

# Serendipity

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# THE TOWN OF LOSERSTUFF

By Jack Montoya

Visit the town of Loserstuff  
Where outcast fairy tales dwell  
Our stories were not good enough  
We are not known too well

My brother, he is Peter Pan  
He is a household name  
Lives yonder out in Neverland  
Where he gets all the fame

I'm Peter's younger, wiser bro  
But you can call me Wayne  
I grew up, unlike him, you know  
So old, I need a cane

Lanky, the eighth dwarf of White  
Stands six foot eleven  
Banished for his massive height  
And now there's only seven

Our poor, asthmatic wolf in town  
He huffs and puffs and blows  
Yet cannot knock a straw house down  
Or fit in grandma's clothes

There's dear old Sleepless Beauty  
Who never goes to bed  
And anti-Genie's duty,  
Deny wishes instead

Rapunzel's aunts, two matching queens  
Have beards so long and silly  
And Zack, who grew some normal beans  
He makes a mighty chili

So pass the village barrier  
Into our magic land  
Although we're called inferior  
Our lives are not so bland



# *The Love of an Enemy*

*By Regina Martinez*

In a place where time wore a cloak,  
the world was tortured,  
strangled, and choked.  
The citizens of Trouville pleaded for peace.  
They bit at their nails and ground their teeth.  
Some slept near swords and loaded guns,  
while others cowered-prepared to run.  
Animals climbed atop mountains and trees,  
escaping the hellfire raging beneath.

Trouville was divided between east and west,  
where each side wore an emblem-  
a distinct metal crest.  
One was pleated in details of silver and gold  
And the other was ruby red-  
a symbol of old.  
They were loyal to their region and nothing else,  
saying anything to degrade the other-  
their slander whipped welts.  
From lovers to enemies,  
from friends to strangers,  
nothing was more detrimental than humanity in danger.  
But amongst the chaos, cries, and woes  
a bond developed of friend and foe.  
Unlikely hearts, once dead and cold,  
conformed to each other-smelting to gold.

Under abalone skies, in the dryness of October  
the two were roaming in the woods,  
obliviously inching closer.  
Until Eve heard footsteps over crunching dead leaves,  
she rotated quickly,  
a swift ninety degrees.  
She saw a man with a kind face,  
walking happily alone.  
And since the two were in East Forrest,  
she assumed him loyal to her zone.

Soon the leafy dry ground and dead vegetation  
caused a noticeable sound and exposed her location

“Hi, who are you?”,  
he said from a semi-close distance.  
But Eve remained guarded  
and feared coexistence.  
“I’m Kal”, he said with a cautious hello.  
If only he knew  
what getting closer would show

Nearer in sight, he examined her and paused.  
He now saw her pendent,  
traced with silver-gold claws.  
The claws of a dove imprinted boldly on her crest.  
It was all too familiar,  
it triggered palpitations in his chest.  
Alerted by the worry,  
Eve noticed his ruby stamped shoulder  
and now they stared at each other,  
wondering who would be bolder.  
Who would draw their weapon first?  
Who would point the loaded gun?  
Who would call for backup frantically?  
Who would give up and run?

Eve reached for her sword,  
prepared to attack at any moment,  
and that’s when Kal hid,  
but oddly from a different opponent.  
He stared past her shoulders,  
looking into the juniper trees.  
His brows furrowed together  
and he crouched to his knees  
Now Eve felt a troubling reverb  
as the ground rumbled louder.  
She saw great sequoia trunks,  
crumble down to a measly powder.  
Braced for the force approaching,  
the two huddled behind a boulder.  
In a space so tight and rigid,  
their hatred couldn’t feel colder  
They both felt disloyal,  
treasonous to their region.  
Just being in the same quarters  
felt like a good enough reason-



a reason to kill each other,  
It's what their families would tell them to do.  
To treat the other like scum,  
Like muck under their shoe.

But a giant was coming,  
some behemoth, colossal in size.  
There was no time to argue  
as Eve saw its reflection in his eyes.  
His pupils mirrored a daunting silhouette-  
of shoulders hairy and broad  
The beast cast an imminent threat,  
terrorizing them as it clawed.  
Swiping, jabbing, and thrashing the air,  
It threw sharp talons over the grass.  
Snarling like a rabid bear,  
The two had to act fast.  
That's when Kal took out his gun  
And shot rapidly at its torso,  
But the bullets did no damage  
If anything, they agitated him more so.  
He kept firing as Eve sliced at it's trunk-like legs  
But they weren't making headway  
To the beast, they were mere dregs

Some rope from Eve's bag was disheveled on the ground  
And Kal collected it to make a lasso  
Trying to corral its limbs like a bloodhound  
He swung it overhead with aim that was simply pervasive  
And Eve soon got frustrated,  
deciding to be forceful and abrasive.  
She snatched the rope and loosened the knot  
Until it was untangled in her hand.  
Then she threw one side to Kal  
Ordering him to, "take the other end!"  
He looked at her dubiously,  
Distrusting her every intention.  
Yes, they might have been fighting together  
But in Trouville any cooperation was a contravention

Yet in that critical moment  
Kal took the rope firmly and looked for Eve's instruction  
She yelled "Run around it's legs"  
Winding the beast to sure destruction

It soon lost all balance and collapsed on its knees  
As the two hastily tied him down  
Over the brutish, wild heaves

Finishing the job,  
Kal aimed the gun between its eyes  
A couple blows to the head  
And the beast was surely dead  
Laying still under abalone skies

With their swords broken and barrels empty  
The two had no weapons to use  
They stood exhausted and quiet  
Over the bloody, slain giant  
In a place so far and recluse

Breaking the silence,  
Kal dropped his gun  
and Eve sat on an old log.  
Neither were scared or decided to run  
Actually, they enjoyed some dialogue  
"Thank you for sparing me before the attack,  
I know you could've used your gun"  
"Well same goes for you with that razor sharp sword,  
one nick and I would've been done"

In the safety of that moment,  
they talked for several hours.  
In an eden away from Trouville.  
No mobs or burning towers,  
just amber marigold flowers  
and new friends at a lovely standstill.  
What interested them the most was how similar they were  
Two kindred spirits, perfect for each other.  
It's kind of affinity that rarely occurs,  
to selflessly love another.

After tasting this sweet feeling,  
Eve and Kal continued to meet.  
In the depths of the Forest,  
away from Trouville's fiery heat.  
Where neither held animosity,  
no hatred for the west or the east.  
Knowing that love resided in the coldest of enemies.  
Even a rival you suspected the least.



# Once Upon A Dress

By Jordan Henchey

Once upon a time, there was a young lad who lived in a rusty cottage on the outskirts of town. He lived there with his vivacious father, for his timid mother had died unexpectedly at childbirth. He never did understand why he and his father lived outside of town, for they contributed to the town in many ways. His father was a carpenter, building houses from dusk until dawn, almost until his hands were bleeding and the soles on his shoes had worn through. The young boy was learning the craft of his father, so that he too could one day build houses for the people in the village.

Though, he did always notice strange looks when he would come strolling through the village. The townspeople would laugh and shout and run and hide; distraught mothers would drag their children inside so they didn't have to see the young boy. The young boy was confused and puzzled, but he continued on his merry way to fetch the eggs and the water for that day. He let his golden locks hang past his shoulders and let the fabric of his cotton dress drag across the pebbled and musty walkway, which would in turn get the cotton to transform into a tattered cloth of brown. His father always told him to pick up the dress so that wouldn't happen, but he quite enjoyed letting go of it and allowing the dress to feel the dewy grass.

One night after a long day going through the town, the young boy's father came home still as cheery as could be. He started the pot on the stove, and began to salt the water. The boy walked in, looking quite disheveled, and sat down at the table to give out an exasperated sigh. "What's wrong, my boy?" The young boy looked at his father. "Why do the people in the village not like me?" He turned his head down to the table like a dog knowing he disappointed his owner. The father sat down across from him and looked down at his crusty hands. "Son, they don't hate you, they are, in fact, jealous of you." The boy glanced up. "Jealous? How could they be jealous? They get to live in the pretty village. They get to enjoy the short walks to the farm."

The father sighed and stared into his son's burning blue eyes. "They are jealous of you because you are living your life freely without any restrictions. They are even more scared of you because they don't understand you." The boy, still puzzled, began to shake his head. "How am I living any more freely than them?" The father looked down at the shredded ends of the cotton dress draped over his son. "Because you are wearing a dress. People don't like the idea that a boy can wear a dress." "Is it not just clothing though? Why do they care?" The father stood up to pour the pasta into the pot. "You're right, it is just clothing. And they should not care if it does not affect them. I saw how much you loved dresses as a child so I bought a vast number just for you. To me, clothing is a representation of style, a safe place where you can express yourself. The people in the village didn't seem to agree and thought I would be a bad influence for their children, so they kicked us out."

"I'm sorry, father. This is all my fault." The father whipped his head around and narrowed his eyes. "No son, don't you dare apologize for who you are. I would climb a thousand mountains if it meant that you could wear your dresses without being judged. But you, my son, are just simply ahead of the curve."

The boy lay in bed that night and thought about what his dear father had said. *I just want people to like me though. Why do I have to be different?* He slept through the night and again the next morning fetched the essentials. His raggy old dress dragged against the cobblestone, and he whistled while people ran. *They cannot judge me, he thought, for I am simply ahead of the curve.*



# The Gospel Woods

By Grace Jos

there it stands by the woods  
a dirt road ceases to be shaded,  
a little girl pulls over her red hood  
until he comes and she's persuaded,

deeper into the forest  
a girl with a soul as golden as the sun,  
her existence is ethereal  
but her story has not even begun,

later on down the path  
a beautiful woman walks,  
for one of the first times  
yet she is not allowed to talk,

as we tread lightly  
we see her life she has awaited,  
yet her slipper is yet to be broken  
not yet has her life been truncated,

back to the beginning  
the woods is not just a scene,  
but a place of the truth  
and everything in between,

this is what is real  
not what you've been told,  
by your parents or guardians  
this is something i can uphold,

later that same day  
little red became enthralled,  
by an unprecedented character  
who she will soon realize she didn't know at all,

he did what she didn't expect  
and down she went, she perished,  
to be gone and lost forever  
no longer will she be cherished,

continuing on  
this gold woman's hair remains angelic,  
people start to envy  
no longer was she a relic,

locked in this tower  
the world remains intangible,  
she stays there suppressed  
her future remained unchangeable,

the next women  
we can no longer see,  
because she lost her own bet  
now she rots in the deep sea,

the last woman's slipper  
becomes filled with red,  
and she is forced to be contained evermore  
and her existence is only to be a thread,

now don't dawdle  
we are not near the end,  
because this path is incessant  
you may never transcend,

I hope you have learned  
the truth of these woods,  
because i know that up until now  
you probably misunderstood.



# Fennec and the Axe

By Emma Rennard

Everyone knew of Velriec's axe. No one knew exactly how the axe itself had come to rest in the tree deep in the woods; there certainly were legends, but no one knew for sure. All that was for certain was that the axe was definitely stuck in that tree, and no one had come close to removing it. No one had really known how long the axe had been there either, long enough for the shrine around it to be built and for the following of those who protected it to be established.

All that was known about the axe, however, was that if someone were to ever come to remove it, it would surely mean the end of the Great Goblin Wars of Morphal.

The Wars, like Velriec's axe, had lasted so long that the exact details of its beginning were lost to time. No definite sides existed either, as the war had been so continuous that alliances had changed and evolved since their beginning.

This promise of peace and the end of the Wars was more than enough motivation for towns from all over to send their bravest warriors to the shrine out in the woods to go and attempt to retrieve the axe, as the legend had been spread that only one who was truly brave would be able to finally remove the axe from the tree and bring peace to the land.

Now, Fennec was the furthest thing from brave. He was known among the other people in his village for chickening out of plans at the last minute and was generally seen as a coward. His

village was one of the lucky few far enough away from the war fronts to be affected as little as one could nowadays. In his village, the only constant reminders of the war were the troops that occasionally rode through town on their way from the large training camps towards the feared fronts or the occasional recruiters coming to the town's square shouting about the benefits of joining into the armies. Fennec knew well enough, however, how brutal the war would actually be for those convinced to leave the town with the soldiers. His brother had been one; he hadn't seen him in months. The war terrified Fennec; he never wanted to go anywhere near the front or even out of the town.

The town, like almost every other town, was sending some of their bravest citizens deep into the woods. The legend had always been known that only someone who was truly brave could remove Velriec's axe from the tree, and in a desperate attempt to put an end to the war, everyone had been trying to find whoever would be able to finally remove the axe. Surely this "truly brave" individual would be able to help stop the war.

Everyone had gathered in the town square to watch the wagon full of what the town considered to be their bravest disappear into the woods. Fennec stared at them from the edge of the crowd. He knew that he wasn't brave, but he also knew that those sitting in that wagon certainly

all weren't the bravest. He immediately thought of his brother and the others who had left with him. They, he thought to himself, were brave. He doubted they were scared of anything! Fennec wanted to be like that; he wanted to be brave.

One of the men, a particularly outspoken and obnoxious washed up adventurer, was standing on the back of the wagon yelling to the crowd. He shouted out about how he was to be the one to remove the axe and end the war; half the crowd simply rolled their eyes, most of them knowing that if anyone from their small town were to be the one to remove the axe, it simply wouldn't be him.

The man, who was known as Grofuhn, scanned the crowd one final time as they prepared to leave. His eyes caught Fennec, standing nervously in the crowd, being jostled around by those who either didn't notice him or didn't care. He chuckled to himself before pointing towards Fennec, shouting out once more into the crowd, "And what about little Fennec here, surely he should come with us!" he yelled, mocking, "The little coward Fennec, surely you should come," he spit his words like venom out and grabbed Fennec by the arm, pulling him onto the wagon. Before Fennec could protest, the wagon suddenly jostled forward, he looked over the side of the wagon, too scared to jump off now that it had begun moving and was starting to pick up speed. He looked out back at the crowd - some laughed, others looked concerned as the wagon disappeared into the wood.

The journey itself took several days, Fennec sat in awe of the other passengers of the wagon the whole time. Even when the journey was challenged and creatures came out from the woods, they never seemed to get scared. They all seemed so brave, he wished he could be brave like them.

After about three days, they began to see some of the foretold landmarks that would lead to the shrine and Velriec's axe. Small stone figurines

and large tablets written on in a strange language dotted the side of the trail. The forest had grown eerily silent, and the colors of the forest had strangely grown more vibrant. Everyone in the party looked around the forest in awe, all of them knowing that whatever causing this certainly was a very powerful being.



Now, they could all tell they were growing closer to the shrine. The artifacts littering the side of the road were more frequent now and Fennec could swear he saw at least one small hooded figure duck back into the lush bushes. He felt a shiver down his spine as he suddenly had an intense feeling of being watched. He nervously turned towards the forest around him, eyes wide in fear, searching for whatever was watching him. It wasn't long before the wagon stopped, all those



sitting in the back of the wagon looked around in confusion. To them it still looked as if they were in the middle of the woods with no shrine in sight. The driver turned to face them, "Wagon trail stops here," he said "it looks like you are all going to have to travel on ahead by foot." They all turned and looked ahead, it appeared that the trail continued on ahead a few hundred feet before turning off into a thick cluster of trees. 'That must be where it is!' thought Fennec to himself. He turned to face the rest of the group and watched as they all calmly left the cart, 'I wish I could be brave like them.' he thought again, 'they never seem to be afraid of anything.'

They walked towards the clearing in the trees up ahead, the others in the group largely uninterested with the surroundings. Fennec scanned the forest around him cautiously, not wanting to be snuck up on by any of the creatures surely living in the woods. His legs shook as he nervously followed behind the rest of the party.

They reached the clearing, and true to their suspicions, there it was- The Shrine of Velriec.

The thick trees opened up to a circular clearing. Small stone figurines and structures littered the clearing. Surrounded by a large stone structure sat a singular tree in the center of the clearing. And in the tree, clear as day, stuck the axe. Everyone stood and stared in awe for a few moments.

'It really exists!' Fennec thought, 'It's real! The stories were real!'

Those who had been selected from the town to come and attempt to remove the axe stepped closer to the tree. Fennec stood behind, still nervously scanning the clearing. The clearing was quiet, eerily quiet. He continued to inspect the clearing while the others neared the axe, most of them commenting on the 'coward Fennec, too scared to even approach the axe.' But something still didn't feel right to Fennec. He grew more panicked as he scanned the clearing as the others drew closer and closer to the axe. Then he spotted it... was that, armor?

"Wait!" Fennec shouted, "Don't touch that!"

But it was too late, a hand had already grasped the handle of the axe. The clearing was

suddenly filled with a blinding white light. The light faded and there, standing near the tree, was what looked to be a glowing woman. Fennec recognized her instantly, "Velriec?" he whispered to himself.

"More challengers for the axe I assume?" the figure spoke. She looked to the small group now knocked to the floor in front of the tree coldly, her icy stare piercing through each of them. "None of you are worthy of removing it." she said bluntly, "I suggest you all head back home now, leave before I make you leave." The figure began to fade, when Grofuhn stood up,

"What do you mean none of us are worthy!" he questioned, stepping towards the axe.

Fennec watched, frozen in absolute fear. He knew questioning Velriec's judgement would surely end poorly, for all involved.

"You didn't even let us try it! How would you know our worth!" Grofuhn spat at the figure, grabbing the axe.

The clearing was filled with a flash as it was before, and a rough wind began to pick up.

"You dare question me?" The figure spoke, now hovering inches over the ground, "You come to take my axe and then question my judgement!"

Grofuhn was knocked back again by the same wind. He stared up at Velriec in horror of what he had just done. Velriec turned her power back to the group, still forced to the ground in front of her. Her anger seemed tangible.

'I need to do something!' Fennec thought to himself, 'No!' he argued back, 'Are you crazy!' He continued to argue back and forth with himself in his head, frozen in fear in his place, until he realised something. If he were to run and grab the axe, he could distract Velriec long enough for the others to be released!

'Now's the time,' the thought, slowly standing, 'Now's the time to be brave Fennec.'

Fennec ran, his heart pounding, half of his conscience streaming at him to stop. He ran across the clearing, feeling as if he was on autopilot. He ran, stumbling forward, towards the tree. Falling

forward, he reached his hand out, and grabbed onto the handle of the axe, and shut his eyes, preparing for the blinding flash and attacks from Velriec.

All at once, the clearing grew quiet again, the roaring of the wind had gone.

"You." said Velriec.

Fennec opened his eyes, turning towards the woman. Velriec and the others stared at Fennec in awe. Confused, Fennec turned to the tree behind him, only to see that the axe had somehow gone missing. And then he realised that he was holding something in his hand, he looked down at what it was.

The axe was in his hand.

Fennec, the coward, had removed the axe.

"You," said Velriec again, walking to Fennec and helping him stand, "are the one I was waiting for."

"H-how?" Fennec stammered, "I'm not brave like them," he gestured towards the others, who were all still on the ground, in shock, "I'm a coward."

"Exactly Fennec," Velriec said, "You aren't brave like them, because you are truly brave. You were the only one willing to overcome your fears. You can't be brave without being scared first. You were willing to face your fears in order to save others, you put yourself in danger in an attempt to save them. You are willing to wield this axe." She turned to the others, "You are all to escort Fennec home now, make sure he returns safely, he has a war to help end and peace to spread."

And so, that day truly became a turning point. With the axe, Fennec was able to help end the Great Goblin Wars of Morphal and bring a new found peace to the land.

And whenever someone spoke of Velriec and her axe, they made sure to mention Fennec, and how in order to be truly brave we need to be at least a little scared first.







# The Life of a Fairy Godmother

By Macy Carter

I'm sure you've heard this story before: a girl meets the guy, falls in love, and with some magical assistance, lives happily ever after. Well, here in the real world, things aren't that simple. I am the "magical assistance," or, as I am more commonly known, the fairy godmother. I suppose you could say my story begins a long time ago in a land far, far away...

I had the best childhood a girl could ask for. My village was a very kind and accepting place, and all of its citizens were proud to be a part of it. We were overseen by the Lamberts, a family of rich Lords and Ladies, but we never really heard much from them, except for when they gave us prophecies.

As soon as I had completed my studies, I began an "adventure of character," as my father called it. My mission was to help each person in the village. So, I went door to door finding how I could help others. I was quite popular among the townspeople, but popularity wasn't my intention. It was to simply make the world a better place, one person at a time.

Word about my mission spread through all of town until the Lamberts became interested. The Lamberts, I would soon come to learn, were frauds. They gave prophecies to the townspeople. The town looked to them for guidance, but they spewed random nonsense. They were not prophets, just money lovers who wanted more.

As I worked on my mission, the Lamberts were losing business. With my help, people could find that the answers to all of their problems

were inside them all along. They didn't need help anymore, so the Lamberts were losing money. Eventually, they got desperate.

Anna Louise was the town sorceress. She brewed potions of every sort, but she didn't get much business since very few people believed in magic. So, when Anna's son came down with a terrible fever, she had no money to pay for medicine. She was the perfect prey for the Lamberts.

They approached her with a deal, a cursed item in exchange for medicine to cure her son. Anna quickly agreed. Her son was cured! But little did she know that she had doomed my future. The Lamberts went on their way.

Word of their presence in the town spread very quickly. They were hardly seen in the town. However, they weren't just here for sightseeing. There were far more important matters to attend to. Mr. Lambert had come to approach me.

"So you are the girl we've heard so much about," he said.

"Excuse me?"

"You are Colette, aren't you?"

"Yes," I responded, "May I help you?"

"Well, that's sort of your thing, isn't it? I'm Mr. Lambert. I heard word of your mission and came to see all the good work you've been doing."

"Oh, yes. I try to help everyone as best I can."

"I see. Helping others, truly a joy, isn't it? Yes, well, as wonderful as it is, I'm going to need you to stop."

"I'm sorry, what? You want me to stop helping people?"

"Yes, I believe it's time for you to put this little endeavor of yours to rest, okay?"

"No, not okay! You can't just make me stop helping people!"

"Madam, I didn't want to take it this far, but you're bad for business! With everybody feeling all happy and perfect, they don't need me, do they. But, if you would simply give in, we can give this all a rest."

"No! I won't just stop helping others."

"Well then, if you like helping people so much, then surely you won't mind helping me."

The curse that was put upon me trapped me in an alternate dimension. A place consisting only of darkness. The only time I was released was with the words, "Oh, fairy godmother!" Yes, Mr. Lambert had turned me into a fairy godmother. He forced me to

become a slave to only his family line. I was forced to make his dreams come true.

Fast forward a few hundred years, I had been a fairy godmother for quite some time. This time, I found myself with a charge by the name of Cinderella. Oh, the stories will tell you of her beauty, grace, and kindness. Well, it's no wonder that they do, for she wrote them all. In reality, Cinderella was a rude, selfish little girl, the real villain of the fairy tale. After I placed a love spell upon the prince of the kingdom, Cinderella was a princess, and I was to wait in my void for my next charge.

"Who are you?" I found my next charge just a few years later. She was young, but strong. "I said, who are you?"

"Why, I am your fairy godmother of course."

"So my mother sent you. What do you want?"

"To make your dreams come true."

"Yeah, right. Well you tell my mother that she can't keep me quiet for much longer."

"What do you mean?"

"My mother? The queen? She had me banished from the kingdom after I spoke out against her reign of tyranny."

"Oh, finally! A sensible one!"

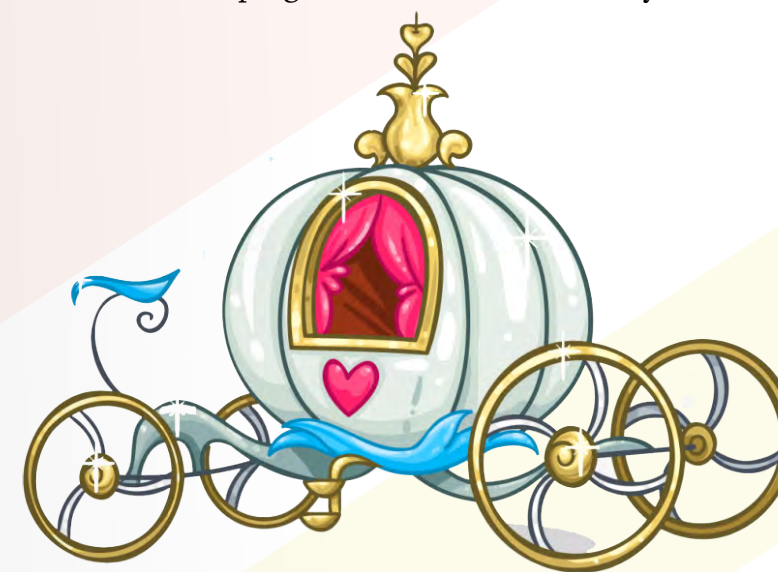
"Excuse me?"

"Your mother's ancestors, they trapped me, forced me to become their slave. I was made to make the dreams of your family line come true."

Cinderella's daughter, Elise, found much joy in this. Her first wish removed her mother

from the throne and destroyed her reputation. Her second wish allowed me to tell you this story today. After years and years of confinement, Elise released me from my duties, and I was a normal person again.

With this wish, Elise's father was set free as well. A love spell cannot hold without its caster. Elise and I were determined to continue our lives free and happy. I suppose you could say we lived happily ever after, but really, the story had just begun.





# RED OR BLUE

In a school in Tokyo, Japan, there is said to be a ghost, named Aka Manto, who haunts the girl's bathroom. Every kid at school knew about Aka Manto, so they always avoided the old bathroom by the gymnasium. One day, a young girl desperately needed to use the bathroom. Since it was the closest one, she decided to use the old bathroom that no one used. She thoughtlessly picked the fourth stall to do her business, since it looked the cleanest. When the girl reached for some toilet paper, she found none in the dispenser. That's when she heard the voice of Aka Manto outside the stall door.

"Do you want red paper, or blue paper?" He asked.

"Red paper." The girl replied. Aka Manto burst down the door of the stall and began stabbing her. He didn't stop until every inch of her clothing was stained red from her blood.

Many months later, another young girl found herself in desperate need of a bathroom. While she knew about the unsolved murder that had taken place in the gymnasium bathroom, she was too desperate to find another bathroom. When she finished her business in the fourth stall, she found no toilet paper in the dispenser.

"Do you want red paper or blue paper?" Aka Manto asked, lurking outside her stall.

The young girl remembered what had happened to the other girl who had answered red paper, so she answered, "Blue paper." The police found her dead in the stall later that evening. Her face had turned blue from being suffocated to death.

Another year passed, and again a third girl found herself using the bathroom by the gymnasium. Knowing the stories of the girls who had been killed, this girl brought her own paper to use. Upon opening her bag, though, she found that the paper she had brought had disappeared.

"Red paper or blue paper?" Aka Manto asked.

Desperate to not die like the others, the girl requested a third option. "Yellow paper." She was dragged down into the underworld through the toilet she had just used.

It's said that Aka Manto still haunts the fourth stall of that same bathroom to this day. Teachers refuse to let any other students anywhere close to that bathroom out of fear of what lurks inside. It is still possible to use that bathroom though, but if you do, be prepared to answer "Red paper or blue paper?"

*By William O'Connell*



# Under the Sea

By Hayley Villani



The seventh-born daughter to the king of Atlantica.  
Bearing an abundance of curiosity  
And a passion to discover that which is unknown to my kind.  
Hair as red as the roses that spilled from your boat into the depths of my water,  
And along with them came you.  
That night when the roaring winds from the storm came in and destroyed your boat,  
I was the one to save you.  
Ariel

Nothing attracts a being more than what they can't have.  
A concept I never understood until I saw you that night.  
It was the first time our eyes met one another,  
But I felt as though I've known your eyes for a lifetime.  
That is what you are to me,  
The thing I can't have.  
We live in two separate worlds.  
I'm a princess to the world under the sea,  
And you are a prince to the world on the land.

They all make fun of me,  
The people of my kingdom.  
What would a foolish girl like me want from the surface?  
When I live in a place as magical as Atlantica.  
I can't help but feel as if the only one around here that truly understands me  
Is my fish friend, Flounder.  
We go exploring through the old shipwrecks sometimes  
In hopes of finding new objects to add to my collection.  
But I don't care about all the riches we have down here.  
There's only one thing that I truly want;  
You

If only they knew how much I adore you.  
If only you knew how much I adore you.  
I would sell my soul if it meant I could be with you.  
Though it pains me to admit,  
I know we can never be together.  
Maybe we will meet again in another life,  
One where we can be together  
And live happily ever after.  
I'll be waiting for you there,  
My Prince Eric.





# *The Evil Queen*

By Sophia Arredondo

“Magic mirror on the wall  
Who’s the fairest of them all?”  
We’ve heard her say it in the past,  
For her tale was different, but it didn’t last.

The evil queen was one of a kind.  
We never knew what she hid deep inside,  
Inside a villainous cloud that filled her mind,  
And caused her to live in vain until the day she died.

Snow White’s beauty drove her insane.  
The young girl never meant to be the cause of any pain,  
Yet the queen was jealous and wanted her dead.  
At least she never said “off with her head”.

What the queen did was vile,  
Yet she still did it with a smile.  
She was the villain of this tale,  
And like every villain, in the end, she had failed.

The evil queen had no happy ending.  
No cheerful music played as the curtains were descending.  
Did she even deserve one after what she had done?  
She surely did not do it all for fun.

She desired to be the “fairest of them all”.  
She did absolutely everything she could to not feel small.  
But no matter how hard she tried, she couldn’t change her story,  
Because in the end, she was always destined to take the fall,  
as Snow White would always take the glory



# Red

By Jenna Levine

Once upon a time, there lived a young girl. Upon first glance, this girl seemed completely normal, she loved playing and laughing, and most of all she adored her family. However, there was a dark secret that only the little girl's gran was aware of.

The girl's dear old gran went to great lengths to keep this secret hidden from the world, and from the girl herself. Her gran spent nearly her entire life's savings to purchase the most beautiful red velvet fabric. With this fabric, she sewed a dazzling red cape for the young girl. Upon the completion of the garment, the gran explained to the little girl saying, "Listen here little one, I implore you to wear this cape, never to take it off. It is enchanted with the most powerful magic in all the lands. I promise it will keep you, and the ones you love safe. Take it off and assure you your nightmares will become reality."

Because the girl was so young she didn't quite understand what the old lady was talking about. Later that night, when the girl returned home from her gran's house, right away, she had forgotten about the warning presented to her just moments earlier. As the young girl walked inside her home and greeted her loving family, she

had taken off the cape.

The sun was setting and the young girl, her mother, father, and older brother sat at the dining table, eating their dinner. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary and later that same night, the little girl was put to bed by her mother and father. Unfortunately, that was the last goodnight kiss the young girl was to get from her parents.

Moments later, as the full moon's light crept into the girl's room, disaster struck. Inside you could hear the horrific screams of the mother and older brother. Then, the girl's father, begging, "Please! Please!" He cried out for only moments before going completely silent. From what the girl said, she was still sound asleep while her beloved family cried for help.

That morning, the little girl didn't wake up in her bed. Instead, she found herself lying curled up on a pile of blankets. After seeing the shocking image of bite marks covering the ones the girl thought so dear to her, she ran.

The young girl ran as fast as she could towards her gran's house. Panicked, she explained to her grandmother what had happened.

When the girl finished explaining the events of the previous night, her gran asked her one question, "Did you take off the cape?" The little girl said nothing. Instead, she looked down at her boots and started to cry.

Later that day, the girl's gran had gone to her home, and upon entering the house, she saw the horrific image the young girl had woken up to. No authorities were called. The gran had taken matters into her own hands. She removed the bodies of the deceased from the house and buried them under an old oak tree in the backyard with only three small rocks to mark the graves of the girl's beloved family. As she was leaving, she made sure to take the enchanted velvet cape, and left the house, locking the doors so no one could see the remnants of what happened that night.

The little girl went on to live with her grandmother. She promised herself nothing would happen to anyone the girl loved, not again. She had learned her lesson. Every day after that horrifying night, the little girl had worn the enchanted cape under any circumstances. Because she was always seen wearing it, everyone began calling her Red, including her gran. Living with her gran allowed the girl to get the fresh start she so desperately needed.

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Years went by where Red and her gran were safe. Red wore her cape and nothing bad happened. However, everything changed when Red turned sixteen.

It was the Sunday just after her birthday. At first appearing like any other, Red had gone into town to get supplies for the week, but there was someone new, a

boy, who had caught her eye. Even though the boy had caught her attention, she decided it was best to simply walk away. It was preeminent that she kept her distance from people. The fewer Red was close with, meant that if disaster were to strike again, there would be fewer casualties.

It seemed as though the boy had other plans. Similar to Red, she had caught his eye. However, unlike Red, for him, it felt like an invisible force was pulling him toward her.

"Good day!" The boy called out to Red. She kept her position, not wanting to make eye contact with the stranger. She debated about walking away and making it seem like she hadn't heard the boy's greeting. But she'd been standing still for too long. Swiftly she turned around, almost knocking herself over.

"Hello," She finally responded. The boy's face lit up.

"I'm new in town, and I've introduced myself to everyone already. However, it seems as though I'm very wrong in saying that, because I have yet to introduce myself to you." He put his hand out, waiting for a handshake. When Red didn't put her hand out to indulge in the greeting. The boy began to speak again, "I'm Gilbert." He added.

"Red," Was the only thing she managed to let out. Following her weak attempt at an introduction, she put her hand out, joining it with the boy's. That was when the two finally locked in eye contact.

The pair got extremely close over the next few weeks. Every day they'd learn something new about one another.



Red learned that the boy moved to town in search of a job. He and his father had worked together as lumberjacks. However, the last place they worked, had closed, and his father was getting weak. Gilbert was in desperate need of a job. So, he had taken the liberty of moving himself and his father.

Red's gran had known about Gilbert for some time now. However, Red hadn't told her the full extent of what was going on between the young couple. She wanted to keep their relationship away from her grandmother. There was no need for Red to give her grandmother something else to stress over.

Nearly every night, Red would sneak out to meet up with Gilbert. She'd spend the night with him, then returned home before her gran would notice her disappearance.

One night, Red planned to do her usual act of sneaking out, however, there was only one problem. The full moon was going to be out, and her gran was extremely superstitious about the things that could happen during those nights. She'd been like that ever since the brutal murder of Red's family had occurred.

Red didn't really understand it, she had felt it was just a coincidence that the attack had happened under the full moon's light. But every night her gran insisted on Red staying in. She would lock all doors and windows and board up both the front and back doors of the house.

It was easy enough for Red to unlock the window in her room.

That was what she did. Red had quietly opened her window and left. It was a cold

night, but of course Red was wearing her cape.

Gilbert's house wasn't too far from the village. It was a small little cottage in the middle of the forest. Oftentimes Red got lost in pursuit of the house, but tonight was different. She was much more aware of her surroundings, and she easily made her way to the house. Gilbert was waiting on the path just outside his home.

Gilbert had not invited Red inside. Instead, he led her into the forest. They walked for a few moments. Normally Red would feel uncomfortable and anxious while walking through unknown woods. However, she had the weird feeling she'd been there before.

Finally, the young couple reached their destination.



"This is it!" Gilbert said with a wide smile. Red allowed herself to look away from Gilbert's large green eyes. When she did, she was looking at the most amazing view she'd ever seen. It was a gorgeous lake view, with a waterfall running down the mountains surrounding it. The water hit the rocks at the bottom with great force, and the lake just below the falls managed to look unscathed by the power of the falling water. Even though at first the scene looked harsh and thunderous, it still somehow made Red feel at peace and calm.

After Red had a moment to take in the view, Gilbert took her hand and led her to a small campfire with a picnic set up just beside it. The young couple ate together, and after that fell asleep next to

one another just underneath a large oak tree.

The couple slept for a while uninterrupted, but then, suddenly, Gilbert was woken up by an angry growl. A large wolf stood beside him, looking as if ready to pounce and kill him. Gilbert noticed something oddly familiar about the wolf's eyes. The hairy creature continued to growl at him.

Frantically, Gilbert looked around in search of a way to save himself. If he tried to run, the wolf could easily catch up to him. The only way to escape was to kill it before it killed him. All of a sudden, Gilbert remembered something or someone. Once again he desperately looked around, this time in search of Red. She was nowhere to be found. All he could see was her red cape



lying just in front of the wolf.

So many thoughts filled Gilbert's mind. Had the wolf already taken the girl he loved so dear? No, he thought. There would be more than just her cape left if that were the case. Maybe she got away before the creature could get to her. Gilbert tried to keep his mind with comforting thoughts. If he began to think the worst, then there was no hope of escape.

All of a sudden, the wolf let out a loud howl. This was like its final words, or maybe a way to mock yet another one of its victims.

After the wolf had finished mocking Gilbert, it began to steadily grow closer. Its angry, hungry eyes set on its prey, ready to make a tasty meal out of him. However, when the wolf was just a couple more steps away from its future meal. Something strange happened. The wolf began twitching and shaking its head as if there were a spider or something unwanted atop its head. The wolf began making a strange sound, not a howl, or any growls. Nothing of the sort, this was a sound Gilbert had not heard a wolf make. It seemed as though the wolf was whimpering. From the small amount of knowledge Gilbert had of wolves, he knew something was causing this creature to be in distress.

The wolf stood there for what felt like hours, twitching and crying. It looked as if it were trying to do everything in its power not to kill Gilbert. It was fighting its instincts of hunting and killing. The wolf was using every bone in its body to contain itself.

Finally after minutes of watching the

poor creature being tortured by its own self, Gilbert decided it was time to help. Slowly he began walking back toward his house. After getting a few steps ahead, the wolf followed.

When Gilbert finally arrived at his cottage, he went toward the back, where he often cut wood to sell for extra income. There he picked up his axe. He felt it was right to help the wolf, and free it from the immense pain it seemed to be in.

The wolf slowly caught up to Gilbert, and stood right in front of him.

The two stood face to face, waiting for Gilbert to decide if he was actually willing to kill the animal, who seemed as though it had no real intention of killing him.

That was when Gilbert cautiously walked closer to the wolf. The animal took a few steps back, not knowing exactly what Gilbert was about to do. When the wolf realized he wasn't about to kill it, the creature allowed itself to relax. Gilbert crouched down to finally see eye to eye with the animal. Then, all of a sudden, it occurred to him. When Gilbert had first looked in the eyes of the wolf, he felt a sense of familiarity. He finally realized why the eyes of the creature looked so memorable. He knew those eyes, and this wasn't the first time he's looked into them. It was far from that, these were eyes he's looked into what felt like millions of times. They were the eyes of his love, Red.

Gilbert knew those deep blue eyes from anywhere. The same electric blue eyes he looked into every night, just before going to sleep. The eyes he lived to see. It was Red. But how? How is this even possible? Gilbert didn't understand. This

was simply impossible! All of a sudden it dawned on him. He was so close to killing the one he loved.

Gilbert was overcome by a surge of anger and sadness. He was angry at himself for being just moments away from killing the one he had such a fondness for. He was sad, because he knew that Red was still in pain and constant torment. He didn't know how to help. He began to sob.

"What do you want me to do," he said behind tears. He looked at the wolf. From what Gilbert could tell, she nodded her head in the direction they'd just come from. Then he remembered, the cape Red had always worn. It was as if everything went wrong when she took it off. Gilbert wiped away his tears and with his axe still in hand, he and the creature started back towards the lake.

It only took a few minutes for them to return. He picked up the cape and attempted to give it to Red. She didn't accept.

"Take it. This is what you need. Right?" Gilbert looked at the creature with confusion. Red shook her head in response. She didn't want the cape. Instead she nudged the axe Gilbert still had in his hand, she was urging him to use it.

"No." He said. "No. No, I won't." This wasn't something he could do. Why would Red ever ask him to do this? It wasn't fair. No one should be tasked with this burden. This was something he would always remember. Red began to whimper once again. Gilbert drew the animal in close to him. This would be their last embrace, before Gilbert would have to end the life of his own love.

Gilbert tried to prolong their last embrace for as long as possible, but it was time.

Gilbert drew back his axe, and struck the wolf with all his power. This was sure to kill it.

As Gilbert looked at his dying love, she began transforming back into her human self. With a grateful smile on her face, she closed her admirable blue eyes, and just like that it was over.

Gilbert dropped the axe, then he himself fell to the ground in defeat. He was tired and most of all, he was broken. He had killed the one good thing in his life. He thought he might die right there.

But, Alas, Gilbert had managed to pick up the girl he had loved so dearly, and he brought her to the house she'd grown up in. He had learned all about the night her family was murdered. On his way to the old oak tree, he put the pieces together of what had actually happened that night. He assumed over the years, Red did too.

As he was burying Red, he finally understood why she asked him to do such a horrible thing. She needed to be saved.

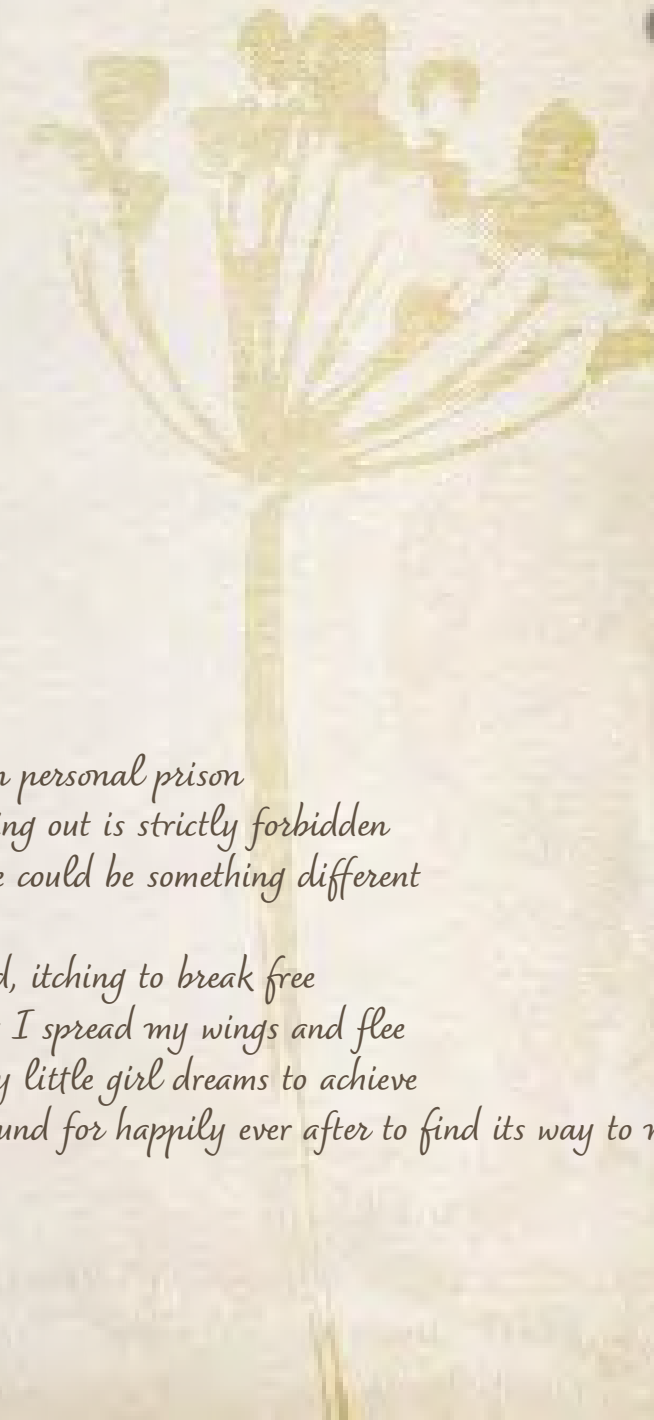


# Being a Princess

By Lucia Simonetti

*Being a princess is every little girl's dream  
The glittery gowns, extravagant balls, charming princes,  
but all those things make me want to scream  
Because being a princess is not what it seems*

*Forced to put up a Facade  
Urged to be perfect because anything less is wrong  
But its all at the cost of feeling like a fraud*



*The Palace is my own personal prison  
Locked away and going out is strictly forbidden  
Stuck wishing my life could be something different*

*I'm like a caged bird, itching to break free  
Awaiting for the day I spread my wings and flee  
My title is what every little girl dreams to achieve  
I'll keep waiting around for happily ever after to find its way to me*



# Aladdin's Revenge

By Ava Driscoll

Once upon a time, there was a young Arabian man who traded sweet fruits, each one a different shade of emerald, amber, or magenta, and spices, each flavor in varying hues of desert sand. He traded his fruits and spices all around local towns—his camel his only company and home. The young man called himself Aladdin. Aladdin heard stories upon stories when he was traveling. Gossip and rumors flowed around him, the young traveler seldom believing the stories.

One day, when the day was turning into evening, the sky changing from azure to a deep plum purple, a young merchant woman who was selling perfumes that smelled of orchids and cinnamon, spoke of a palace. Aladdin, who had begun packing away his precious fruit and spice, overheard the beautiful young woman. Her face was hidden by amethyst silks, only her dark eyes showed. The woman told a story about a golden palace, hidden in the desert, where only the most brave and worthy people could enter. Aladdin scoffed at the woman in silks and claimed her story was too foolish to be true.

This angered the young woman and her eyes took on a hazy reddish gold glow. What Aladdin didn't know was that the young woman was the Sultan's rumored wicked daughter. The princess frequently posed as a commoner to cause mischief and madness among her people. It was rumored that anyone who dared to provoke the princess faced unspeakable consequences.

The woman in silks now stared at Aladdin with her glowing eyes and cursed him. "You have insulted me, young traveler, so now you will face my wrath. I curse you. You will spend the rest of your days on this planet walking through the desert, only what you have in your satchel and other bags to keep you nourished. You will wander, looking for the 'foolish golden palace', even in the afterlife."

Aladdin once again scoffed at the woman, chalking it up to madness and parlour tricks. He soon realized it was not madness nor parlour tricks when he found himself alone with his camel in the desert. He roamed the desert for days on end just as the princess had said. Aladdin vowed to himself he would get revenge on the mad woman should he ever be able to escape the labyrinth of red and orange sand. The young traveler quickly had depleted his satchel of gem colored fruits, finding he only had one ripe pomegranate left in the coffee tinted bag.

Aladdin was at his limit of the endless traipsing when he spied something shiny and gold in the sand. He quickly shuffled to it and erected the sparkling object. It was a lamp and upon closer inspection it was a deep gold, stained and nicked from being exposed to the elements. Aladdin started to rub the lamp with a worn piece of cloth, deciding that he should try to get the

stains off, when the lamp began to emit a perfumed smoke. A humanoid figure emerged from the smoke, immediately towering over Aladdin and his camel. The figure's coloring was far from human though. The apparition was the shade of sapphires and had an eerie glow to it.

"I am the Genie and I will grant you three wishes. How will you use your first wish, Master?" The Genie grinned at Aladdin as it announced what it was. Aladdin's first wish, without hesitation, was to escape the desert and to be back in the nearest town. "Your wish is my command."

Back at the town, Aladdin gorged his camel and himself with a great feast of dried fruits, cooked meats, sweet wine, and freshly baked pita. That was when Aladdin made his second wish. "I want you to bring the woman who cursed me to me. I want revenge on this woman, for she nearly killed me with her curse." The Genie brought the princess to Aladdin moments later. The woman was wearing olive colored silks when she was brought to him, only Aladdin now fully saw and recognized who she truly was.

This gave Aladdin an idea. "I would like to use my last wish, Genie." The Genie waited for his young Master to continue, ready to fulfill any wish he asked for. "I want to become this woman's husband, so I shall be the Sultan. I want this woman to never speak again, so she shall curse no one else and no one else will suffer from her wicked words."

The Genie nodded, "Your wish is my command." A wedding was held days later, plates filled with roasted meat and candied peaches and pita, chalices were filled to the brim with expensive wine, and peonies and lilies decorated the kingdom in festivity.

The Genie went back into its bottle in a flash of color and smoke when the wedding was finished. Soon later when the Sultan passed away, Aladdin came to power, his mute wife beside him. Aladdin ruled with kindness and understanding despite his horrible third wish. The kingdom flourished and there were no more innocent people cursed by the woman in silk.





A long time ago there was a peasant in a small town in Nepal who was desperate to stop time. The man had a lot of money that was due. Even though he knew for a while that the money was due, he slacked off and figured that sooner or later the woman he owned the money to would forget. She was old and had lots of money already. She gave him a loan so that he could start up a small business, but he wasted the money on unnecessary things in life. She forgot things often, like the day of the week or what month it was, so he thought he could get away with this.

"I have nothing to worry about". The man said

"That old hag has nothing on me. She would not even realize she lost a couple of bucks," he continued.

But still as the time grew closer and closer he became more and more anxious. He was barely able to function at a certain point. The feeling of anxiety caused the man to feel paralyzed.

"I have to do something, I need to find some money fast," he said.

He looked through his savings, but he barely had a dollar to his name. The man often blew his money on anything but the necessities. He would barely have anything to eat but he would walk around sporting a fur coat. But then a crazy illogical idea came to his mind. He was going to stop time. He knew that this sounded outlandish. Deranged some might call him, but he was in need of money, so he needed more time. He could have just asked the woman for an extension-how wild

does that sound- but she was known to rule with an iron fist and the man did not want to become a slave to her.

"To the mountain I got to find the keeper of time. Those ticking hands will stop by tomorrow's next rainfall". He shouted.

And so he began his journey to death. Before starting this trip he had heard many stories about the keeper of time. He was fierce, cruel, and did not care for new visitors. This still did not stop the man. He needed the time to make some more money. He rather be dead than a slave. So he walked, with a pouch of water and a small leather bag. He followed the paths to the mountains till he reached the top of the third mountain to his right. The hike almost killed him.

"I can do this," he kept saying to himself.

The more he chanted this, the more he thought that he would believe it- but deep inside he did not. When he finally reached the

mountain he knocked on the huge wooden doors. At first no one answered other than two fairies. They were scared- not of the man, but of what the Time Keeper would do to him.

"What do you wish for?" they both said at the same time.

"I want to see that Time Keeper. I need his help," he exclaimed.

At first they hesitated to open the door, but they eventually let him in with panic written on their faces. They led him down a flight of stairs to a dark room.

"Hello, Hello? Is anyone down there?" he asked.

So he heard a loud grumble and the ground started to shake.

"Hello?" he said queasy.

Soon he felt rough fur scratch the side of his ear. Soon a sharp pain started to vibrate all down his neck. Blood oozed from the sides. He dropped down silently like how

snow falls from the sky. I guess the Time Keeper was worse than they thought. One the fairies heard the loud eating stop and they ran down to the basement and opened the door. When they took a peek they saw the monster and the tattered clothes the peasant came in with.

"After all, the ones that waste time always taste the best," said the Time Keeper.

# LOSS OF TIME

By Bre Smith





# CHAMBER

By Adrianna DeBenedetto

*My Lord wanted an heir  
who was dark but also fair  
whose mind would be clouded but filled with air  
to which my chamber would have to prepare.*

*My chamber labored everyday  
creating parts and slaving away  
the clusters would soon form a  
crown that would see the light of day.*

*The heir was not in my chamber alone.  
There appeared to be another.*

*The two heirs were both not light  
their restless souls put up a fight  
as the midwife was in fright  
to see the Lord's anger in sight.*

*My Lord only wanted one  
to make certain his throne was won  
my mistake can not be undone  
their misfortune has just begun.*

*I watched my heirs battle as they did in my chamber.  
One could not live if the other still lingered.*

*The heirs were bent on power  
their minds a wilted flower  
their sanity devoured  
by the minute, by the hour.*



# Where There is Light, There Must Be Darkness

By Allison Bechtler

The castle echoed with the sound of new life.

The wails reverberated off of the carefully chiseled concrete slabs of the corridors, bringing the good news to any who happened to be entrapped in their walls.

Unlike most other kingdoms in the northern region of the world, the King and Queen had been previously unsuccessful in producing any children. Their branch of the world had been growing weaker.

With no new alliances or promise of marriage, or even a new king, most other kingdoms refused to place faith or money in the hands of the small and cold realm. This had sent the small town under the King and Queen's control into a dark and gloomy depression that would seemingly never lift.

Until that day, nearly all hope had been lost for a child to be born from their King and Queen. The Queen had had many unsuccessful pregnancies in her youth, and the losses had left her, just like her kingdom, weak and frail.

The King, however, never gave up on his wife or his kingdom, and he had promised for nearly twenty years that they would someday have an heir and their land would turn green with warm air from the sea. He had promised flowers and bountiful crops for so many years that his boisterous speech lacked the luster it had had the first time he had promised it.

But, for the first day in almost two decades, hope had brought a smile to the faces of even the most bitter workers of the castle.

The King watched as his Queen, who hadn't smiled since their wedding day, beamed. Her smile spread ear to ear as she held the slimy babe to her chest for its first meal.

"I told you," he marvelled softly at the new life, "that everything would begin to get better. I promised, did I not? I promised you the warm air and the fruit."

The Queen, unable to shake the smile from her face, nodded.

"And health," she reminded. "You promised us health."

"Do you hear his cries? An unhealthy babe wouldn't be able to cry so fiercely."

And with that, the King and Queen named their newfound happiness Lucian, the perfect name for their little light.

Lucian cried just as he had from birth. Day and night, his piercing screams frustrated even the Queen, who had locked herself away once she realized he would not cease regardless of her coddling and maternal presence.

The King had no fear: for a crying baby was a healthy baby, and he surely could not cry forever.

It did upset him to see his wife so distraught when he had promised her warm air and fruit and the brightest light to make her happy once again, but he assured himself that her gloom would pass once the child stopped wailing.

"Please," the Queen wailed to her adoring husband, "my head is pounding. You have to take him and leave. I don't care where you take him, please!"

His heart throbbed for his wife, but he did as she asked and brought him outside to the garden where the King and Queen had been wed. Their new and fresh relationship had blossomed many years ago, and the flowers that had surrounded them when they promised themselves to each other for eternity were dead, and weeds had taken over.

Nevertheless, the King bounced Lucian up and down. He showed Lucian the weeds, proclaiming that their beauty and endurance made them infinitely better than the roses that had once lived there, but once it grew cold and dark the King had to return indoors with the still sobbing newborn.

The next morning the King rose to greet his wife, now quiet. He went to see his son-his light- and again heard the soft silence.

Now, he thought, my Queen will surely see that she was not the cause of his unhappiness, and we can be a happy family.

He did not wish to wake his light, so he left the door closed. He had matters to attend to before he could be a father. He was a king, after all.

When the wails began again they came from his wife-no longer his child.

His curiosity won him over and he rushed to go find her. Her child had silenced, what was she crying for? Perhaps from joy.

In the hall besides the bedroom of their child his wife sat with the child in her arms, her back pinned against the cobbled walls.

Her heaving cries told him all he needed to know. He already knew the look on her face. He knew the sound of her heartbroken pleas with a god who had long since abandoned them in their corner of the world.

Those agonizing screams were the sound of a mourning mother.

"You did this!" She spat the words like venom. "You brought him outside- he was only a babe! Didn't you know he'd catch a chill? You knew, you had to know that you'd do this!" her accusations filled him with a pain almost too much for him to bear.

The King, so stoic and joyful, but now torn apart, fell to his knees. The only foe he had faced but could not destroy had taken from him again. Death had taken his light right from his careful and loving hands.

"My baby-" the Queen sobbed as she clawed to keep the tiny body from the King's hands.

The Queen mourned as she never had before. She screamed. She cried. Her heart broke for the tiny life she had held for nine months, keeping him safe from all harm only for her naive husband to ruin the babe she had so carefully nurtured and carried for him.

But the King would not allow for his wife to hurt so deeply. He would not allow his kingdom to lose their faith, and he sure as hell was not about to let his only light be taken from him for something so silly as a chill.

He brought the babe down the cellar to the apothecary that had treated any illness in the castle and demanded a cure.

Both men knew that a cure for death was not something they could yet procure, but the apothecary didn't dare say that to the King, only promised that he would dress his son's body accordingly for the burial.



The King refused this, and dismissed the apothecary without hesitation. He then laid his son's blue body on the table. He would find a way to bring back the hope and life in the small boy's body. No fiend could take something from him that meant so much. He simply would not allow it.

The Queen sat in front of her mirror floors above the King. She had long since lost her youth. She blamed time and despair for taking her beauty. Perhaps she had simply been too old. That had to be the reason for the loss.

She took her time preparing herself in all black to go to the church to pray. It had been many years since she had prayed, but she wanted to beg for a safe and warm place for her Lucian to rest .

At the church the warm scent of incense greeted her as she knelt to pray. She remained motionless with her hands clasped together until her back ached over time and her hands grew stiff. She remained until she was brought back by the help for dinner.

She did not want to face her husband. She did not want to accept that he had done this to her and their son. Her heart was pained with the loss of both her son and her faith in her husband, but he never came for dinner, so the once proud queen slouched in her seat and put her elbows on the table to weep into her palms.

Days and nights passed with no signs of the King's presence in the castle besides the occasional rustle of blankets when he turned in for the night, if he did try to sleep at all.

The Queen, despite her anger, longed for the touch and comfort of her husband. She descended into the cellar to find her husband with a glass bottle in one fist. He was hunched over the table of the apothecary.

"You've given in to spirits?" The Queen hummed as she gently reached out and slid the bottle from his hand.

"Have you ever feared death?"

His cold words came as a shock to her. Very rarely did he speak of anything unhappy, especially not death.

"Perhaps," she allowed. "Briefly. In my youth I suppose."

"It's a pig."

"Pardon?"

"Death. It's a greedy pig. So hungry and monstrous it seeks out those who cannot fight and takes them from the hands of the people who loved..." The King pressed his palm to his forehead briefly in a moment of weakness and fluttering dizziness. "A goddamn pig."

"You're talking like a mad man. Come to breakfast with me. The sun has come up, and you must eat."

He shrugged off her offer and held himself over the table.

"I won't let it win. I'm sure to beat it. I could beat anything."

"My dear, I'm sure there's things even you can't conquer," The Queen soothed.

"Don't speak to me like I've already lost. I haven't lost. I haven't lost anything yet, just you wait. I'll show you. I'll show everybody!" His hands shook with anger.

"My husband..." The Queen trailed off as she gently held his forearm and gave him a soft tug towards her. "Your grief is controlling you. Come. Let's eat."

His body separated from the table and she caught a glimpse of what he had been slaving over.

"Don't look," he begged. "He isn't ready yet. He's almost back, but not quite. The fight is hard, but I'm sure to win. Trust me, don't look."

Even if she had wished to believe her husband's sure words her eyes had already been studying the mass.

"What have you been doing?" Her voice was hardly as whisper as her stomach rose into her throat. "What have you done?"

Her lips shook as she saw her baby boy. He was laid across the table. Blood pooled under him. Small haphazard stitches barely held him together along with other pieces she dared not name. A wing half jut out from his small shoulder and his mouth was stitched shut. One eye was open to reveal an obviously disproportional eye, and his feet had been cut off and reattached with small hooves.

"I told you not to look," The King growled. "I told you not to, but you don't listen, do you?"

The Queen's hand flew over her mouth.

"You—" "I'm not finished yet. Just you wait. I won't let anything take him from us."

She feared for her own life just then. This man who had taken apart their child and reassembled him could not be her husband, and she nearly collapsed from the paralyzing fear she felt in that moment.

"Yes," she agreed in a whisper. "You're not quite finished, but I know you can do it. You're a good man."

The King turned with a cold and emotionless look on his face as he held the small dull knife in his hand. He held it so tightly his knuckles turned white.

"I've always wanted to hear you say that."

"You're a good man. I married a good and selfless man." Her hands shook as tears stung her eyes and her throat tightened. "I'm so proud of you."

His face relaxed for a moment.

"Will I be a good father?" he asked his wife in a soft tone.

She nodded.

"You're the best father and king that anybody could ask for."

He smiled and turned back to his work.

The Queen, dazed and horrified, turned and walked back to the table where she held herself tightly. The food was steaming in front of her, but after what she had seen she could not eat a single bite.

In a brief moment of silence she made a decision. Her hand fluttered to the small knife set next to her plate.

She rose and, like a specter, floated down the corridors where she longed to hear the cries of her son again.

Her hand held the blade tightly as she returned to her husband.

The sound of scissors cutting made her stomach turn. Upon her arrival the King turned and smiled.

"My loving wife," he swooned.

"My dear husband."



# WALK AGAIN

By Panika Garg

*‘Once upon a time, in a far away land, a young prince lived in a shining castle. Although he had everything his heart desired, the prince was spoiled, selfish and unkind.’ (Beauty and the Beast, Walt Disney)*

There was a man named Adam who had everything. Despite having the world laid out at his feet, he didn't appreciate what he had. He was spoiled, selfish and unkind. One night, when Adam was at a party, he got drunk on the alcohol, and hopped into his car. When he wrapped his car around the outer stone wall of his house, he was taken to the hospital, where a severe spinal cord injury was diagnosed. Despite all the money that Adam had, there was no treatment for his injury. Adam went way into isolation, waiting for a day for when there would be a cure to his injury. There was a deadline on his injury though, if he did not find a way to walk again within the next 10 years, his muscles would start atrophying, and Adam would never be able to walk again. And so Adam was forgotten-until he was not.

Bella strolled through New York City. Bella loved the city. The energy and the architecture had always appealed to her. Bella walked with her AirPods jammed into her ears, the sounds of the world drowned out by the music. As she walked, she watched the people around her. Everyone rushed to get

everywhere, though there was a certain peace to all of it. The rushing and the bustling and the pushing as people went about the day and their lives. She watched the crowds waiting for buses and others trying to hail taxis. She watched the baristas in the coffee shops and the baker in the bakeries. She watched as old people and new people alike started their morning routines, following the same pattern of events every day.

Bella stopped at the New York Public Library. She went in and saw her favorite librarian at the desk.

“Hi Bella. Back so soon?”

“Of course, you know how it is. This one was so good! I couldn't stop reading it. That plot twist was unforgettable. Do you have anything else for me to read?” Bella asked eagerly. The librarian chuckled in response to Bella's enthusiasm.

“You've read all of the older ones, and there are no new books. I don't have anything for you.”

“Oh, that's all right. I'll just reread this one.” Bella said, picking out another book from the shelf.

“Are you sure? You've reread it so many times though.”

“Oh, but it never gets old no matter how many times I read it.” The librarian

checked it out for Bella and Bella put it in her bag before she left the library and stepped out onto the crowded streets once more. This time her destination was the New York-Presbyterian Ochs Spine Hospital at which she was an orthopedic spinal surgeon.

When she reached the hospital, Bella waved to Ms. Jenny, the elderly head nurse of the spinal ward.

“You're early again Bella?”

“Hi Ms. Jenny. Yeah, I walked through the city, so I left my house early.”

“Isn't that the same excuse you give everyday? I would take every opportunity to sleep in. Why would you even want to get up this early?” Ms. Jenny had an odd look on her face, as if she was trying to solve a very complicated puzzle.

“I'm just an early riser I guess.”

Bella ducked her head to hide the color in her cheeks. She quickly walked away from the nurse though she couldn't help herself from hearing the nurse's final comment directed to the other nurses rather than her.

“She's quite unusual, isn't she?” Bella also heard the other nurses murmur in agreement. Bella walked even faster, hurrying towards the back to get ready for her shift.

Bella was dead on her feet at the end of her shift. As much as she wanted to go home, and watch movies for the rest of the evening, she had to go to her father's house to have dinner with him before he had to go to his restaurant to prepare for the evening rush. Bella's dad, Morris, was a chef with his own restaurant. Her dad had the best food in the city, though she did have a biased opinion, but the restaurant was struggling financially. Bella tried to give her father some of her money, but he always refused.

As Bella walked to her car, Gus and his friend bombarded her. She tried turning around and walked the other way, but—“Hey Bella. Are you still working here? You should

focus on better things than this old job.” Bella slowly turned back around trying to delay the inevitable. Gus was a nurse who worked in the emergency room. He was the singular most annoying person she had ever met, not to mention one of the most self-absorbed.

“Hi Gus. And what better things should I be focusing on?” Bella rolled her eyes, trying to push past him.

“Me, of course. Anyway, you will be joining me for dinner, I presume?”

“I will most definitely not be joining you for dinner. I have plans to eat dinner with my father, not that I should have to explain myself to you.”

“Your father? The chef of a dying restaurant? You would choose to have dinner with him rather than the dashing Gus?” And this was Finn. Finn was Gus's so called best friend. Gus treated Finn more like a servant than a friend, but who was she to judge?

“Oh, shut up. You know nothing about my dad.”

“Yeah Finn, don't make fun of her father.” Gus reprimanded Finn. “That's my future father-in-law that you're talking about.” Bella made an obscene gesture at the two of them and practically ran to her car.

Before Bella went home, she picked up some food from a takeout place. Bella knew her father was way too busy to cook, so whenever they had dinner together Bella always got takeout or pizza. Bella arrived at her house to see the kitchen in total disarray.

“What is going on here? Why is there stuff all over the place?”

“Oh Bella, you're here! I can't find my glasses. Do you know whe—” Morris stopped mid-sentence when he saw his glasses in her outstretched hand.

“They were on the table next to the front door.” She said with a wry smile.

“Oh, thank you dear. Let's sit down and eat.”



As Bella and her father ate, they discussed what had happened since last week, when they last had dinner together. Bella told her father about Ms. Jenny and her conversation with her that morning.

"She said I'm 'unusual'? Like, she didn't even whisper! I heard her say it to the whole hospital. And I thought she liked me!"

"Bella, Bella. People will always talk and you can't stop them from doing that. People will think what they want to think and say what they want to say. Don't get bothered by it though."

"I guess." Bella said, though she found the explanation to be very unsatisfactory. "Anyway, you must be headed for the restaurant now so you aren't late." She got up and threw away the takeout containers.

"Yes, I better go. See you next week, Bella." Morris hugged her.

"Bye Father. Call me when you get home after your shift."

"Will do Bella dear." Bella walked to her car, her father walking to his own car after he locked the house to the door. Bella reversed out of the driveway and went home.

Bella jolted awake at the sound of her phone ringing. It was 3 in the morning. And her father was calling. That was weird. He never called her this early in the morning. She immediately picked up.

"Hey Dad. What's up?"

"There's been an incident!" His voice was high pitched, filled with panic. Bella got out of bed, holding her phone to her ear with her shoulder.

"Oh no! Is everyone okay?"

"Not that type of incident. I messed up someone's order and they are going to sue the restaurant!"

"Oh my stars! Did you explain what happened? Did you offer a full refund?"

"This man named Adam called in and ordered a filet mignon for delivery. After we

had delivered the meal, the man called again, furious this time. Phillippe was the one who answered and then he gave the phone to me to talk to the man. The man was saying how he ordered a filet mignon and got prime rib. I tried explaining what may have happened and offered him a refund, but the man was quite angry. I don't know what to do. If he actually sues us..." Morris trailed off.

"You could lose the restaurant! Your whole life's work! Who is this Adam guy? Maybe if someone goes to talk to him they can convince him to drop the charges?"

"I don't know. Don't worry about it. I'll just do something, maybe..." Morris trailed off, lost in his own despair.

"Wait, hold up Dad. Could you just tell me the full name of this Adam guy and his address for delivery. I'm gonna do some digging."

"Yes, his name is Adam Silvesta. Be careful, Bella." He also gave her Adam's address that she immediately wrote down on a separate sheet of paper.

"Yes, Dad. I always am." Bella hung up, and grabbed her laptop. There was no way she was sleeping after that. When her laptop turned on, Bella looked up Adam Silvesta and much to her surprise there were a lot of hits by that name. She had expected to do a lot of digging, but this was even better. When she read a couple of articles, she learned that they were all about the same person.

Adam Silvesta was rich. Rich, that screamed 'Daddy's money!' In the pictures that she saw, striking was the only word that could be used to describe him.. He had black hair cut close to his skull. His eyes stood out sharply contrasting with his short hair. His eyes were relaxed with the look of someone who had the world laid out at their feet. He had a sharp jawline and an indulgent smile on his face. Bella studied him closely. So this was the man who was going to sue her father for an

innocent, harmless mistake. What a jerk.

These articles were all about Adam's antics growing up. His past girlfriends, outrageous indulgences, crazy tricks. She read through each article closely as only a doctor could do. She gathered every piece of knowledge about him, storing each piece of information in her mind for later on. The last article on him was dated to about 10 years ago give or take a couple of months. It was about an accident. The article said that Adam was drunk driving and when he was driving too fast, he crashed his car into the wall outside of his girlfriend's house. The article said that Adam and his girlfriend's families refused to comment. Adam and his girlfriend did break up though, and Bella wasn't surprised in the slightest. Adam also did not have any social media accounts. This tidbit of information was hard to believe, but when she found a social media account from one of his friends, there was only one account that had Adam tagged in it and it was from 20 years ago. This post was also one of the first posts on the account and the only one featuring Adam. There were no other posts of Adam on any other social media platform or on any of his friends' accounts. It was as if he wanted everyone to forget he existed in the first place. Bella shivered at the thought.

It was 5am when she completed her research. She didn't have to go to the hospital today, and yet she couldn't fall asleep again no matter how hard she tried. Instead, she decided to finish the book she got from the library the previous day.

Books were Bella's escape. She lost herself in them, becoming the character she was reading about. Understanding the choices, emotions, and burdens of each character. In the moments she was reading, there was no Bella the Orthopedic Spinal Surgeon. She was just another book character who always came out on top, despite the losses. There may not

be many who lost their lives when Bella was treating them, but it was devastating all the same. The guilt, the nagging little voice in the back of her head saying, "Could you have done better? Did you do something wrong? Why couldn't you help them?" Bella never forgot her patients, especially the ones she lost. Being a doctor was a difficult job. Knowing that a person's future was in her hands was a lot of pressure, and so slipping into a book was one of the only ways that she could relax and not lose herself in her thoughts.

The next day, Bella set out to meet Adam in person. Adam lived in a penthouse in the upper west side. The kind that rich rich people lived in. She admired the building from outside. The whole building was a marvel of architecture. Its shiny exterior reflected the evening sun. The floor to ceiling windows were tinted, preventing a look inside. She opened the door and stepped into the lobby. The interior was lowlighted with lamps hanging from the ceiling. There was a water wall on the left, with color changing lights behind it. It was beautiful, the perfect combination of modern and medieval. The lights illuminated the lone man standing at the desk, and she walked over to him.

"I would like to go up to Adam Silvesta's penthouse please."

"Is he expecting you?" The doorman asked.

"Not at all."

"Let me call you in first then." He picked up the phone ready to dial Adam's number.

"Wait, hold on. I want to surprise him." Bella put on her 'please face'. Her father could never resist her when she made that face.

"Who are you to him?" The doorman had a very skeptical look on his face.

"His girlfriend." Bella said quickly.

"Adam doesn't have a girlfriend." The doorman's skepticism increased.

"Please could you let me through. I really



need to talk to him. Just this once, can't you make an exception?"

"Tell me who you are and what you want with Adam and maybe I'll let you go talk to him."

"Fine, whatever. So, my name is Bella and last night Adam ordered from my father's restaurant and there was a mishap with his order. Adam is going to sue my father and I need to talk him out of doing that. Please, you have got to let me go talk to him."

"Fine. You'll need this card to use the elevator." He handed Bella a plastic card.

"Thanks Lumen." She said glancing at his name tag. "I owe you one." Bella hurried to the elevators, just in case her new bud Lumen changed his mind.

In the elevator Bella thought about the close encounter that she had with the doorman. She was really lucky that Lumen thought that her problem was urgent enough to let her in. The elevator dinged open and there was only one door at the end of the hallway. Bella walked up to it and rapped sharply on the door.

The door finally opened and in a wheelchair sat Adam. Adam looked much different than in her pictures. Where his hair used to be cropped short, it was now long and shaggy, hanging in his eyes. His clean-shaven face was covered in week old stubble. There was a rugged charm about him, she thought. She snapped herself out of her thoughts.

"Hi Adam. My name is Bella." She extended a hand out for him to shake.

"What do you want from me?" Adam looked at her hand disdainfully.

"I need to talk to you." She lowered her hand.

"About what? I don't even know who you are."

"I'm the daughter of the man you threatened to sue yesterday. Can I come inside?" She said brusquely. Adam looked annoyed at her declaration. Nonetheless, he

rolled out of the way and let her inside.

She walked through the entryway of his penthouse. It was stunning. There was a large open kitchen to the right housing every top class appliance anyone could think of. The appliances gleamed as if they were brand new. Bella wondered if he ever cooked. Attached to the kitchen was the dining table, which had 4 chairs with it. The table was small, but beautifully crafted. It looked to be hand crafted and Bella knew that it must be. Rich people always get the real thing, no fakes for the rich. The table was situated next to the floor to ceiling windows. The window blind were still down despite the fact that he lived in the penthouse and no one could see inside. She wondered if Adam just had an aversion to sunlight or if there was another reason behind the closed blinds. On the left was the living room and fireplace. The fireplace was roaring and most of the house lights were turned off, giving the house a gloomy feeling. There were 2 black leather couches facing each other with a glass coffee table separating them. The whole house was immaculate despite the fact that there was a grown man living in there and she showed up uninvited. Quite shocking really. Next to the fireplace was a hallway that most likely led to Adam's bedroom.

Bella sat in one of the leather couches while Adam wheeled himself next to the other couch.

"So, what brings you to my humble abode, daughter of the chef?" Adam asked sarcastically.

Bella ignored his sarcasm choosing to answer his question. "I want you to not sue my father."

"And why should I do that? His restaurant messed up my order and they should pay for it." His previously sardonic face turned to one of annoyance.

"Because that restaurant is my father's livelihood!"

"So?"

Bella spluttered at the question. "What do you mean, 'So'?" My father would lose his restaurant! It would devastate him! It was his dream!"

"Even if I had a heart big enough to agree with your sentiments, I never do anything without getting something in return. What will you do to convince me to not sue your father?" Bella considered his question. What do you give a man who has everything? Money? Love? Happiness? Freedom? But couldn't Bella give Adam freedom?

"Freedom." Bella blurted out. "I can give you freedom."

"What do you mean?" Adam looked intrigued for the first time since they started talking.

"I can make you walk again."

"How? Is there a new treatment or something?"

"I'm going to have to assess your legs and see how much feeling they still have in them. Depending on that, I can begin to treat you. You may still need to use a cane to walk though. But over all, I can help you walk again."

"I am going to have to consider your offer."

"Look, I am a top tier doctor and I have lines of patients who want to be treated by me. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity for you. You won't find this type of treatment anywhere else. If you don't sue my father and his restaurant, I will take you on as my patient. It's that simple." Adam contemplated what she just said. While Bella watched him, she tried to quench her internal panic.

After what seemed like an eternity, he looked me deep in her eyes. It was as if he was trying to determine the genuity of her offer. "I accept your proposal, Bella." He started to roll away, but then he turned back. "Would you like to have dinner with me?"

"Like a business dinner?"

"You could call it that."

Bella thought about it. She really wasn't in the mood to go home to an empty house. "I guess I can stay."

And so Bella found herself sitting at the kitchen table eating one of the most expensive, yet delicious, meals of her life. Adam poured some red wine to go along with their meal and it was amazing. That bottle of wine probably cost more than her whole apartment alone. Conversation flowed easily between the two of them after their initial rocky start. As the wine got flowing, he told her about his accident and how he got his injury.

"I met Agnes at a party. She was standing in the corner, and I got the feeling that she didn't want to be there. So I decided to talk to her, to see if she wanted to leave the party to go have a joyride or something. And for the first time ever, she said no. Like who tells me, no? I was shocked and that was the start of our relationship. Agnes was different from the rest of my previous girlfriends. She had a naivete that was what first attracted me to her." Adam paused to collect his thoughts. "From then on, we started to spend a lot of time together. I got to know her really well, and I realized that I was starting to fall in love with her a little at a time. It was hard not to. She was so innocent and pure, and I couldn't handle it. The great Adam Silvesta, party boy extraordinaire, falling in love. It was preposterous. So that night, I drove to her house and broke up with her. The worst part about it was that I knew that she was in love with me, all the way. But I still went and broke her heart. I hated myself then, so I drove to the nearest bar and got drunk out of my mind. And the next I know is waking up paralyzed in a hospital bed." Adam rubbed his thighs unconsciously, as if remembering a time when he could use his legs.

"When I woke up, my parents disowned me. They let me keep my trust fund, but they cut me out of their lives like I never existed."



All of my so called friends deserted me as soon as they realized that I was not the guy I once was. Those days were the worst of my life and probably the lowest. I tried overdosing on my pain meds, but it didn't work." He gave a short humorless laugh. "And so that's my story about how I'm paralyzed. Still want to treat me?"

"If that gets you to drop the case on my father then yes. You may have been a selfish jerk once, but you still have time to change. And I for one, don't hold your past against you." And that was that.

The next day, Bella called Adam to ask about his appointment. He was adamant about not coming to the hospital. He insisted that she bring her equipment to his house. There was too much equipment to move to Adam's house, and she told him as much. After a long while, they settled on a compromise. Adam would come to the hospital, but she would make sure that she would be the only one seeing and treating him. They set an appointment date for Adam's first appointment where Bella would assess Adam and create his treatment plan.

Over the next couple of weeks, Bella and Adam spent time preparing Adam's legs for the treatment. Adam already had a very strong upper body, by years of lifting himself out of his wheelchair and years of weightlifting. She helped him prepare for the surgery, both mentally and physically. They practiced leg exercises, with Bella moving Adam's legs, so the muscles would redevelop and so it would be easier for Adam to walk again after the surgery. They also discussed Adam's upcoming surgery in extensive detail. Adam seemed to be more of the do more/ talk less kind of person, so the exercises came easy to him, while mentally preparing for the surgery and learning about the surgery bored him to tears.

Bella started to get to know Adam better and she was surprised to know that Adam was not just a cruel, heartless rich guy. He

had an insightfulness that was unexpected for someone of his caliber. They talked about a range of things starting with their shared passion for books and movies to debating about political decisions. Their talking turned into a tentative friendship kindled by similar passions. Bella wasn't afraid to speak up when she disagreed with anything Adam said or did which sparked many debates between the two, though those debates never turned into arguments. Bella never had a friend with whom she wasn't afraid to voice her opinions, and so Adam -who never made her feel that she shouldn't say something- made her even more grateful for their friendship.

On the day of the surgery, Bella prepared herself for the procedure. She took deep breaths, clearing her mind. In the middle of a deep breath, a hand grabbed her arm and yanked her into the closest empty room. Before she could free herself out of the grip the hand released her and Bella whipped around. It was-

"Gus! What the hell is wrong with you? Why did you grab me like that?" Bella shouted. She looked at his face, waiting for an answer. His eyes held a maniacal gleam to them and his mouth was shaped into a snarl. It looked like the old Gus amped up on drugs or something. "You've been dating that other guy! How could you do this to me,?" He growled at Bella. He shoved her into the wall, gripping her by the throat.

"I have no obligations to you, Gus." Bella yelled angrily at Gus, ignoring the pain in her head. "I wasn't dating you Gus. you can't tell me what to do or who to be with. I thought I made myself abundantly clear!" Bella's voice raised with each word, anger lacing each and every word. Gus tightened his hand around Bella's neck. "You're deluded if you think that you have any right over me!" She spat at Gus, trying to break out of his hold.

"We were together. You just never

admitted it! You were always meant to be mine!" His eyes grew wider with each word, a feral light behind his eyes. His fingers loosened a little but as if he believed that his little speech would actually convince her to come with him.

"SECURITY!" Bella screamed half with a sob. As soon as they screamed, Gus tightened his hold around her neck. Air. She couldn't breathe. She clawed at Gus's arms, scratching, pulling to no avail. Her vision swam, black spots beginning to cloud her vision. She faintly heard the sound of footsteps. Two security guards arrived, stopping upon seeing Bella captive in Gus's hold. They held handguns, pointed right at Gus.

"Let go of her, or we'll have to remove you by force!" The guards shouted. Gus let go of Bella, slowly putting his hands in the air.

"How could you do this to me?" He growled at Bella. The guards rushed Gus[, and Gus let go of Bella to face the guards. The scuffle between Gus and the guards couldn't even be considered a fight. Gus threw a weak punch at one of the guards, but they grabbed his wrist and they restrained him. Bella didn't even care what they were going to do to him. As long as he got out of her sight at soon as possible, the only time she would be seeing him again would be to testify against him in court after she pressed charges.

As the guards led Gus away, Bella ran to the bathroom, hurrying into a stall. As soon as she sat down, the tears came pouring out. Sobs wracked her body. She felt lost in those moments, torn between grief and anger. One side of her hated Gus. How dare he touch her without her consent. And the other side that was grieving about what had just happened to her felt a deep sense of self loathing. She couldn't even break out of his grip. What would have happened if the guards weren't there to save her? Bella got up wiping her face with her hands. She needed to go do Adam's surgery

and no one could know what happened. Bella knew what she had to do. She made a quick detour to her locker and pulled out a change of clothes. Her black turtleneck combined with black leggings. No one would know. Ever.

Bella walked into the operating theater. She felt hollow, empty. The anger and grief that ruled over her minutes ago was gone. The protective armor of her grief and anger had been stripped away. She was laid bare to the world. So as her steps took her closer to the operating room, she built up shields around her heart. One rock at a time. Building until there was a fortress around her heart. That not even the greatest of armies could breach. But maybe, just maybe there was one man who could obliterate those walls. She shook that last thought out of her head, out of her heart. She knew her face was vacant, not a trace of emotion to be found. Her walk into the theater was one filled with false confidence as if acting that everything was okay would actually make things okay. Adam was already lying unconscious on the operating table. She was glad he wasn't awake to see her. She didn't want to talk to anyone, he especially. Not after what Gus had said. So, ignoring all other thoughts in her head save the thoughts about the surgery, she got ready with the rest of her team and they finally got to work on Adam.

Adam woke up hours after the surgery was over. The nurse alerted Bella when he was awake and she was walking to his room, her thoughts plaguing her the whole way. Would he notice the hollowness of her eyes, the desolate expression on her face. What would he see when he saw her? She knew what her mother would say if she were here. Her mother would ask her, "Who are you?" Anytime Bella came to her mother feeling insecure about herself, her mother had always asked her that question. And like always, Bella never had an answer.

Adam was sitting upright in his bed



when Bella arrived in his room. He noticed immediately when she entered the room. They didn't speak for a few minutes, their eyes locked, a silent battle of wills between them. Bella looked away first and when she looked back at him, his eyes held a newfound determination in them.

He spoke first. "I want a different doctor." Her face flickered with confusion and betrayal.

Bella found her voice again. "Why? The surgery went excellently." She felt like crying all over again. Did someone tell Adam what had happened? Did he hate her now?

His next words stunned her more than the first ones did. "I want to be with you Bella. I want to spend all of my time with you. Talking to you, loving you. I can't control it anymore. I hate watching from a distance. I hate it and I can't stand it. Can we try? Give us a shot?" His voice cracked, the force of his emotions overwhelmed him. Adam was looking at her with openness that she had never seen in him before.

She walked to his bed, plopped down on the chair next to Adam's bed. She took his hands in hers. "Ada-

Adam cut her off. "What happened to your neck? Why are they all bruised up?" His eyes were on her bare neck, where her turtleneck had ridden down showcasing the bruises that Gus had given her. Gently, he pushed down her turtleneck, tracing a finger on her bruises.. She tried pulling away to re-cover her neck with no avail. "Are these handprints?" Bella didn't answer. She couldn't stand to look at the horror that filled his face. Adam took her chin in his other hand and lifted her face to look him in his eyes. His eyes were filled with sadness, and a righteous anger that was slowly simmering.

"Who did this to you, Bella? Who abused you like this?" His voice was gentle despite the underlying steel in his voice.

"It doesn't matter, Adam. It's been taken care of."

"I don't care. No one hurts you without consequences."

"Adam, we can't be together. For starters, you're a millionaire. I'm not. You deserve to be with some other rich girl out there, not me." Adam opens his mouth to protest but Bella ignored it and keeps talking. "I'm not worthy of you, okay! I'm not and there's no arguing with that. I'm tainted, and damaged, and you deserve better. And that's not me. Ok, so just go on with your life and forget about me." She got up, pulling her hand from his. It took all of her strength to take the first step towards the door. That door that stood, all of five feet away. Five huge feet. Adam grabbed Bella's hand, pulling her back around. She fell back onto the bed, clumsily. She looked at Adam through the shein of tears that covered her eyes. There was no expression on his face.

"You don't know how wrong you are, Bella. Before my accident, I was an idiot. To everyone. My parents, the staff, my friends. The only thing I ever cared about was money. And then I had my accident and my life flipped upside down. Everyone left me after my accident, and I started to realize the impact of my actions. How cruel I was to people, how privileged I was, how much I took advantage of my lifestyle. Meeting you, changed that, it changed everything. My whole outlook of life changed, my attitude towards people, my understanding of the world changed. If anything, it's me who's not worthy. Wealth doesn't give me worth. You save lives everyday, you give people like me new lives. How could you say that you're not worthy? No one could be worthy of you, this beautiful, strong, caring woman and I aspire to be worthy of you. I love you, Bella. These past couple of months have been amazing, spending all of this time with you. I've been falling in love with you from the moment you came knocking at my

door. So please, let me try to be worthy of you everyday. Let me show you how much I love you." Adam held out his hand. There, in his palm, lay a beautiful rose shaped pendant will inlaid rubies on the petals and a marquise diamond set in the middle. The pendant was on a sterling silver chain that glinted in the light. Bella did a double take, looking at the necklace, thinking about how expensive it was. "Look, I know this looks bad. When I was coming here, I just saw this at a jewelry store and I couldn't not buy it. It was calling to me. I saw this necklace and the first thing I thought about is how much you would love it and how beautiful it would look on you. Please just give me a chance, give us a chance. Look at how amazing we could be."

"Adam, don't you see? This gift, look at it. You just bought it. Without thinking about how expensive it is. Don't you see how different we are? We live completely different lifestyles and there is no way this can work for a long time. A fling is all we can have." She looked into his eyes, hers filled with pleading not to make his leaving harder than it already was.

"I will give it all up in a heartbeat, all of my wealth, money, assets. Everything. Say the word, Bella. If me giving up my wealth, my lifestyle will give me a chance to be with you, I will do it without question. Please, Bella, give us a chance, a future, together."

"No, you don't have to do that."

Bella looked up, into Adam's face, his open expression. She could see the truth in his eyes. The genuity of everything he had just said. She felt the truth of those words like a piece of chocolate on her tongue. She saw Adam's hope, his love for her like a tangible bond, tying her to him.

And she could see another bond extending from her to him, made of love. The same love that Adam's bond was made of. Meeting Adam's bond right at the center. Adam had stolen the final piece of her heart sitting right there on his bed at the end of a difficult surgery, just by wanting to hurt anyone who hurt her. And she would want to hurt anyone who hurt him too. And that final thought gave her the strength to lean towards him, letting him guide the necklace around her neck, and finally touching her lips with his, joining together their souls forever.





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Together we create the Comsewogue High School Literary Magazine club! We hope our works can brighten someone's day and inspire those interested in writing and art to overcome difficulties and become closer to the writer/artist they've always aspired to be.

Check out Serendipity's last issue [here!](#)

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