



The background of the page is a repeating pattern of stylized, light pink flowers and leaves on a white background. The pattern is dense and covers the entire page.

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*For Moira ...*





... the fairest of them all

EH

*"Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?"  
The mirror answered, but of course it was not the answer the wicked  
Queen had wanted.*



*At that very moment, "The fairest of them all" was sitting on the  
bottom step of the stone staircase which, with English humour,*

*twisted its way up the main tower of the castle. It was late afternoon and she had an etiquette lesson. The large, sunflower-like autumn sun struggled to stay above the horizon, while night gathered in a purple haze. The last few rays of light were falling cold and unnoticed in the yard. Autumn was almost over.*

*Reluctantly she stood up, dusted herself off, and set out, two steps at a time, up the tower. The classroom was of course at the top of the tower and her teacher would be angry if she was late. Her teacher would be angry anyway, as it wasn't ladylike to leap up stairs two at a time.*

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**M**oira was twenty-three, and about to get married to the man of her dreams. Like most young girls, she wanted to be married in white. It was her "big day" after all, and a white wedding was what was expected. She had invited everyone she knew, and everyone

had written back saying they would attend. The wedding was to take place on the first day of spring. It was all very romantic.

The wedding day sky was bright blue and cloudless. The wind whistled through the nearby steeple while the first returning birds busied themselves in the rafters. Even the cook was panicking in the kitchen, as more guests had turned up than expected.



Mr Kazantzakis, Moira's father, stood in the doorway to the small Greek Orthodox chapel awaiting the bride, as proud a father as any could be. Today was the day his little girl was to get married. "His little girl". He swallowed hard and tried not to think about it. Later,

perhaps, when he was alone he could let go, but right now, well his little girl was getting married and he wasn't going to let her down. He was to be her "big strong Daddy" one last time.

On this day Moira looked even more beautiful than usual. Everyone commented on it, and not simply because she was wearing the most expensive dress she would probably ever wear, or because she had spent all that morning getting ready. No, she was beautiful because she smiled. It was as simple as that. And today of all days she had a very good reason to smile.

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*Now some people might think that Wicked Queens are not actually born wicked, but grow that way with time because of some social deficiency in their life or some dark and secret genealogy. This idea is completely wrong. Wicked Queens are destined to be wicked.*

*As is ordained for them in the labyrinth of time, they usually start out as the "Ugly Sister." An apprenticeship that most wicked queens go through to graduate. Some graduate better than others. Our wicked Queen had straight A's in all her subjects.*

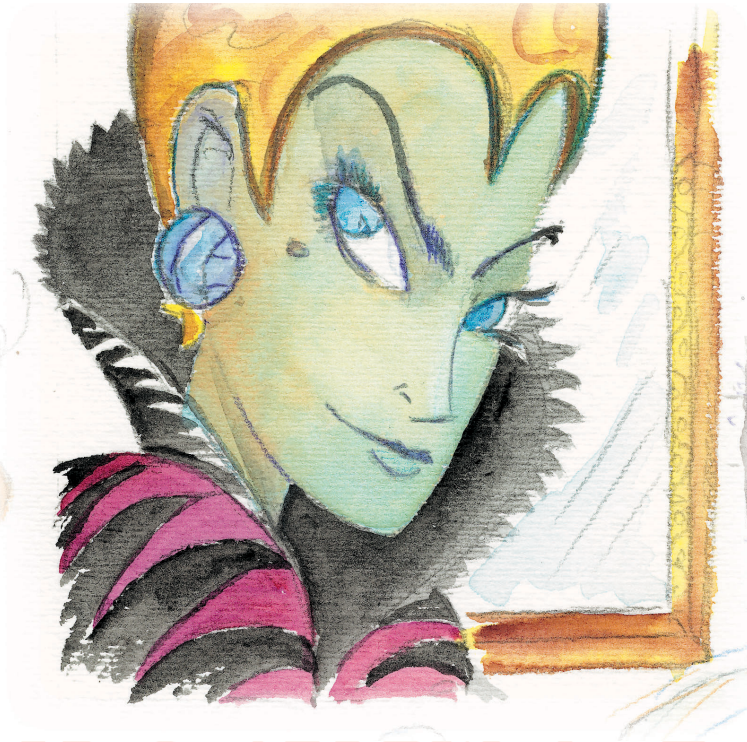
*A similar rule naturally applies to good queens and kind princesses.*

*So it was for 'The fairest of them all'. Her destiny was to be the poor, naïve Princess whom everyone loved (everyone that is except the Wicked Queen). And her magic was her smile. For when she smiled everything around her seemed to be beautiful and good. You really couldn't help liking someone like that. And it didn't take much to make her smile either.*

*Still, she couldn't afford to be late for class.*

*The Wicked Queen, on the other hand, never smiled. She never had. Grinned? Yes. Smirked, leered, even sneered, but never smiled.*

*And now, having been told by the Magic Mirror that there was in fact someone more beautiful than she, the chance of her ever smiling became a bitter laugh.*





*"Maybe I'll turn her into a frog?" the Wicked Queen said to the room in general, while her steel-hard fingernails drummed a tattoo on the tabletop. "Why, the way she leaps up those stairs each day for class, she has perfect legs for a frog!"*

*The face in the mirror made no comment.*

*"Hm. But then again, if she were a frog, she could simply leap out of the pond at the very first passing prince and be saved. Princes these days seem to have nothing better to do than wander around the countryside looking for cursed little princesses!"*

*It was at this moment that an unsuspecting fly flew in through the window and landed on the large bowl of fruit in the middle of the table. The Wicked Queen watched it with amusement, quietly turning thoughts over in her mind.*

*"Perhaps I should simply poison her with an apple? The old-fashioned way. Classic. With style: 'Old lady selling bright shiny red apples....'" she said as she flicked the dead fly onto the floor.*

*"Ah, maybe not. She's probably got a group of dwarf friends some-*

where who will insist on making a glass coffin and come and stare at her each day until some silly wandering Prince with nothing to do comes along and saves her.”



It was just then, as ‘The fairest of them all’ arrived at the top of the tower and knocked on her classroom door, that the Wicked Queen had her most brilliant plan. She would create an evil “Prince Charming”. No one would ever think of it or, and this was

what made it so good, be able to stop it. Nobody would dream of rescuing a married princess. Married princesses live happily ever after, in some windy castle somewhere, doing embroidery. That’s what a fairy tale is all about. Why, she could use the very magic of the fairy tale against itself!



*Then with a well-practised sneer and snap of her fingers, she set about her evil task.*

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**T**he man of her dreams was called Bill. He was tall and thin and had dark brown wavy hair and pale blue eyes. He wore glasses with a slight tint to the lenses. He also had a moustache. Bill was a child of the American-German army bases created after the Second World War. He had grown up speaking two languages. He first met Moira in a bar. One of her friends was celebrating her birthday, so she was in a good mood to start off with and open to new things. Bill's best friend happened to know her and had invited him along, just for fun. When they saw each other it was love at first sight. Moira of course gave Bill a really hard time of it, making him wait and want until he almost gave up. Almost.

Eventually though he won a kiss, then her heart, until finally her hand. Then they got engaged to be married.



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Once started, it didn't take long for the Wicked Queen to transform herself. It was a relatively simple spell, one she and her sister (ugly sisters tend to come in twos) had had great fun with as kids. As for winning the young princess's heart, that was even easier. "The fairest of them all" was easily swayed by the advances of men; a few kind words and well-placed gestures would steal her heart. And as for the King, the Wicked Queen was certain he would quickly come round when told about the kingdom that awaited his daughter upon marriage. After all, isn't that what royalty is all about, marrying into even more land and money?

The day "Prince Charming" rode into the Little Princess's kingdom was just another ordinary day. There was no clap of thunder, no bright shining star or fanfare to herald his approach. In fact the only unusual thing about the day was that the palace cook had overslept. And, in accordance with the Wicked Queen's evil plan, before anyone knew what was going on "Prince Charming" had won the Little

*Princess's heart and hand in marriage.*

*A grand and royal wedding was planned, the likes of which had never been seen before. All the kings and queens from the surrounding kingdoms were invited. And although none of them knew "Prince Charming"*



*personally, they had all heard about him and his splendid kingdom from one source or another. No one bothered to ask where his kingdom actually was, as it was general knowledge that young princes went forth to find their true love. Simply the way he dressed and talked was proof enough that he was of royal blood. If he'd been a*

*peasant they would have noticed it long ago. You could smell a peasant a mile away!*

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**I**n general, Bill got on well with everyone. He was well-spoken and polite - always the first to offer help when it was needed, and the last to refuse when asked. By the time of the wedding even Moira's elderly Greek relatives liked him. With his southern American charm and his German attention to detail, he left them nodding happily as he flirted gregariously with each and every one of them. Besides, Mr Kazantzakis had given his permission. Without it the wedding would not have taken place...

For most of us, living in a fast, high-tech, permissive society in which everything is allowed, this attitude must seem very old-fashioned and uncivilised. The very idea that a father could decide his daugh-

ter's happiness seems oppressive. In the case of Moira, however, this was not true; like her father she had been brought up with a

strong and traditional Greek way of thinking. For her, family was everything, and her father was the head of this family and therefore decided what was best for everyone. She believed in this with all her heart.



Thus Bill and Moira were married, surrounded by friends and family. And after the traditional breaking of plates, dancing with all the relatives, new and old, kissing everyone goodbye at least twice, they left to the sound of rattling tin cans and cheers and tears on the long journey home.



Moira was going back to America with Bill.

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*The castle (this being the only word available to describe it) looked as though it had grown from the hillside over which it sprawled. It was a masterpiece of architectural engineering, with more towers and gilded parapets than the young princess had ever imagined. All the bright blue-slatted roofs shone in the sunlight. Around the foot of the hill was a moat in which lived a real moat-monster. And beneath the one small rickety wooden bridge that crossed it there lived a troll. The Little Princess was certain she would be happy here and couldn't wait to write home and tell her parents of her good fortune and joy.*

*It had been a long day and she was tired. "Prince Charming", now her husband, suggested she wait until the morning before she met*



*his father, the king, who was bedridden and hence unable to attend the wedding.*

*"Oh, but he can't wait to meet you!" "Prince Charming" told her as the servants carried her things up to her room. "I've told him all*



*about you. How beautiful and kind you are, how your eyes sparkle like stars on a moonless night and how the sound of your laughter stirs the very strings of my soul - and oh, your smile!"*

*The next day, however, when the Little Princess awoke, she was no longer in the large four-poster bed with its soft mattress and goose-feathered quilts that she had gone to sleep in the night before. She was now locked up in the tallest of towers, with but a slit for a window and a pile of straw for a bed. Somehow she knew she wasn't going to meet the king that day.*

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*Three years had passed since "the big day" and the routine of daily life was making its presence felt. It was everywhere. It hung in the air like pollen in spring, making you sneeze. So it was that one morning, to the tinny sound of her radio alarm clock, Moira awoke.*



Still in her pyjamas and half asleep she drew back the curtains, to let the breaking daylight in on yet another day. She sat down in front of the dressing table and stared at her own reflection in the mirror. Everything seemed so dull. As dull today as it would be tomorrow.

She sneezed...

It was just then that Bill came in, nicely shaven and ready for work and with the Financial Times tucked under his arm like the sword of a modern-day knight.

"Got to go, miss the tube otherwise," he said, stuffing the rest of his breakfast into his mouth. He chewed a few times like a cow and then washed it down with coffee. "I think there's still some coffee

in the pot," he said wiping his mouth clean before giving her a peck on the cheek. His pecks used to feel like real kisses. Then, as an afterthought, he added, "You can heat it up in the microwave if it's cold," and closed the door behind him.

Moira didn't move. She listened to the sound of his large flat feet making their way down the stairway towards the front door. She sneezed again...

That evening when she came home Bill was, as usual, slouched on the couch with his shoes still on. She'd had a long hard day and was exhausted. After making herself something to eat and drink, she climbed into bed. Tomorrow was another day. She sneezed once more...

Time passed and nothing much changed. Ever since she could remember, everything carried on as it always had. She wondered when, and how long ago she had come to the crossroads at which

her life had taken this course. And what had happened to all her dreams? As a little girl she had dreamt she would find her very own "Little Prince". Someone who, even though he knew her to be but a rose like every other, would love her as if she were the only rose in the whole wide world. Once she had thought Bill was that someone. Now of course she knew that the "Little Prince" was just a story for children.

Bill wasn't as bad as some of the men her friends had. That's what she told herself, putting down the book she was reading. She just wasn't his special rose - that was all. Did she need to be told she was beautiful? Or be called up during the day, simply because he missed her? As for their wedding anniversary, or other special occasions, were they really that important? Bill's birthday of course was celebrated in a big way, he liked that sort of thing. And when he wanted to go out or do something special, they did that too. As for holding hands when they went out for a walk, or cuddling up close on the

couch late at night, that just didn't come into it. Moira's life had lost the capital letter; she had become Moira with a little "m". Simply there, like the coffee machine. In time, the "always there" coffee machine broke, and Moira with the little "m" stopped functioning. Bill simply found someone to replace her, another coffee machine for his needs.

It was time for a change.

Moira moved out.

She took the first apartment she could find. There hadn't been time to look for another.

It was small, it was old, and it looked over a railway track. Now, with only her cat to keep her company, Moira with the little "m" had to start again.

"At least I've still got my job," she told herself. "Positive thinking is



what's called for here." A lot of positive thinking.

She soon made work her whole life. It filled and replaced everything, good and bad. Her dreams, the idea of a home, a family, children, all she had ever known and wanted. All carefully packed and put away on the shelf. The highest of shelves, where things go that are very rarely needed.

With time, like worked steel, little "m" Moira hardened. She became strong, strong enough to forget. She learned how to leave things in the past. She was now her own boss. Dreams were for dreamers and fairy tales for children. At the age of thirty, she couldn't consider herself a little girl anymore. She was a grown woman with a divorce behind her and half a life left to live. And she was determined to live it, to the full.

So the years passed, and with them Moira grew ever more accustomed to living alone. So much so, in fact, that the very thought of

having to share her life with someone other than her cat was unthinkable. Of course there had been one or two men, "ships in the night" who had hung about her harbour for a while. But when they finally understood that her work was not just something she did while waiting for "Mr Right" but was very important to her, they had weighed anchor and set sail for more male-dominated shores.

She could do without bumping into someone first thing in the morning when she was in a hurry to get to work. She needed her mornings to prepare for the day, the quiet before the storm. And she could certainly do without explaining to someone where she had been the night before, or what time she would be home. A relationship was nothing more than a set of rules that she obviously didn't need.

The cat didn't like men either.

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*Each day food and water was brought to the little Princess by the Wicked Queen's most trusted guard. He had been given strict instructions that, if he valued his life, he would not talk to her, no matter how much she begged. Thus she was left alone, day in and day out, with no one to talk to but herself. Each night she would cry herself to sleep thinking of her home and all her friends. Each morning she would measure the length of her hair just in case it had grown overnight, long enough for some passing prince to climb up. As for "Prince Charming", her husband, he had disappeared. Being the kind and gentle princess that she was, she worried about him and all the dreadful things that might have happened to him, while, at the same time dreaming of the many wonderful and heroic ways in which he would rescue her. In his place was the Wicked Queen, who would come and visit only when she fancied. She did not like the Little Princess at all - and she enjoyed letting her know it. "The fairest in the land!" she would say, tormenting her. "Not if I've got anything to do with it. Why, when I'm finished with you you'll*

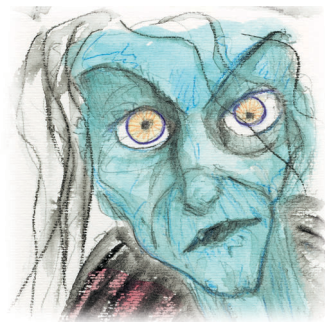


*be so ugly that not even the poorest of the poor will want to be near you! And as for that stupid smile of yours, I will wipe it off your face forever!"*

*After saying such things and seeing the tears the Little Princess shed she would laugh and go back to doing whatever other evil things she had to get up to that day.*

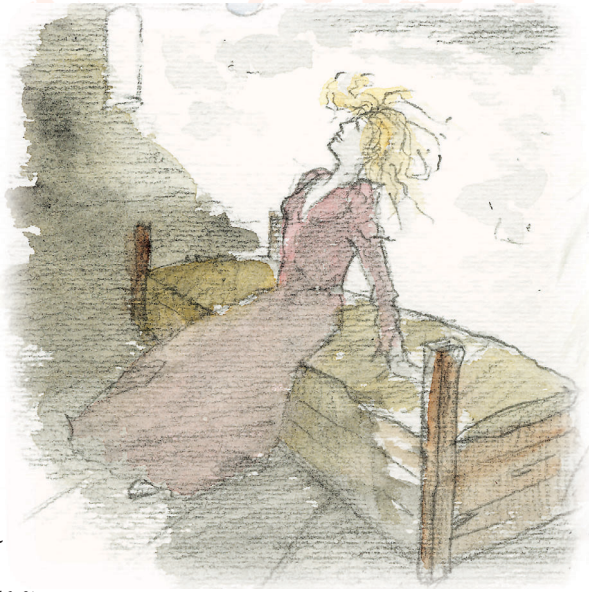
*When guests came to the castle and heard the distant sobs of the Little Princess, the Wicked Queen would only laugh with pleasure and tell them how she had fooled her. Then, seeing their horrified faces, she would laugh even louder.*

*"The same will happen to your daughters and sons if you don't do as I say," she would warn them. This was how she ruled her kingdom.*



*As the months passed the Wicked Queen forgot about the Little Princess locked up in the tower. She no longer*

*cried or begged to be free, or even banged on the door when she was hungry. And she certainly never asked about her husband or threatened the Wicked Queen with his return. Instead she just sat there among the straw bedding rocking gently back and forth, humming the different songs of the birds that passed outside her window. Her once marble-like skin was now covered in blisters and scars where she had scratched herself. She had become thin and pale from neglect. Her once beautiful hair was matted and coarse from not having been washed properly. And, oh, how she smelled! She was no longer 'The Fairest of Them All.'*



*Her beauty was well and truly gone. Even the magic mirror had to agree.*

*But there was still one more thing the Wicked Queen had to do before she would release her. Something crueller and even more evil than anything she had done before. She had to be sure that all that was beautiful in the Little Princess would be destroyed forever, including her smile.*

*She changed back into "Prince Charming" for one last time...*

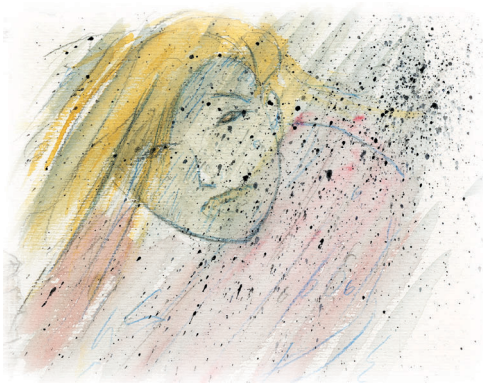
*And, oh, how happy the Little Princess was to see him, as he stood there in the open doorway. Her love and her saviour! So great in fact was her joy that she completely forgot how she looked and jumped up to greet him. He had not forgotten her after all!*

*"Prince Charming" however, all nicely dressed and clean, forcefully pushed her away and told her that he had only freed her because it was his duty, and he could never imagine himself being with her again now that she was so ugly. For him their marriage was over and*

he would never be able to love her again. Furthermore, she should leave both the castle and the kingdom immediately, never to return. If she did he would be forced to have the guards behead her.

And so, with an evil laugh and a good hard kick to help her on her way, the Wicked Queen, still disguised as "Prince Charming", pushed

the frail Little Princess out of the castle and into the cold night air.



Not knowing what else to do, the frightened Princess made her way across the bridge and away from the castle. The rain beat down mercilessly upon her

while the wind tugged at her thin dress. She hardly noticed any of this, as the knowledge that her Prince didn't love her any more now swamped her fragile mind. Nothing could be more painful than that. Broken hearted and not knowing where to go, she wandered aim-

lessly into her sad and lonely future. Even if she had known which way home lay, she certainly wouldn't have gone there. What would her parents say upon seeing her like this? Worse still, what if they didn't recognise her and turned her away?

As soon as she was alone, the Wicked Queen made her way back inside to the large open fire and the magic mirror.

"Mirror!" she said and sat down to gloat. "Tell me, who is indeed the fairest of them all?" Once she heard the mirror's reply, she bit happily into one of the poisoned apples she had made. They didn't hurt her of course, as she was far more rotten than they were. "Perhaps I should have given her one to take with her," she said out loud and laughed to herself. "Just in case she got hungry". But with that came an awful thought: perhaps she hadn't done enough and one day the Little Princess would still regain all her beauty.

The thought put her in a bad mood.

"Surely not? Not the way she looks," she said while absentmindedly

*examining the bitten apple in her hand. "No one could love someone as ugly as that! Certainly not a Prince. Not even a frog prince! Frog princes don't let themselves be caught and kissed by just anyone!"*

*To be safe, though, she decided to send the guards out after the Little Princess, to make sure she never came back.*

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**P**eople fade. Some more so than others. Like a pair of jeans that have been washed over and over again, until nearly all the colour has run out of them. With jeans it looks cool, with people it doesn't.

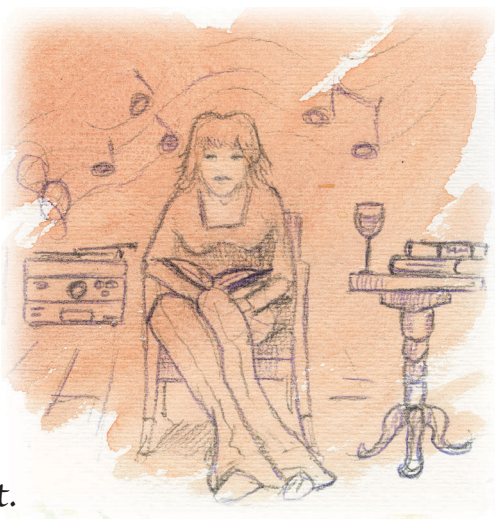
So it was that Moira began to fade into the city, the sky, the land. The world, with its



many shades of grey, wrapped itself around her. She became a part of the scenery, one of those people you pass every day on the street but never notice. She was like a street lamp - there, but unnoticed. Each night Moira went to bed exhausted. Driven by routine, she would awake each morning fresh but empty inside.

Time changed gear.

And then Moira with the little 'm' found she had time to do other things besides work. She began to read and listen to music. She found she could listen to a song over and over again and never grow tired or bored with it. More often than not she would fall asleep leaving the song playing late into the night.



It was as if the melody took her out and away from herself and everything she knew. Or perhaps it was the words of the songs, talking of a love she had once thought she would find. Maybe the music reminded her of her childhood, those happy days at home when her father would sing Greek songs while helping her mother dry the dishes. He would laugh heartily and hug Moira to him as she sang along in her childish way. She could clearly remember the day her father had redecorated her bedroom. "Why, you're a big girl now!" he had said as the walls of her bedroom were stripped of their teddy bears.

There are probably a hundred reasons and more for her behaviour, but the fact was, if you looked closely, when the light was just right or she wasn't paying attention, you could see the shadow of a smile lingering on the edge of her lips, as though waiting for someone or something. It hadn't gone away, you see; magic never does, it had just disappeared for a while.

It's a well-known magic trick, sudden disappearing...

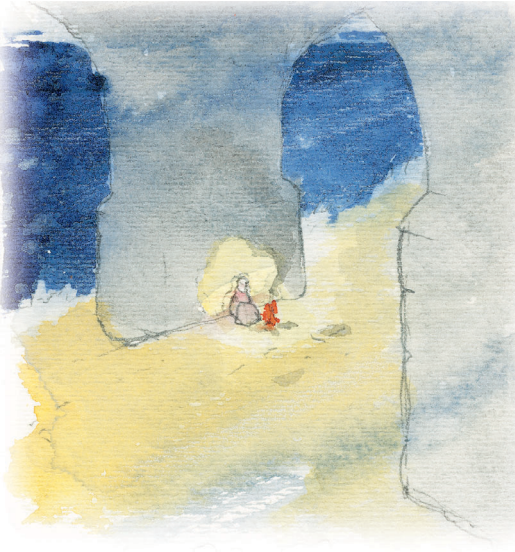


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*Of course the guards never found the Little Princess, for they had no idea what she looked like. No one but the Wicked Queen's most trusted guard had ever seen her. They had only heard tales about a beautiful princess locked up in one of the many towers, and swore they could hear someone crying late at night, when it was very quiet. But upsetting the Wicked Queen was not a good idea, and since every peasant girl looked so much like the next, the guards decided to simply kill as many peasant girls as they could find before returning to the castle to tell the Queen they had done as she asked. Surely one of their victims would be the Princess!*

*Unaware of the death that plagued her footsteps, the Little Princess wandered further and further away. Everyone she met shunned her, but not because she was too ugly to look at, or because they were cruel and unkind as the Wicked Queen had said, but because*

there was something about the Little Princess that frightened them. She might have looked like a beggar, even dressed like one, but when she spoke even the dumbest of peasants knew she wasn't a peasant. She was therefore obviously cursed and no one wanted anything to do with her.



So it was that the Little Princess grew ever weaker and more isolated. She slept wherever she could find shelter. Sometimes it was in an old barn, where the straw would cling cruelly to her hair, or under a bridge, where the river's cold mists would sink into her very bones...

Late one afternoon, as night approached and the rain fell hard and the wind blew cuttngly, she found herself on the outskirts of a thick,

dark forest. She scrambled underneath a large holly tree. Winter was near and the tree was covered with small red berries reminding her of the happy days and Christmases she had spent at home. Curling up small and tight to keep warm, she tried to sleep. She could have lit a fire, if she had only kept some of those matches she had found earlier that day and had not have sold them, but the rain would probably have put the fire out anyway.

So, cold and wet, she fell asleep to dream once more of home.

When she woke, it was still dark. A soft and gentle hand was caressing her fevered brow. A male voice was saying things she couldn't understand; the sound soothed her and made her feel safe. She was also covered by a blanket and a warm fire burned brightly nearby, over which roasted the remains of a pigeon.

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It was around this time that Moira met Ted. He was thin, he was gangly, and he hardly ever worked. Not that he was lazy, it was just that he didn't have the time, he was too busy chasing rainbows that no else could see. He laughed like a young boy, yet looked like an old man. When he spoke there was

wisdom in his words, but he was never serious enough to be wise.

When he looked at you, he really looked at you. He paid attention to the details when you spoke to him, and he made you feel as though he was actually listening and not just waiting to speak. Even the dullest of things seemed to interest him. He had a special

gift of dreaming dreams for everyone, and everyone enjoyed listening to him explain the dreams.



Ted would tell people, "Your dreams can all come true, you know. If you really want them to." But just like Moira, they didn't really want them to, not many people do. People like things to stay the same, and a change means exactly that: change.

Ted, though, didn't mind, he didn't seem to know that they didn't actually want to change. Either that or he just didn't care. They weren't his dreams after all now, were they?

One day, while having coffee with Moira, he called her his Little Princess, and was quickly reprimanded.

"My ex used to call me that," she told him firmly. "So if you want to talk to me you'd better think of some other name." But Ted only smiled. He would think of her as his Little Princess, even if he wasn't allowed to say it out loud.

What made him smile most of all, though, was when he remembered the very first day that they met, when she had told him not to fall in love with her. Ha! You might as well tell the sun not to rise,

or the stars not to shine. He of all people wasn't going to waste his time trying to change the inevitable course of his life. If his heart said that he loved her, well, he loved her.

Moira and Ted met regularly, with Moira always insisting that she didn't want another relationship. Relationships frightened her. If Ted wanted to see her, well fine, but he shouldn't expect anything more. "They always go wrong," she'd say. "Someone always ends up getting hurt." Meaning herself. Besides, she had her work.

Of course Ted agreed, because he also understood the magic of a white lie. He certainly didn't need to be hurt again either. You see, like everyone else, Ted had also been hurt. People had used him and his dreams; they had taken the light from his dreams and used it for evil and hurtful things. Things he would never have dreamed of doing. Things he had never known existed until they had shown him.

He did, however, tell Moira that she was beautiful, and that there was nothing more beautiful than when she smiled. He told her that when she smiled the world seemed to change. Hearing him say such things made her chuckle. Of course she knew it wasn't true. She knew her smile couldn't change the world, but it was still nice to hear.

Ted, though, believed it could.

"People aren't happy with just each other," Ted would say when he felt upset or had failed to make her smile.

"They're only happy when they feel they're better than others. When I was young I thought I could make a difference. I thought I could show people that there was more to life than possessions. That life was all about people. Now all I want is to be able to stay the same. Not to lose myself in this world of finance and business. Simply be me and be loved by one person, mistakes and all. Even that now seems too much to ask."



Ted often talked like this, as though he was very old, and that annoyed Moira. He really wasn't much older than she was, and she certainly didn't feel old. When she heard him say such things she would get angry and tell him he was speaking nonsense.

"Love is all anybody wants," she'd say. Then, not wishing to talk about it any more, she would ask him to leave. She might not want a relationship; but then again she didn't want to think that she never would have another one. Besides, she had to get up early for work...

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*The old man who found the sleeping Princess was none other than a prince. However, like the princess, he was far from the fine young man he had been when he first set out in search of the beautiful princess about whom he had dreamt. That was all so long ago, and seemed so unreal now.*

*It had all begun one midsummer night some ten years before. The*

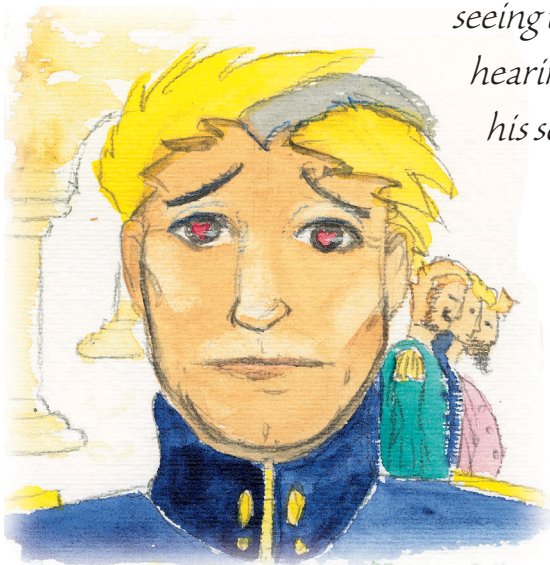


*young prince had dreamt about a beautiful princess whose smile changed the world. She was so beautiful, in fact, that from that moment on he knew he could never love another, even though the princess of his dreams might not even exist.*

*Being the youngest son of four, and thus knowing he would never be king, he mentioned the dream to his father and told him that he would like to go and see if he could find the princess. The King,*

*seeing the passion in his son's eyes and hearing the truth in his words, gave his son his blessing and wished him*

*well. Taking with him his share of the kingdom in gold and jewels and the finest horse in the stables to help him on his journey, he left, waving a sad goodbye to everyone he loved.*



Night after night, month after month, through winter and summer, kingdom after kingdom, he searched for her, letting his heart lead the way. Until one day he had the misfortune to ride straight into the hands of a very wicked and evil band of thieves who took pleasure in beating him up and taking away everything he owned, including his horse. When he finally awoke, aching with bruises and almost unable to move, he made his way to a lonely hut that stood on the edge of the nearby forest to sleep and recover. Yet, unfortunately for the young prince, the hut was owned by an even more evil and wicked forest troll, who was furious to find the young prince fast asleep in his bed with no money to pay for his comforts. The young prince tried to explain, and promised the troll that he would pay him back the moment he had some money, but the forest troll was just not interested. Instead he grew even more enraged and gouged the young prince's eyes out as payment.

"If you're too stupid not to see where you're going, you won't be needing these," he said.

*So, sorely beaten, blinded, and with no money or means to survive, the young prince was left to fend for himself. Instead of returning home, though, to beg the mercy of his brothers, he travelled on, knowing in his heart he would find her one day, for he had seen his beautiful princess with his inner eye and no one could take that away.*

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*Some mornings, Moira would wake up and, even though the curtains were drawn and the sound of the rain could be heard outside, she felt the sky was blue. On these particular mornings, while still in her nightdress, she would smile contentedly to herself while humming (slightly out of tune) as she looked around her palace. Then she would smile again and feed the cat, get dressed, and close the door behind her as she went off to work, hoping that Ted would call. And he did, every day, without missing a day. He also sent her text messages or e-mails, in which nothing very special was said*

other than that he had been thinking of her. He was always thinking of her and never seemed to get tired of it. Most of all though, he never forgot the very first time she took his hand. He told her about it often. For him it was magic.

For her it had simply been a surprise, the natural thing to do. There had been no special build-up to it, no subtle indication that it would be nice or was the right thing to do - it just happened.

He had turned to go the wrong way in the shop and she, without thinking, had taken him by the hand and led him away. Nothing special...



It was at this moment, though, that their worlds met, and she smiled. She smiled a smile that made the whole world brighter. But she didn't stop there, oh no, she laughed. Laughed for the sheer pleasure of laughing. It was like the opening of some hidden sluice gates. Colour flooded her world. Castles appeared where dirty grey blocks of flats had been, and litter-filled playgrounds became rolling fields.



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*So it was that the moment the blind prince came across the small sleeping figure of the Princess he knew his search was over. He did not need his eyes to tell him this, he knew in his heart it was true. Of course he didn't tell her this, for he also knew what he had become and he no longer thought of marrying his beautiful princess. But he*



*swore to himself then and there that one day, when she was well again, he would tell her about his dream and his long journey to find her. Only then could he go home contented.*

*So slowly, with the help of the blinded prince, the Little Princess began to grow healthy, and even feel pretty once more. Until finally one day, while listening to the song of a bird she recognised, she smiled.*

*Many years have passed since that awful day when the Little Princess was thrown out of the castle. Together she and the blind prince had travelled far and wide, making friends everywhere they went.*





Neither of them knew that destiny was leading them right back to the kingdom of the Wicked Queen.

Tales of the beautiful princess and the gentle, blind old man at her side spread out before them like ripples on a pond, until finally one day echoes of them reached the Wicked Queen.

*"Kill them. Kill them both!" the Wicked Queen screamed at the captain of the guards. "And bring me their heads in a basket. I want to be sure they are dead."*

*The captain of the guards, however, had also heard about the kind and beautiful princess, and he was tired of his life of tyranny under the Wicked Queen. He ordered the guards to take the royal coach and guide the Little Princess safely back to the castle. He would deal with the wicked Queen personally.*

*In desperation the Wicked Queen ran upstairs to confront the Magic Mirror and find out if it all that was said was true.*



*"Mirror, Mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?"*

*The mirror grinned, for it too was tired of her wicked ways and besides, over the years she had grown ugly with the ugliness of evil. And, being a magic mirror, it didn't reflect the image of the*

*captain of the guards as he crept up stealthily behind the Wicked Queen, sword drawn to behead her.*

*The Little Princess held on tightly to the blind prince's hand as the coach brought them back to the castle where it had all began. The captain of the guards threw himself on his knees upon seeing the*

*Little Princess and begged for her forgiveness for all the years he had failed and wronged her. Then, still bowed, he swore his allegiance to both her and the blind prince.*

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**T**hat night, Moira took Ted back to her castle on the hill. First, he had to say hello to the cat to see if it approved. And of course it did, in fact it curled up on his lap and purred contentedly.

And so he stayed.

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*Somewhere, far away, in a large castle with many turrets and towers, right on top of a hill, there lives a blind prince and a beautiful princess, who plan a truly royal wedding with all of their friends...*

*And do you know what?*

*She'll be dressed in white, because who says you can't get married in white twice?*

