

The Sea Witch and the Fisherman's Wife

Sometime in the gloom of the late nineteenth century,
a town smokes between a black ocean and a sickly sky.
Long ago in this forgotten place, a woman falls.

★

The fisherman's wife couldn't sleep and decided to
amble up and down the seafront in the hope that
dreams might find her.

She was a feather of bones for her height with
unusually bright red hair and a limp. She preferred
the limp.

For a while, the night seemed just like any other
until she saw a naked woman on the beach.

The stranger was pacing in the shallows with the
moon strung above her head. She was fat, with large
breasts and dimpled skin running up the backs of her
thighs. The woman moved quickly and with violent
plunges.

The fisherman's wife tightened her shawl and stepped onto the sand. But she retreated, for the woman bucked her head and howled. The sound was low and raspy, like a borrowed voice from a wild thing.

Her belly bounced with every breath while her hair dangled like black seaweed. When the moon peaked between the rolling clouds, its light softened her freakishness. As if her skin was lined with silver velvet.

An unexpected flush of shame overcame the fisherman's wife. She needed to go back to her husband. She would never tell him about the madwoman or the whore or whatever she may be. She would be her first secret.

A small nod signified her resolve. Despite her resistance being slight, it was a stand, nonetheless. That's what the wives say around here. *Make a stand, sister*. Though, this was always said when the male ear was otherwise occupied.

The fisherman's wife was peeled from her thoughts when her secret fell quiet. She thought her heart might stop - the woman was staring at her.

The stranger's softness had vanished. Now, she was no more than a shadowy form with black menacing eyes. The fisherman's wife watched as those eyes twitched behind wet strands of coal-black hair.

The fisherman's wife felt outmatched. It was unclear why, for the stranger had neither advanced nor spoken to her. It was a dominance that she hadn't seen in the body of a woman.

The stranger wasn't seeing, she was *reading*.

It conjured excitement inside her which bred repulsion. The familiar shamefulness returned and a feeling of awful fear. It had infected her, she could not undo it.

She turned abruptly on her heel and headed in the direction of her husband's hovel. She had no choice but to carry this strange pulse inside her. It was relentless. Impossible to dispel.

The woman's eyes continued to explore her from the beach despite the distance she had put between them. Those eyes were clearly mad but the fisherman's wife feared her own madness the most.

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'Irene?'

'Yes,' Irene said automatically, hot and aching from being bent over a washboard.

'You're washing your skirts.'

'Yes.'

'Why?'

Irene paused, unsure of whether to lie. She decided to bide her time. 'They're dirty.'

'Careful,' her husband warned. He delved into the murky water and retrieved a fistful of fabric. The hem was lined with dirt.

'Where were you last night?' he asked, his baggy eyes still scrutinising the fabric.

Irene gripped the tin tub in front of her. 'I went for a walk. I couldn't sleep.'

He hooked a yellow-nailed thumb onto Irene's shoulder. 'You won't do it again.'

'No Sir, it won't happen again.' That was a lie.

Unprompted, he straddled the tin tub and unbuttoned his trousers. Irene sank and watched piss

dribble from the leathery folds of his penis. The trickle seemed to be the only sound left in the world.

She sagged under the weight of an ugly feeling. A feeling of nothing at all. The walls started to stick to her. She could hear them whispering. Beckoning her to become a part of the room. Her bones dissolved into the bricks.

To distract herself, Irene counted five wiry pubic hairs near the creature's yellowish head.

It had a pungent odour, musty and sour. Irene often encountered the same smell at the butcher's stall, when meats had spoiled in the heat.

Neither the man nor his wife noticed the clutter of spiders which watched them from the windowsill. When the man left the room, the spiders scattered in their hundreds; scuttling into trails, like spilt oil.

Irene turned.

One lone spider squeezed through a crack in the glass.

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The attic was impossible to find. Only its owner had a fighting chance.

She would slip through several unnamed alleys and climb cobbled steps, twisted stairs, even a rotting ladder before reaching a lopsided passageway.

In the day, a shattered skylight poured a single column of light inside. When the moon rose above the waves, the owner would simply close her eyes and follow the passage, knowing her way so well.

The ceiling was so low that she would bend double to reach the dull hanging tapestry at the end. She would find a skinny door behind it - this was the attic.

Inside, a familiar curvaceous woman lolled on a pink chaise lounge. It was one vast room, lined with three colossal crescent windows.

This was a place of impossible things.

The woman gazed dreamily at several floating lamps circling the ceiling. Gravity had forgotten them. She studied one in her hand and propelled it

into the air; the lamp caught itself of its own accord and joined the rest. They rotated like planets, casting a soft amber hue inside the room.

The glow stamped shadows onto the walls from all the exquisite treasures inside. Tosses of expensive silks hung from several wooden beams, each embroidered with unimaginable patterns. Precious stones and jewellery spilled from drawers and rolled off tabletops. Leather-bound books were stacked into high pillars along the walls.

The woman roamed to the crackling fireplace and spat into the coals. The flames turned blood red and the attic fell into crimson.

Sitting down again, she retrieved a fistful of spiders from her dressing gown pocket. The woman held the creatures gently to her ear and nodded intently.

★

The day was hot in the marketplace. Sweaty bodies bustled, launching shillings and farthings through

the air. The merchants wiped their brows and threw their produce in return.

Irene had already picked up mutton fat to treat her workworn hands. Her bony body served her well in snaking through the throngs of people. Soon enough she was an arm's reach away from the apple cart.

She expeditiously plucked the shiniest apple from the bushel only to have it snatched by a man in the crowd. Irene prepared to confront the stranger but was astonished to find the woman from the beach standing right beside her. She was holding the man by the wrist and said, 'You are mistaken.'

Her words were barely audible above the noise of the market yet the man flinched, as if the woman's words were deafening. Hastily, the stranger gave the apple back to Irene and disappeared amongst the bodies.

The woman turned and smiled. 'Do you need anything else from here?'

Irene jerked a hand towards the apples and picked another two. 'That's everything,' she stuttered.

The woman said nothing. Instead, she placed a hand on the small of Irene's back and led her to a quiet corner.

'My name is Grace,' she said.

'Mrs Brent,' Irene replied automatically.

'Hardly.'

'I'm sorry?' Irene asked.

'What is *your* name?' Grace corrected.

'Irene.'

Grace nodded, seemingly satisfied with the name, as if any other may have proven inadequate. Irene picked at the handle of her basket, completely lost on how to behave. She also felt inferior walking next to a woman who was dressed like royalty (though, it was odd seeing her clothed).

Grace wore a dress of deep green silk with a corset embellished with a single ruby. The ruby was only a fraction smaller than Irene's prized apple. She marvelled at Grace's neck which was flooded with diamond teardrops. She hadn't seen a real diamond in her lifetime, let alone so many glistening in the filthy sun.

'It's quite a coincidence us both meeting again, isn't it?' Grace said matter-of-factly.

'Yes,' Irene said out of politeness; knowing that a woman of her wealth would not shop at the market. Irene wracked her brain for potential small talk before noticing a spider dangling from Grace's hair.

'Oh heavens. There's a spider on you.'

'No matter.' Calmly, Grace held her palm upright in front of her. From there, the spider scurried downwards and sat in Grace's hand. It seemed to be waiting for further instruction.

A small smile tugged at Grace's mouth, as she placed the creature on the cobblestones between her feet. The spider scuttled off toward a dusty corner of the courtyard.

'How did-'

'I'd like to get to know you a little,' Grace declared.

Irene blushed at the stranger's brashness. 'Why?'

'Can't a woman make friends in the world?'

Irene fell silent and examined the cut on her finger from picking her basket. In response, Grace slipped a small card inside.

'I'll see you tonight if you like,' she said. Without another word, Grace sauntered away and disappeared down a bleak lane. The spider followed.

Irene read the card with a shaky hand:

9pm. Emerald Tide Hotel, George Street.

★

Irene spent the day dreading sunset yet wished for nothing more in the world. She rescued her best dress from a stolen hatbox and inspected it.

Apprehension bubbled inside her throat. The thought of standing next to Grace tonight wearing whatever artistry she conjured up next was sickening. If her daywear was extravagant, Irene was horrified at the thought of standing beside the lady in her dinner gown.

Ignoring the anxiety of the plans ahead, Irene slipped into her dress. The fit wasn't the same, she

was far too thin for it now. But the clock was ticking and nothing could be done.

Irene had only one shoe on when a voice boomed, 'Where are you going?'

Irene fiddled with an earring. 'I asked you. You said it was alright.'

'I said you could see a friend,' the husband replied. 'Not seek employment at the local brothel.'

Irene perched on the edge of his bed and shrouded herself in a shawl. 'She's my oldest friend and my biggest critic, I wanted to look nice.'

'You're staying here tonight.'

Without warning, he pressed Irene into the mattress and wrestled with her dress.

'It's my best. Let me get changed first,' Irene begged, attempting to escape her husband's advances. Unprompted, he buried his hand between Irene's thighs. At the touch of her, his countenance darkened.

'Who's in your head?' His brow furrowed madly.

Irene's knees snapped together, as her husband continued to examine her. She stared at the uncooked

chicken she had stolen on the kitchen table. Its legs lay spread-eagled from where she had cut the string.

'Who's been in here, Irene?' he pressed.

His fingers raked inside her. 'No one, Sir-' A blood clot was stuck to the chicken's gaping hole.

The chasm was black with shadow.

'Get him out. Hear me? Fucking whore.'

He ripped the bodice of the dress in two and left her there. The walls pulsed for several minutes.

Whispering. Whispering. Whispering.

Irene sat up. Her pubic hair was wet with blood. A lone spider watched from the bedside table, as she took off her single shoe.

That night, he wolfed down the cooked chicken and sucked on its bones. Irene's plate was left untouched. The walls had eaten plenty of her already.

★

Somewhere in a hotel of grandeur and marble, Grace sat alone with a shattered glass inside her fist. The spider on her shoulder crouched low.

★

You travelled alone tonight as you did the night before.

Madam instructed it be so, for you are faster than the others. Not forgetting the deadliest in her collection.

You had a close call with a hungry seagull but managed to escape. The prominent red stripe on your bulbous abdomen often attracted unwanted attention.

After seeking refuge in an abandoned boot on the street, you counted all eight legs and went on your way.

You used any resource to your advantage but always remained cautious, as the world was not kind to your species. Madam could only revive so many of your kin until her powers drained and sickness found her.

You watched from the window of the bakery before securing your thread and lowering yourself onto the coach outside. The warmth of the carriage was short

lived, for these gentlemen were heading further into town.

When the horses stopped, you scurried out the window in search of another carriage. It wasn't long until you found a courting couple heading to the seafront.

You hid in the young lady's handbag and rested on her powder puff until you heard waves hitting the seawall.

Once the couple exited the coach, you jumped from the handbag which caused the gentleman to faint. The lady bared her teeth and made strange noises. Madam says human beings do so out of pleasure.

From here, you hurried along the sands towards the fishing port. Once there, you concealed yourself in a heap of rotten fishing rope and waited. Madam was after a particular fisherman by the name *Brent*. It wasn't until the sky burned orange that you found him.

'You going for a drink, gents?' It was a short man with a flat nose who said that. He fidgeted on the spot awkwardly until an answer came.

A fellow fisherman walked down the dock with company. 'Not with you, Gibface!'

'Why? You thirsty, Brent?' heckled another. 'Come on boys, rat bag is thirsty!'

Unprompted, the three fishermen sprinted after him. Brent scrambled down the dock before tripping over a line. Immediately, the three men swamped their victim, lifted him above their heads and threw him into the sea.

'Drink up, Brenty Boy!' the third one spluttered around laughter.

★

Irene sat at the kitchen table. A single gaslight hissed faintly. The pot of tea had gone cold. She left from behind the walls and returned to her body when a gentle knock stirred her.

With her husband out, she felt unsure to answer it. Irene didn't open doors nor close them. That was a man's privilege.

Nonetheless, the visitor knocked again. Irene clicked the latch and revealed the stranger. Much to her dread and happiness, Grace was standing on the landing.

She wore a silver dress tonight with daring sleeves or rather, no sleeves at all. Her fleshy shoulders were completely bare, save for two wisps of fabric which served as straps. Irene felt the heat rise to her face, when she noticed the soft dips in the woman's collarbones.

To her relief, Grace pulled her fur shawl around her as the evening draught whipped down the corridor.

'Might I come in a moment?' Grace asked.

Irene had already stepped aside to signal her invitation before Grace had even finished speaking.

The woman walked like a dancer, deliberate and delicate. Irene mustered her courage and followed the lady into the kitchen.

'This really isn't a good time,' Irene floundered. 'My husband isn't home.'

'Seems to me like perfect timing then,' Grace replied.

Irene's gaze drifted to the chicken skeleton on the side.

'You misunderstand me, he wouldn't be pleased.'

'I thought as you missed our dinner reservations that I'd come to you.'

Irene didn't respond which pulled a sigh from Grace. 'Do you want me to leave?'

But before Irene could decide, her companion removed her furs and threw them on the table. She stood before Irene in her thin slip of silk and waited.

Distracted by Grace's swollen hips, Irene stuttered, 'It wouldn't be appropriate, Grace.'

'I certainly hope not.'

Irene didn't speak.

Observing the fact, Grace wandered to the cupboard. 'Champagne, I think.'

Irene scoffed, 'We could never afford such a thing.' Much to her astonishment, Grace revealed a bottle from the bottom shelf.

'Now.' Grace popped the cork. 'I'm not here to cause any conflict-'

'What are you?' Irene blurted out.

Grace stalled and considered the scared girl in front of her.

'I'm something different,' Grace said before blowing on the bottle which lined it with frost.

'Like you.' Grace sucked the cold froth from her fingers.

'How am I different?' Irene snapped.

'Don't insult me and certainly don't insult yourself.'

Several glances passed before Irene collapsed onto the kitchen chair and sobbed. Grace was next to her in a moment and held Irene's face, as if she were something precious.

'Wipe your tears. Life is far too short for such sorrow.'

'I fear what I might do,' Irene cried. 'I don't know myself.'

'I believe this is the closest you've ever been to knowing yourself, Irene.' Grace stood abruptly and held out her hand. 'Come. You need to be reminded of what you are.'

Gingerly, Irene laced her fingers with Grace's. An alien sensation rattled her skeleton. She thought her bones might break. There was a nasty jolt and Irene fell onto something other than her husband's kitchen floor.

She teetered on a great shard of rock which had pierced a vast slice of stormy ocean. Her husband's hovel had disappeared entirely. Now, she was somewhere wild and strange.

The rain spat at her skin like buckshot and lightning ripped the skin of a bruised sky. The rock was similar to the shape of a dagger and had only just enough room for the two women.

Grace stood at its sharpest point; the tail of her dress flapped aggressively in the wind. She looked onwards through the sea spray like an ominous figurehead.

'Life has taught you to think small, Irene,' Grace bellowed over the storm. 'Remember, the powerful only ensnare a creature if it is a threat and that is exactly what you are! You carry a

divinity in you that man shall never know. You are a vessel of cyclic power, pleasure and rebirth.'

Grace snatched Irene's wrist in her fist.

'Remember what you are.'

All of a sudden, the two women were back in the kitchen. Their clothes were dry and their hair neat again, as if they had never left.

Irene looked to Grace, her skull burning with questions. But her companion was slumped on a chair, pale and breathless. Concern flooded Irene, as she knelt beside her.

'Grace?'

Grace smiled weakly. 'I'm alright. It leaves me sick when I attempt that.'

'What can I do?'

'Remember.'

Irene kissed her desperately and everything fell away.

It was late and Irene's husband had finally tired himself out and taken to his bed. (She had laced his beer with crushed chamomile). After treating the cut on her cheek with garlic, she sought comfort by the dying fire.

She stoked the flames with the bellows and traced her lips with her finger. She had eaten like a bird all day; nothing but brief sips and small bites. Afraid that Grace's touch would leave her.

Despite her husband's foul mood, the walls were quieter today. It was only a kiss but her world was bigger.

She stayed by the fire a while, staring into the dwindling flames. Her head swam with images of Grace, as she became lost inside herself. The room collapsed into nothing and the hot and swollen pulse returned.

Exquisite and cursed scenes throbbed inside her: sweat beading on soft skin between sheets of twilight.

Irene returned only briefly to see the once suffocating fire now ferociously ablaze. The flames

licked the hearth aggressively and Irene found herself squirming on the floor.

She lifted her skirts instinctively above her hips. Heat rolled inside her like waves. The smell of Grace's perfume ignited the air, as Irene lost her breath.

Keeping her eyes on the flames, Irene rocked gently, her body shedding itself of endless rotten years.

She removed bloody rags from inside her and touched herself in places she felt neglected. The fire crackled and snapped like glass in response.

Grace's name lingered like sugar on her tongue. Pleasure possessed her. She could feel her body preparing for something. Something shameful yet sublime and it was close.

Irene regained her focus and pulled her hands into fists by her sides. 'Stop! Stop-'

The fire shrank ever so slightly but maintained its ferocity. Irene bit her lip and traced her fingers along the hearth. 'Not like this,' she whispered.

As if on command, the fire swallowed itself and the same tiny pulses of flame danced atop of embers. A note was left inside, neat and unburnt. Quickly, Irene brushed the note onto the hearth and read:

Don't miss our reservations this time -

Tomorrow. 9pm. Emerald Tide Hotel, George Street.

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Grace sat on orange coals with her fingers inside her.

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The night arrived and Irene heard a knock at the door. Dread rolled through her; she was certain the invitation said to meet at the hotel.

Irene looked down at herself in horror, still dressed in her apron with bare feet. She tiptoed past the door where her husband was bathing and opened the front door ajar.

Much to her relief Grace was not on the other side. Instead, a large solitary parcel sat at her feet on the landing. Irene looked over her shoulder before picking it up.

Once she was inside his bedroom, Irene tore at the packaging and unveiled the mystery gift.

It was a gown.

The contents were wrapped in a sliver of golden cloth. The gown was made from velvet which was so heavy she had to hold it against her with two fists.

The colour was a rich, royal blue and stitched to the fabric from top to bottom was a sea of sapphires. The jewels looked like stars strung against a cold night sky.

Irene laid the dress onto the bed as if it were made of glass. She considered it with hesitation before trying it on.

The dress fitted her perfectly. Anyone sane wouldn't have believed the coincidence, for no measurements had been taken. But Irene refused to insult Grace. She would never again question the

power of such a woman. No matter what creature she might be.

As Irene slipped on her shoes, she heard her husband leave the bathroom. Taking note of a big spider with a red flash of skin, Irene threw back her shoulders and walked into the hallway.

Her husband stalled, naked and soapy in front of her. 'I thought you were smarter than this,' he spat.

Irene considered her response for a moment before taking a step forward. 'You're in my way, Jack.'

The man's countenance twitched and weakened immediately. It was brief. Familiar redness flooded his cheeks again.

'What did you say?'

'You're delaying me. Do you have something you'd like to say?'

The man made a strange choking noise, as if her words had done something to the air. Jack advanced towards her at speed. But Irene held her hand out at him and he skidded to a stop.

'I've spoiled you, Darling. But if you touch me again, I don't know what I might do.'

Jack shrunk and considered the warning. Irene walked towards the front door while he contemplated. He hadn't moved and was stood perfectly still with suds tracing down the back of his legs.

The click of the latch woke him; he lurched towards Irene and reached for her strenuously. She punched him in the nose and the man slipped.

She noticed how much taller she was than him. Jack had always been a short man and Irene was definitely on the taller side when it came to a woman's height.

Jack crawled towards her. 'Stupid bitch! I'm the man of this fucking house-'

A blanket of spiders fell from the ceiling, covering the man from head to toe. Jack screamed and flailed in the hallway beneath the scuttling bodies. The sound of gulping and hacking ruptured from his body, as the spiders crawled inside him.

Plucking her coat off the hook, Irene walked onto the landing and shut the door gently behind her. She hummed down the stairs.

His screams could be heard from the street.

★

Irene reached the hotel doors and a curtain of rain closed behind her. She had enjoyed the walk. For she never had an excuse to be in such a rich area of town. The air smelt of hanging baskets and pastries.

The hotel could have been mistaken for a small palace. She was welcomed by two porters. The first took her coat and asked if she had any luggage. When she shook her head, the second porter led her to an elegant gilded staircase.

He offered his hand when she lifted her dress to ascend the stairs. She blinked in surprise; the world acknowledged her existence.

The dining room welcomed her with warm candlelight and live music. The pianist played delicately in the corner beneath the clinking of glasses and cutlery. The candlelight bounced spots across the room; reflecting off jewellery and pocket watches.

Irene failed to notice that the porter had vanished and was replaced by the head waiter. He bowed his head and smiled. 'Are you dining alone tonight, Madam?'

'I'm meeting someone,' Irene replied in a daze.

'The name of your companion, Madam?'

'Grace. Her name is Grace.'

The waiter looked stunned. 'Are you referring to the Lady Mosswood?'

Grace felt her face flush red. A Lady? Mosswood? She knew nothing about this woman. Yet here she was, wearing more wealth than she had ever known and dining with an unwoman woman. Should one assume another's species?

'Madam?'

'Oh, I'm not sure.'

The waiter fell silent.

'Is there something wrong, Sir?' Irene asked.

'Forgive me, Madam,' the waiter began, 'Lady Mosswood dines alone. Always.' He smiled brightly.

'This way, please.'

The waiter snaked efficiently past several round tables and ascended a set of small steps. Irene tried to keep up as best she could, as she was led onto a private balcony with only three tables.

Two couples occupied two of them and Grace sat alone at the third. She was looking over the balcony at the foyer below. Her dress was crimson and it suited her the best. The bodice was tightly fitted but the cloth feathered just past her knees into something similar to a mermaid's tail.

Irene noticed the crown atop her black curls. Large pearls were suspended amidst the crown's flourishes. She noticed both the waiter and Grace engaged in a conversation.

Composing herself, Irene walked over to the table and the waiter quickly circled round to pull out her chair. Irene watched the waiter kiss Grace's hand and disappear amidst the diners downstairs.

'Jealousy suits you,' Grace mused, nursing a glass of champagne.

'I'm not jealous!'

'No? Regardless dear, my cunt would repulse him.'

Irene stalled at Grace's brashness again. But curiosity got the better of her. 'You mean he's like you?'

'Like us,' Grace corrected.

Irene said nothing and read the menu's 'Mock Turtle Soup' four times. Grace didn't say a word. Instead, she returned to her glass and looked unsure.

Irene recalled how much Grace had given her. How many times she had saved her. Irene had never returned the favour, either out of fear or pure selfishness.

'I think you're the most beautiful thing I've ever seen in my life,' Irene announced.

Grace took a breath and sank into the chair. The drawbridge had been lowered. Irene marvelled at the unprecedented version of Grace. She looked vulnerable. Human even.

Irene leaned forward, allowing her dress to open around her cleavage. 'Do you have a room?'

'The fireplace is already lit,' Grace replied, her familiar confidence restored again.

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The suite was almost as big as the dining room downstairs. Two ornate chandeliers hung above rugs the length of the street outside. The fireplace was as tall as Irene and the bed was the size of a carriage, with its four detailed mahogany posts.

She watched Grace walk past the towering French windows; the drapes fell shut one by one of their own accord. The two women met by the fireside and the world fell silent.

Irene turned slowly on the spot until she faced away from Grace. She unbuttoned one button. 'Won't you help?'

Grace didn't move yet the remaining buttons were ripped from the dress and rolled on the floor. Irene breathed heavily. Her back was exposed, right down to the crest of her tail bone. She laughed quietly to herself before letting the dress fall.

Irene turned with unexpected confidence. She plucked Grace's crown from her head and placed it

playfully on her own. In response, Grace curtsayed lowly and said, 'Lady Irene.'

The women laughed sweetly.

'Come to me, my love,' Grace said.

Irene stepped out of her abandoned dress and tiptoed forward. Her body betrayed her. She trembled under Grace's gaze. Her lover stared in places where Irene wouldn't care to look. Grace had a peculiar fascination with the shadow of skin just below her breasts.

'You put the Devil in me,' Grace whispered.

Irene's nipples budded as Grace gently cupped her breasts.

'Are you really a Lady?'

'Fuck no. Lady Mosswood was the stage name of my favourite exotic dancer.'

Irene smirked. She was desperate to kiss her companion. However, Grace abruptly got onto her knees. Irene stared at the fullness of Grace's cleavage which was spilling out of her dress. *Now she decides to keep her clothes on?*

'I want to kiss you elsewhere. May I?' Grace asked.

Completely unaware of where Grace intended to kiss her, Irene nodded. Immediately, Grace nuzzled her nose into Irene's pubic hair and there, she kissed her. Grace wouldn't relent, kissing her over and over like she was ravenous.

Irene parted her legs instinctively, allowing Grace to explore further. But doubt hooked her. Jack had never kissed her like that. He said the smell of her was foul and only prostitutes were kissed there.

But a sound escaped her, dissolving any doubt. She hadn't heard herself make such a noise. The warmth of Grace's tongue discovered a spot that only invited pleasure.

Irene ran her hands through Grace's hair, as her lover lowered herself further still. The crown fell, as her knees knocked around Grace's head. Her tongue was inside her now.

Irene crumbled like sand onto the floor.

'Love?' Grace ventured.

'I'm sorry,' she stuttered. 'Your spells are making me silly.'

Grace smirked broadly. 'My darling, I don't use the craft when I fuck.'

Irene's eyes widened. She was convinced that a spell of the flesh had been used to transcend her to such a state.

'You're still dressed.' Irene pulled at Grace's gown. 'Why are you still dressed? God damn it, Grace!'

The two women fell on the floor into breathless giggles, wrestling with clothes. Finally, Grace's body spilled from the fabric; *flesh, flesh, flesh*.

Her breasts were abundant and heavy. They rolled against the plushness of her belly, as she changed positions. Irene chased stretchmarks with her tongue, relishing the fullness of Grace's body.

She had never experienced gluttony like it. The aching need to possess another's body was maddening.

The forgotten crown was kicked towards the fireplace. Flames danced inside the jewels of a fallen woman's crown.

★

Somewhere in the rain, Jack Brent walked into the sea and drowned.

The corpse was monstrous. Its skin was lumpy with spider bites. The venom caused the body to swell, allowing it to float on the black water.

One eye was overhung by a fleshy sack and the other had detached itself entirely. When the wind licked cold air over the waves, the eyeball rolled across the cheek. Several spiders rested inside Its mouth, as the corpse bobbed in the frothy shallows.

The police were unable to collect the body, for a strange phenomenon blackened the sands. A vast carpet of spiders.