

Revelation

It took time for her senses to fully awaken.

She heard herself breathing—a low muffled noise—as if she was breathing underwater. It faded and cleared until she was able to hear a gentle breeze whisper through a rustle of trees. She heard what was undoubtedly the swirling of water through a fast-moving stream. Birds twittered in the distance, creating a musical harmony that soothed the soul. She felt the tender tickling of strands of grass on her neck and bare arms. She smelled the fresh scent of an elaborate garden; a whirling array of scented flowers and fruits and the earthy smell of soil. Unbidden, a dreamy smile adorned her face, and her hands began to move; feeling the grass with curious fingers. Only when her other senses had finished exploring did her eyes open, hesitantly, faltering. A light sigh escaped from her lips.

The sweetest sky of pastel blue stretched out before her, with white fluffy wisps of clouds that seemed to be locked in embrace with the breeze. Her hair and skin shimmered with a smooth sheen under the rays of the sun. She stood on shaky legs, as if she had just been born a fawn and was unsure of the workings of her own body. She was barefooted, but she did not mind, for the grass was so tender that it seemed to reach up and embrace her skin. The folds of her soft white dress smoothed out as she straightened, and she touched the cloth gently, marveling at its lovely material. It seemed imaginary, as if she moved in a dream.

She took a step and walked through this heavenly garden that joyfully accepted her with uncanny eagerness. Trees rustled as she passed and birds chirped gaily around her, one even bravely sitting on her shoulder, its little twig-like claws pressing into her skin.

She walked towards the stream, which she heard ebbing and flowing just around a cluster of bushes. As she neared the bushes, the alluring smell of white roses distracted her and she gazed upon their silky petals. She took a step towards them, but she would not reach those roses, for a sharp lightning-stab of pain jolted up her right leg. She stumbled to the ground, crying out in agony. She had stepped on a rusted nail that was protruding from between the once-tender strands of the grass.

Her foot, in front of her eyes, began to turn blue, as the grass on the ground shifted to hide the nail. It completely disappeared from view. In fear, she stumbled to her good leg and hopped towards the stream, hoping to clean the wound. It began to throb and ache, and the cool water did nothing to soothe it. In less than a minute, the wound turned a bright and raw red, lined with the yellow of infection. Shivers ran through her body as the grass she sat on began to wilt and turn brown. She tried to make herself run, but she was paralyzed with the pain that spread through her body. The trees above her withered and reeled in anguish, turning a pale, sick white. Something dropped near her and when she looked at it, she gave a cry of dismay, for it was a small bird, stiff and cold with the hold of death. More fell, dropping like stones onto the dusty ground and creating a patter like hail. She put her hands over her ears to stop the noise, but weakness overcame her. Her eyes blurred, and in a last attempt to keep them open, she saw the figure of a man, tall and lean, adorned in a hazy white outfit and standing still to watch her from a distance.

Then, all was dark.



Her senses came awake first.

The beautiful smells, the coolness of the grass strands and petals of flowers on her cheek, and the tender cupping of her dress against her skin. She blinked open her eyes and sighed in awe at the beauty of the garden she was in. The sun's rays washed over her like honey, and she reveled in its warmth.

She stood on her feet, leaning against the trunk of a tree to support her trembling legs. She felt the soft fabric of her glimmering red sundress and twirled around to feel the air caress her skin like the trailing fingers of a lover. A red bird fluttered to her and sat on her shoulder, twittering sweetly.

In the distance, she heard the musical gurgling of a stream. She ran towards the sound eagerly, but as she rounded the corner, a sharp sting at her arm made her suddenly recoil in pain. A single thorn protruding from the bush had slashed her pale skin, and the blood bubbled out of the gash. The bird

at her shoulder fluttered off and sat on an overhanging branch to watch her carefully through beady eyes as she held her arm. The blood dripped to the ground, where it stained the green grass with its dark red pigment. Before she could turn away, the grass suddenly shifted and turned over on itself. In its place grew a new patch of grass, clean and fresh, all traces of her blood having disappeared. Suppressing a shudder, she hurried for the stream to wash her arm.

The water was lovely; it was crystal clear, streaming over smooth pebbles and winding its way through the lush greenery that lined its path. She kneeled down at the edge and gently dipped her arm into the flowing stream. The blood was wiped clean from her skin, swirling away in ornate designs and dispersing away until all traces of it was gone.

She sat back, a satisfied smile on her face.

And then she saw him.

Standing on the other side of the stream was a man, tall and lean, but incredibly handsome. He watched her closely, a slight smile on his thin lips, head slightly cocked to the side as if he questioned her every move. His hair was dark, wispy like the clouds in the sky, and they framed his angular face. She was unable to tell what the color of his eyes was, although they pierced her with their steady gaze. He wore a shimmery red shirt with ruffles at the neck and sleeves that accented his figure greatly.

“Hello!” she called, smiling. She lifted her arm to wave, but she noticed that the gash had begun to bleed again, oozing out over her skin. “I’m injured, do you think you could help me?” she asked, worriedly wiping at her arm with her free hand. She hunched over the water again, splashing it onto her wound.

He appraised her with a slight lift of his chin. “You’ve stained the water.” His voice was like a cooling spring that ran over her body, leaving goosebumps in its wake.

“Oh, everything here seems to refresh itself,” she said, light-heartedly. “Look!”

He watched her as she rubbed her arm over the lush green grass beneath her. She waited eagerly for the strands to turn over on themselves to create a new patch.

Nothing happened.

“It happened, earlier, I could swear it!” she frowned, glancing up. He was gone.

She stood, agitatedly, and ran back to the spot of grass that had earlier been made anew.

To her horror, the blood had reappeared and had spread, as if she had killed someone instead of torn her skin on a small thorn. She stepped away from the patch, as the grass underneath it began to shrivel and turn brown. The trees above her changed color as well, and slowly, the rays of the sun faded until dark clouds snuffed out the light and color of the sky.

She screamed for help, running back towards the stream where the water had all but disappeared, and the remaining traces of liquid were murky and green. The gash on her arm grew wider and she fell to the ground, silenced, watching from clouded eyes as the beautiful garden around her withered and died, and the once-beautiful smell of flowers and fruits now was the pungent smell of decay and death.

Then, all was dark.



She came to her senses slowly.

Such a beautiful fragrance filled the air and tickled her nose. The air brushed past her skin, and she felt the fabric of the shimmery black dress against her body. The sun shone down on her skin, making her glow like she had never glowed before. “It’s beautiful,” she sighed to herself.

“What about this?” asked a cool voice that sent shivers down her spine. She turned and saw a handsome man, tall and lean, with swirls of black hair that framed his marble face. He wore a silky black shirt that shone when it caught the light. He held a blood-red flower in his hands with a bright sunny-yellow center. She approached him, her eyes glittering at the blossoming beauty held tenderly in his fingers.

“It’s marvelous!” she breathed.

A slight smile moved his lips. With a subtle shift of his fingers, the flower folded in on itself and a bright-red bird, with ornate yellow swirls, appeared on his finger. It peeped timidly, as if to prove that it was real.

She gave a small cry of delight. “How did you do that?”

“You can do anything here,” he said, gesturing around him majestically. The bird moved to his shoulder, balancing on the slippery folds of his gossamer-like shirt.

“Show me,” she smiled.

They spent the day in the dazzling garden. She was always ahead, twittering like a hummingbird, eager to take in everything as fast as she could, while he strolled behind, watching her closely and feeding her excitement with small acts of miracles that seemed impossible in reality. Butterflies flew up from fluttering dandelions while they drank the honey-sweet liquid that formed from the rays of the sun.

She laughed joyfully. “I don’t want this to ever end!”

He touched a flower bud with a finger, watching it open wide and blossom into a beautiful red rose.

He picked it with light fingers and handed her the flower.

“Everything must end eventually.”

“Not here,” she replied, smugly.

He gave her a cryptic glance, with his ever-present slight smile. Instead of replying, he tucked a fragile daisy into the strands of her hair. “What color are your eyes?” she asked. He locked eyes with her, so as to give her a better look. The piercing glance ran tingles down her spine, and she grew uneasy. “They have no color,” she observed.

“Everything has color.”

“Not your eyes. Who are you? Where are we?”

“Where do you think we are?”

“Paradise?”

He laughed, a ringing laugh that would be beautiful were it not for the harsh edge that lined it.

“And what have you done to deserve paradise?”

Her smile faltered as he turned to her and lifted a hand to show her a small pile of juicy blackberries that winked at her in the sunlight. “Would you like some?” She shook her head slowly. He grinned, showing pearly-white teeth. “Too bad.” The berries turned in on themselves, and in their place was a handful of locusts, brown and dry, humming with destructive thoughts. They jumped into the air and spread, a hundred coming out of nowhere. She began to run towards the stream, panic spurring her on. Every step she took killed the plants that grew underneath her feet, and she ran faster, fear clouding her senses. The trees bent over, withering and twisting in agony, and the flowers turned black and brown. Fruits fell from the trees, bursting open with a harsh pungent smell and their black interiors riddled with maggots.

Her feet buckled underneath her, and she fell to the barren ground. Locusts covered her and covered the land that surrounded her, like a thick blanket.

Then, all was dark.



She came to her senses slowly.

All was quiet; an eerie heaviness filled the air and pushed down on her chest. She opened her eyes, blinking them from her deep sleep. She was laying on her back on the cold dusty ground. There was no smell, no noise. She felt around with her hands, and felt the fabric of her dress. She glanced down, her neck straining to see what she wore, and she grew uneasy, for she was wearing a pale, almost see-through dress. She turned her head to the side weakly, and gazed upon the chiseled face of the man who lay next to her. He turned to gaze back quietly.

“Your eyes,” she murmured. They did not flicker; they were so steady, like two burning candles in a still room. “They do have a color.” He only stared back. She gave a struggling whimper. “I don’t know the name.”

He sat up slowly, but she was unable to join him. She lay limply, watching him. He wore a shirt that was similar to the paleness of her own dress. “Do you know what the color of life is?” She shook her head. “It is the fresh and raw warmth that stains a baby’s skin. It is the heated flush on the cheeks of a maiden. It is the sweet pink of innocent skin. That is life.”

She was finding it hard to stay awake, but his words resounded through her mind.

He continued. “And what is the color of Death?” Her eyes fluttered weakly. “It is that which we are wearing. It is the same as what you see in my eyes.” He stood to his feet and gazed down at her.

“And what I see in yours.”

She felt the fabric of her dress. Such a pale and pallid color. The color of his eyes. And hers.

She shut them now, unable to keep them open anymore. “I’m sorry,” she whispered.

He put his arms around her and lifted her gently.

“Everyone who comes here is.”

With the limp girl cradled in his arms like a child, the tall and lean man began to walk over the dusty ground that was beginning to break with the timid heads of the new grass that would soon cover the garden.

He stepped carefully over the still body of a sleeping young man who wore a silvery white shirt.

But he would not speak to that man today.

Instead, he walked until he reached the stream that ran so clearly and beautifully.

He stepped over that stream to the shore that she had never been to.

Then, all was dark.

