love today, and many riches I shall pay.

All around her, she could hear the giggles of a Creature-Man.

Elizabeth turned to her father, and ran a finger down his arm. “Daddy, my love for you is like a diamond: pure, strong, and clear. It is everlasting and nearly indestructible.”

The crowd roared its appreciation and Marcus clapped his hands together with joy. He signaled to the donkey-man, and within a few moments, the donkey had procured a diamond necklace which he fastened around the young woman’s neck. Elena beamed her pleasure at her daughter.

Emmeline spoke next. “Daddy, my love for you is like gold: everyone knows of it, but not everyone can have it. Gold is beautiful, exclusive, as is my love for you.”

Rosella watched as the crowd cheered once more. Marcus cheered with them and once more signaled to his servant. The donkey-man handed to Emmeline a black velvet pouch. With demure glee, the woman reached into the bag and pulled out a handful of shiny, gold coins and showed this to the crowd. Elena nodded her joy towards her daughter.

Marcus turned now to Rosella and looked at her with expectation. Rosella felt panicked. What could she say to her father? She didn't love him as the riches of the world, she loved him as herself. She refused to lie to him to gain a bit of luxury. And so she spoke.

"Father. I cannot like and say I love you as a diamond, as gold, as any jewels or riches we find in this land, for I do not love you as that. My love for you is as a rose: delicate when it blooms and precious when it does so; thorny to protect its lovely flower."

The crowd was silent as was her father. He stared at her, the smile fading from his face. "A rose? A flower is what my love is worth, of all the riches on this earth? A bloom that's worthless, plucked for free, cheapness is your love for me." His black eyes were filled with hurt, with annoyance, and with anger. He stepped back from her.

"No, father, you do not understand. To me a rose is worth more than diamonds, then gold. A rose is worth more than all those expensive things. Those things can be bought with money; a rose, if not tended, if not nurtured, will not blossom." Rosella stepped forward, trying to grasp her father's hand.

Marcus brushed her efforts away. "A rose is a worthless thing for me, growing in my garden free. Its petals fall, it wilts in days, it dies, it dries, it browns, it fades." His voice rose as his fury grew. "Diamonds and gold are everlasting, roses and flowers days are wasting, their lives are short and viewed for pleasure; diamonds are gold are highly treasured. A rose you want, so let it be; it will be your gift from me. But leave me now, I've none of you, leave me with my daughters true!"

"Father, no! Please listen!" She stepped towards him, trying to embrace him but the donkey-man held her fast. She struggled against his arms. Rosella could hear the

crowd voicing their displeasure, felt something soft and juicy being thrown at her head and body. Still she struggled and watched as Marcus put his arms around the twins, holding them close. He smiled to them, the secret smile he used to share with her as a girl. Rosella wilted. It seemed as though the twins had taken her place in her father's life.

But she would not let it be. With one wrench, she tore herself free from the donkey and grasped her father's white sleeve.

"Please Father, another chance."

Marcus turned and sneered. "And who might you be?"

Rosella stared at her father. "Your daughter, Rosella!"

He pushed her away and she stumbled atop the stage, staring at the trio.

Emmeline and Elizabeth wore twin faces of triumph, reflective images. "I have no other daughters but these two. Go home to your fairy land, Fairy Queen. We've no want of you here."

Within her, she could hear the giggles of a Creature-Man.

Rosella wilted. Her head drooped and her flaxen hair cascaded around her face. She felt her arm being lifted, but did not look. The person turned her hand palm up and pressed an object within it. As her hand was forced tightly closed, she gasped as she could feel the object pricking her skin. Quickly, Rosella looked and saw it was a rose, as red as the blood which was now rushing to the surface. She watched as a drop began to pool where she had been pricked and felt the world begin to swirl once more.



Rosella could hear the crowd accosting her, shouting obscenities and pelting things at her body. She heard the donkey-man braying, apparently amused by her situation. She heard her father, the twins, and Elena being a family. She could hear Henry giggling. She heard her mother laughing. Around and around the world spun and within this whirlwind of colors she could see her mother's eyes, amused and triumphant at her daughter's demise. Once again, she felt hands attacking her body, pinching, caressing, pulling, squeezing. She could feel Henry panting at her ear and smelt desire on his breath. Then it stopped.

She was back at the island of isolation.

Rosella lay bewildered beneath the Juniper tree, covered with sticky juices of the fruit the villagers had thrown at her. In her hand, she still held the rose. Crimson trails flowed from her fingers down to her wrists, but she didn't wipe it away; rather, it seemed as if she saw, heard or felt nothing. Her hair lay fanned about her, like petals fallen from their dying stem. She made no sound, no indication that she knew where she was. She didn't move, didn't blink, barely breathed. Meanwhile, thoughts stormed her mind. Her mind was turbulent, a flurry of confusion, hurt and anger. Rosella was still, her eyes staring blankly at the fiery sky above her.

From beyond the garden somewhere she could hear a low moan of agony.

With a gasp, Rosella awoke from her daze. "Father?"

She sat up quickly, glancing about her once more, straining to hear that groan again. The wind blew gently around her and she could hear the Juniper's leaves with

their rustle-laugh, and amidst the Juniper's amusement she heard the groan once more. It was coming from the glass house.

Rosella stood, making her way towards her transparent bedroom. Through the glass she could see a figure upon the bed, still. She rushed towards the door. It must be her father. The vision in the mirror—the carnival must've all been a dream. Her steps quickened as she reached the edge of the bed and looked down. It wasn't her father. It was the Beast.

He lay curled on the bed with his eyes closed. His paws were wrapped around something at his abdomen, but what it was, Rosella could not tell. She shook his shoulders, trying to wake him, wanting to know if he lived, and suddenly not wanting his life to end.

"Beast. Beast! Wake, please. Beast!" Her voice grew more frantic and she shook him harder until finally he opened his eyes.

"Rosella. Please, pull it out."

"Pull what out? Beast, how can I help?"

The Beast uncurled his body, wincing with pain. With a gasp, Rosella saw what he had been clutching. Buried deep within his abdomen was the dagger she had used to end Ozra's life.

"I tried to pull it out...but couldn't." His voice was weak and rasping. He gazed at her with his dark eyes, and with a nod, she consented.

Rosella wrapped her hands around the silver handle of the dagger and pulled. She could feel the warmth of his blood release in a rush over her hands and she gagged. The blade, now slippery with crimson, dropped upon the floor and with a sob she sat upon the

bed and cradled the Beast towards her. He moaned in pain, and she peeled off her dress, holding it to his wound to stop the flow of blood. She had lost Ozra, and now she was losing the only other that had tried to be her friend.

“It was your mother, you know. She did this,” he whispered softly.

“She deceived me, Johnson. Everything she told me was false.”

He looked surprised at the sound of his own name and gazed at the juice covered woman in front of him. “What happened?”

“She fooled me. She taught me how to go through the mirror to my father. Instead she led me into a world of fools. Fitting for someone naive as I.”

He growled softly, trying to sit up. Rosella pushed his shoulder down.

“Shh...quiet now. You need your rest if you want to get better.”

“I won’t get better, Rosella. You know as well as I that I’m dying.”

She shook her head softly. “No. You mustn’t speak that way. You can’t die here in this prison. You will get better. And we will find a way to leave.”

“Foolish girl,” he smiled gently, then grew serious. “Beware of your mother, Rosella. She is not someone to be toyed with.”

He coughed once more, his body quivering with the exertion. She could tell he was growing weaker. Rosella lowered her lips to his muzzle and kissed him; the Beast’s eyes widened in surprise. With a soft sigh, he kissed her back gently and longingly. Carefully, Rosella pushed his body back against the pillows and mounted him.

She made love to him that evening, invited him to share her body. Her back arched as she received him, and her hands explored him for the first time. Their bodies

were slippery, slick with his blood and her juice and when they were done, he looked up at her with pleasure.

“Thank you,” he whispered and took one final breath. Rosella gently kissed his forehead and slid off of the Beast. Standing naked, she pulled the covers over his body.

“It’s time that I face her, my dear Beast. Dream well. We shall meet again one day.”

Rosella retrieved the silver dagger from the floor and headed towards the door of the glass house. With a final look towards her husband, she clicked open the door and stepped into the garden. Spying the juniper tree besides the house, she climbed its branches just as she did the first time the tree had been born.

“Mother, I know you can hear me. Come out to meet your daughter a final time!” She stood on the branches, naked and proud, calling out to her mother beneath the light of the moon.

There was silence for a few moments. The animals in the forest made no noise; the birds had stopped their twittering. Even the wind had ceased. Then she could hear the giggles of the Creature-Man.

They appeared besides her, sitting upon the branches of the juniper tree. Though the limbs of the tree looked to be thin, they seemed quite capable of holding the trio. Her mother was dressed in white, mirroring Marcus’ attire in the town square.

“Hello, Mother”

“Rosella, my dearest daughter, you look as if you’re angry with me. Don’t tell me my little adventure has gotten you upset?” Jezzalyn smiled at her daughter, unperturbed by the dagger that the younger woman held.

“You fooled me, Mother. I thought you loved me! I thought you were trying to help, when all along you took me as your puppet, a mere toy in which to cure your boredom.”

“And apparently I’ve grown tired of you. Sit, Rosella, and stop your whining.”

“You’ve killed my husband and turned Father against me. No longer will I be your pawn.”

Jezzalyn laughed softly. “Your father was never yours to begin with. From the moment we conceived you, he belonged to me. He only loved you because you were a part of me, but that is all you ever will be: a mere fraction of perfection.”

Rosella blanched, her blue eyes widening in horror. “You and Father. So the twins were speaking the truth! How could you, Mother. I’m nothing but an abomination, a child of sin. You do not deserve to live and neither do I.”

“You are a fool, Rosella, living in a world of my creation. Your life is but chimera roses; an illusion lasting only until the petals wilt and die. Your season has ended, my darling Rose, your bloom has lingered for too long.” Jezzalyn’s smile turned coy. “But perhaps you could be of something useful. Perhaps you are lonely now. Henry grows lonely as well. Perhaps you two could share each other.”

Henry’s grin grew lascivious. He giggled madly as one of his crooked hands reached towards Rosella’s naked breast. Rosella moved. She kneeled upon the tree branch as if she were going to sit, and in one quick motion, sliced the dagger across Henry’s throat. The Creature-Man’s giggling stopped in mid-air. He clutched his throat, red bubbling at the corners of his dried lips, staining his already yellowed teeth. With one helpless look at his mistress, he fell off of the branch and onto the leaf-strewn ground.

“We’re now one for two, aren’t we mother? I’m afraid I still need to catch up.”

Rosella calmly grasped the limb, dangled from it and dropped to the ground. Jezzalyn followed, her dark eyes full of fury as she looked from the slain man to her daughter.

“You think you can win, do you child? I am the creature of the forests. I am the witch of the night. I am your teacher, your creator, your death. There is no way you could ever win.” Jezzalyn’s face was fiery, her mouth curling into a sneer. Though her features were dark, the moon illuminated her coal’s hair, her ebon eyes, her rose red lips and skin made of snow. Snow White and risen again and was about to eliminate her Cinderella, daughter of her creation, creature born of her sin.

All at once, Rosella could hear her father’s voice in her mind, full of scorn and hatred. *Rosella, you are no daughter of mind. I’ve never loved you. You could never take Jezzalyn’s place. My precious angel; you are the devil.*

The proud Rosella did not wilt. She stood naked, strong and proud.

Images of Ozra and the Beast filled her mind. She could feel Ozra’s tongue lapping her face, his nose nuzzling her body. Than his whine of pain as she slit his throat. She could see the blood pouring from the Beast’s wound onto his dark fur as she pulled the dagger from his body. Images of their slain body crossed her mind; the feeling of despair she felt as she killed her only friend, the feeling of companionship as she made love to the Beast.

And still she did not wilt.

“Are these all the tricks you can play, mother? Mind games and pranks? Perhaps I was wrong about you; you’re weaker than I’d ever imagined.”

Jezzalyn attacked. Not with images or words, but with her body. She jumped upon her daughter and pummeled her body with her fists. With Jezzalyn's magic, each of these blows felt like fists of gold pounding her face, her chest and Rosella began to grow dizzy. She tried to roll her mother off, but she was trapped between the trunk of the juniper tree and her mother.

Jezzalyn grew a wicked gleam in her eyes. Held high above her in her hand was the silver dagger.

"You'll soon be joining your friend, Rosella darling. Goodbye, my dear daughter. It was truly nice knowing you—I never understood the saying, it's a shame when a mother outlives her child. It's perfectly fine with me."

As Jezzalyn's hand began to make its plunge to Rosella's death, Rosella reached into the earth besides the juniper tree. She was desperate, hoping to grasp a rock or root to stop the blade. Instead she felt a bundle of fur and shoved it in the path of the dagger. Her mother screamed with fury and with pain.

At first Rosella had thought she had grabbed Ozra's body buried beneath the juniper tree. She saw now that she had pulled the rabbit's pelt from its home under the earth, disturbing it from years of rest. Rosella watched as her mother continued her screaming, her form beginning to fade in the moonlight.

Her power. It had been in the rabbit's pelt all along. Jezzalyn must have concentrated her magic into the pelt, knowing that it was safe under the earth. Leaves began to fall from the juniper tree, and the fruit began to dry as the plant began to wilt and die. Snow White had born for the last time, and at long last Jezzalyn was dead.

Rosella's chest heaved as she tried to catch her breath. It was all over now. The fairytale had ended and the chimera was now shattered. She rolled up upon her knees and stood watching the Juniper tree wilt as she, the Rose, bloomed tall and proud.

Within her womb she knew a seed grew.

The island was gone, and in its place were the woodlands which Rosella grew up in leading towards Johnson's castle and her father. Later, she would go home to her Father, but for now she needed peace. She headed towards the castle, the home of her youth, to rest and restore herself. Rosella heard a rustling behind her. She looked over the shoulders and saw the roses. The red and white blooms were creeping towards the Juniper tree as if consumed with the need to abolish the tree completely. The thorny stems wrapped themselves around the glass house and throughout the garden in their final triumph. They grew upon the castle walls and over the archway where the flowers bloomed crimson and snow, welcoming their new mistress of the castle.

Rosella smiled and walked through the roses.