

The Fountain of Fair Fortune

By Olivia Nolan

based off of the
short story
by J. K. Rowling

EXT. FARMLANDS - DAY

The wheat fields sway in waves as a strong breeze whistles over them. The clouds are puffy and high in the sky and the sun is setting, casting a burnt-orange hue all over.

Sheep, black and white, graze in clumps, chewing lazily and scanning from side to side. A young lamb trips and stumbles slightly, following in the wake of its mother. It lets out a small high-pitched bleat to which the mother spins around.

The herd stand on the edge of a forest of dark green leaves. The trees stand erect and menacingly large. On the right, there is a stone wall that rises high into the air and cuts into the forest, separating some trees from the rest.

Further along the wall, grass and weeds creep up its stones as it stretches for miles past the wheat fields and into yonder.

EXT. GARDEN WALL- NIGHT

Bodies upon bodies, hundreds upon hundreds, huddle and camp together in squatter formation on the outskirts of the wall. An OLD WITCH (89, dressed in rags, crooked nose) points a lecturing finger at a YOUNG BOY (12, freckles, pouty lips). She sits on a closed barrel and leans on a walking stick talking to him.

OLD WITCH

Ooooooooooh, but do you have the resources see me lad?

She gestures dramatically with her hand and the boy frowns.

OLD WITCH

The resources, the resources. Being of sound mind and heart, do you think that's enough?... For the things you'll see? The things in there?

She points past him at the ancient walls to which he turns over his shoulder. He rubs a sleepy eye with grimy hands leaving dirt on his face. The Old Witch nods and grins a cracked toothed grin.

OLD WITCH

You'll never make it my boy. Go home.

YOUNG BOY

Can to! I'll get there first! You'll see!

He flings his fists about in a tantrum and storms off through the dust to a group of his young peers. The Old Witch rolls her eyes and tuts.

OLD WITCH

Time better spent at home if you ask me.

Down the hill where the Young Boy runs is a raggedy tent with three individuals hunched over outside it. THE MAN (48, bald, harsh facial lines and features, unforgiving stare) sits cross-legged on the ground. THE LADY (35, thin, boney jawline and nose, hair messed about her shoulders) stands snivelling behind him closer to the tent.

The OLD MAN (70, white hair halfway down his back and white beard, one milky blind eye) sits legs spread apart on a stool with his elbows supporting his chin on his knees. All three look out into the crowd surrounding them with grimaces on their faces.

The Old Man snorts and spits phlegm onto the ground.

OLD MAN

Not a good chance this year.

THE MAN

No kidding. Things have doubled. At least!

He rubs his hands all over his face and neck and rocks back and forth.

THE MAN(CONT'D)

How're we supposed to compete with all of this?

THE LADY

Ooi! Chin up old swag. Check it.

She lifts and motions with her chin in the direction of a YOUNG PRINCE (27, chiseled jawline, broad shoulders, thick Brunette hair and beard) strolling by. He is accompanied by several armed guards, swords shimmering in what is left of the sunset.

THE LADY(CONT'D)

Silver-spoon shit-for-brains over there don't got nothin' on our pain. He ain't getting' in.

She too hurls a loogie onto the dust and stares daggers at the Prince. He stands just in front of them, taking in his surroundings with disgust growing over his face.

THE PRINCE

Is there no sanctitude amongst this rough and rabble!

SIR LUCKLESS (40, large, burly, gruff voice) takes a step forward and projects through his metal helmet.

SIR LUCKLESS

My Prince. We have scouted all over this squander. There seems no end to it! And no room!

THE PRINCE

Pah! Well make room! What is it I pay you for exactly, hmm?

He steps towards Sir Luckless whose posture straightens more than it already had been.

SIR LUCKLESS

My Prince! Of course!

He turns to his peer guards.

SIR LUCKLESS(CONT'D)

Atten-hut! Make room for The Prince!

THE PRINCE

Yes, somewhere close too. I want to be there upon sunrise.

He walks up the hill, kicking dirt as he goes, towards the wall. The guards follow and march awkwardly behind him with Sir Luckless rushing to the front to speak with his prince.

The Man stands up abruptly and panicked. He points after the group marching up the hill and stares with large eyes at his companions.

THE MAN

See that! See! There's no way we can compare with that!

THE LADY

Did you hear me? He's got everything!

She unfolds her arms and stomps into the tent. The Old Man chuckles, shrugs and turns to The Man.

THE OLD MAN

Well... It's not really up to any of us in the end, yeh?

He smiles at The Man who looks sadly down at his boots caked in dirt and dust. A tear drop falls from his eyes onto his toe. AMATA (26, blonde hair down to her knees, white rob sordid with filth, sweet and sad disposition) walks behind him carrying a gourd of filthy water.

Tripping over her rob, a dribble of the water spills over and onto The Man.

THE MAN

Ooi!

AMATA

Oh my! Oh! Good sir, I am so sorry.

He wipes his rags dry as her hands flutter about him trying to help.

THE MAN

It's alrigh'. It's alrigh' miss!

She stops fussing and holds the gourd to her chest, her blonde hair swept over her shoulder. He leaves his clothes and looks Amata up and down, licking his lips.

THE MAN(CONT'D)

I sees we got us a fine bird here, ain't we ye old geezer?

He turns to The Old Man who grunts in response and then back to Amata, eyes now widened with new found fear.

THE MAN(CONT'D)

Yeah, looks nice. You look real nice m'lady.

He extends his hand out to her waist. His fingers bristle her robe and she jerks away, wielding her concealed weapon, a wand of thin light white wood.

AMATA

Constingere!

A wind blows from her arm over The Man and immediately his limbs pull to his sides and his knees buckle forcing him to lose balance. His lips too, have been sealed shut by an invisible zipper.

The Old Man leaps up from his stool, Amata takes a step back and The Man trips over himself, collapsing to the ground. He writhes and wriggles on the floor and Amata looks up at The Old Man. The two share a moment of eye contact before Amata makes a break for it with steady yet speedy strides. She holds the gourd to her chest all the while.

Dodging squatters and filthy children, wizards and witches and creatures not-human, orcs, elves, goblins and dwarves, she staggers through the dust to her campsite.

A small red tent with a makeshift awning, rags drying from it, is surrounded by pots and pans, herbs and spices and two other women. A small fire burns beneath a small cauldron which ALTHEDA (47, lanky, shiny brown hair collected in a bun which flows down over her shoulders and to her waist, calm and collected demeanor) sits stirring.

ALTHEDA

Sweet girl, do you have it?

AMATA

Yes ma'am, spilt a bit being harassed by the riff raff but...

Altheda nods and lifts her spoon, steaming with the cauldron's contents, blows on it and turns to ASHA (69, frail, jet black hair with strands of silver adorned atop of her head, jittery). She spoons the contents into Asha's mouth who thanks her kindly.

ALTHEDA

The unfortunates are growing, or rather we... we are growing. One cannot expect from such a large pool of individual's not to come across a scoundrel along the way.

AMATA

Rather at every corner...

She walks slowly over to the two seated women and placed the gourd by Altheda's feet.

ASHA

Take heed of her words girl. In a group of as many sorrowful souls as this, you better watch your back.

Amata sits slowly and stoically on the ground layered with carpets

and tapestry the women had laid out. Altheda turns back to the cauldron, placing the spoon down and bending to pick up the gourd of water.

ALTHEDA

But, you got us too. So don't you mind.

AMATA

Not right now I didn't. The man almost had his hands on me.

ASHA

So what did you do?

She leans forward in her chair and looks Amata in the eyes. Altheda pours the dirty water into the cauldron.

AMATA

I stunned him. Constricted him like a boa.

The two older women look at each other, nod and smile.

ASHA

Not bad.

ALTHEDA

Yes. You see, there is no need for fear, but caution. There is always room for caution.

She stirs the cauldron. Asha wraps her shawls around herself tighter and coughs. Amata eyes bounce between the two women before resting on the ground at their feet.

AMATA

It appears that even The Prince himself needs aid this year.

ALTHEDA

Oh really?

She scoffs, putting the gourd back down on the ground.

ALTHEDA(CONT'D)

A public embarrassment if you ask me.

AMATA

Yes. There are guards a-plenty, scouting and shouting about.

ASHA

What could a prince possibly need more than I--

She shoots off into a coughing fit. Altheda rests a hand on her shoulder and Amata rises to one knee, looking with care at the older woman. Finally, Asha stills her coughing.

ASHA(CONT'D)

--or you--

She looks at Altheda, gently ushering her hand away, and then at

Amata.

ASHA (CONT'D)

--or you?

Altheda sighs and spoons another spoonful of lukewarm water into Asha's mouth. Amata looks down at the ground again, kneeling down until she is sitting once more, tears brimming in her eyes.

A gang of children kick a small rock along the ground as they walk by the red tent. All three women turn to watch them and the final rays of the sun disappear behind the horizon.

EXT. FAMRLANDS- NIGHT

The moon sweeps across the sky and the celestial sphere thrusts stars into its path. The wheat fields sway in the moaning wind and the sheep are no longer grazing.

EXT. GARDEN WALLS- DAY

People sleep in heaps on the ground, on stools, and in tents in the dirt and dust. Two guards sleep on a bench outside of a white and gold marquee.

Sir Luckless sits on a log a few metres from them and leans on his spear, fighting sleep and dozing off only to wake up with a fright and bang his head against the side of his weapon.

Snoring emanates throughout the squatter camp and occasionally a body stirs. A fly buzzes past Sir Luckless's face. It does not stir him. One of the guards on the bench grumbles in his sleep and shifts his position before falling back into slumber.

The fly buzzes past Sir Luckless again, this time under his nose. He wakes briefly and annoyedly swats at it. He drifts off again for a moment before the fly returns and lands on his forehead. This time, he awakens and swings his armoured hand at his head. He smacks himself with his gauntlet and, waking fully and violently, kicks his helmet across the ground in front of him.

He lets out a yelp and five people around him, as well as the two guards on the bench, wake grumpily to all the noise.

SIR LUCKLESS

Ah! For the love of his holy--

Interrupting his outburst, the first beam of sunrise twinkles from the East horizon, shining a small sliver onto the ancient stoney garden walls.

Sir Luckless's mouth gapes open as he follows the beam of light to look at where it hits the wall. The two guards on the bench too, follow his gaze until they see the wall.

The peasants who are awake notice the beam too and either stare at it or shake their friends awake.

The two guards grab together their weapons and place their helmets over their heads. Sir Luckless continues to stare bewilderedly at the beam hitting the wall before he blinks violently and inhales

deeply.

He slams his spear into the ground and collects his helmet.

SIR LUCKLESS

Atten-hut!

He places the helmet over his head and marches back to his spear.

SIR LUCKLESS

Morning has broken! Sunrise! Sunrise!

The peasants surrounding him look to him with annoyance.

INT. RED TENT- DAY

Altheda stirs from her sleep on her sleeping stretcher and throws her blankets aside.

ALTHEDA

It's time.

She rises from her bed and shuffles across the tent, taking a comb from a small table to begin brushing her hair. She does this as she walks hurriedly over to Amata's stretcher. Altheda shakes her awake with one hand.

ALTHEDA(CONT'D)

Amata! Amata... It's time.

Amata looks up at her with cloudy blue eyes and blinks until she can focus.

AMATA

It's time.

ALTHEDA

Yes!

She laughs slightly at the end of her word and moves on to Asha.

ALTHEDA

Asha! Asha! Wake up. It's time.

Amata reaches for a pottery mug painted black on her bedside and sips from it, staring off vacantly at the pots, pans and camping supplies in front of her.

EXT. GARDEN WALLS- DAY

Peasants and wizards and guards and all the rest gather around the sun's beams of light onto the wall. None dare to look away. The Prince stands in the front of the throng with his chest out, looking scared.

A piece of rock from the wall falls where the sunlight hits it and the crowd gasps. The Prince lets out a breath of relief.

THE PRINCE

Aha! Yes! Yes! It's happening!

Another piece of rock tumbles from the wall and another and another. Altheda arrives on the outskirts of the crowd followed by Amata who guides Asha, with the help of a walking stick, by the hand.

Altheda goes on tiptoe to peer over the heads at the front but gives up.

ALTHEDA

This won't do.

She turns back to the other two with a stern look on her face and unblinking.

ALTHEDA(CONT'D)

We need to get to the front.

AMATA

But there are so many. And so eager. How are we to--

ALTHEDA

--If there's any hope of any of us getting chosen, it's not going to happen if we're out here.

Asha wheezes and Amata turns her attention back to her as Altheda turns back to the crowd and a frown creeps over her face. She shoves an ELF(20, tall, slender, boney structure, armed with bow and arrow) out of the way and swerves past a DWARF(50, red hair, plaited beard, surly).

ELF

Hey!

DWARF

Watch it!

ELF

No cutting!

They jeer at Altheda but she does not turn back. Amata keeps her head down and follows after her, trailing Asha along who merely looks up and down at the two angry ones respectfully.

More stones and cement tumble from the wall as the sunlight grows stronger and the sunrise progresses. A small chink falls away and the world on the other side of the walls peeps through.

The crowd gasps and someone screams. The Prince lets out a loud corny laugh. Altheda pushes her way past the last row of the crowd to near the front and stops a few metres from him.

THE PRINCE

The time has come to choose!

Amata and Asha arrive by Altheda's shoulders and watch the quivering prince.

THE PRINCE(CONT'D)

To choose the most deserving!

His arms are splayed out at his sides and his head thrust upwards to the sky. A loud crack sounds out and travels up the wall from the chink. Slowly, green tendrils adorned with yellow and pink flowers snake their way through the hole and stretch it, rupturing the wall and sending stone flying everywhere.

The sounds of a woman's screams and the crowd's gasps fill the air. Children scream and cry and people point fingers and the vines and leaves slither and crawl out of the wall from the other side. The sunlight continues to shine on them and the wall and now the crowd itself.

The Prince opens his eyes and looks down at the tendril creeping towards him.

THE PRINCE

Oh! Oh yes! Pick me! I am the one. Yes!

The tendril worms closer to his feet but snakes around him, avoiding him, and, so rapidly, snatches Asha around the ankle between the feet of everyone else and yanks her forward.

She is pulled and screams as her back hits the ground and she is dragged towards the pulsating green flowery mass in the hole in the wall.

AMATA

Asha!

She is dragged down too as Asha had taken hold of the hem of her robe. Amata hits the ground with a thud. Altheda looks back and forth frantically and grabs a hold of Amata's hand as she gets dragged along in the dirt. Both women cry out for help.

AMATA

What's happening! What's happening!

ALTHEDA

It's alright. It's alright. This is it!

She keeps a grasp on Amata's hand and the crowd jeers insults and cries of disappointment that it was not them.

THE PRINCE

No! It's me!

He lunges at the creepers and slices them with his sword. High-pitched screaming comes from the wall and the greenery but only more vines tangle themselves around the three women, drawing them closer and closer through the hole.

THE PRINCE (CONT'D)

It should be me!

He runs at the swelling roots and vines protruding from the wall, aiming his sword at it!

SIR LUCKLESS

My Leige!

He chases after The Prince, leaving his spear and helmet and drawing his sword. Asha's lower body is devoured by the vines, half of her could not be seen and so the rest of her as she vanishes through to the other side of the wall.

The Prince screams as the vines touch him and his skin is left burnt and sizzling. He stares at the boils forming and bursting on his hand and falls to the ground.

SIR LUCKLESS(CONT'D)

My Leige!

Amata's body seeps through the wall too and steadily so does Altheda's, none of the women now making any sound. The Prince cries and gurgles in the dust. Sir Luckless's sword comes down on the vines who cry out in return.

The crowd and Sir Luckless cover their ears with their hands. One creeper shoots forward and wraps around Sir Luckless's waist. He is hoisted abruptly into the air and flies at the wall as the creeper reals itself in. He smacks the foliage of the garden wall and is crunched and absorbed through it to the other side.

EXT. GARDEN BEHIND WALLS- DAY

The cries of the crowd resonate from the other side of the wall and the creepers squirm and squeak around each other and the bodies. Asha collapses on the ground first with a moan, followed by Amata, whose golden hair sprays out onto the ground. Altheda is oozed out of the vines with squishy sounds and flops onto the ground herself. The sounds of the crowd disappear.

Asha crawls to her walking stick and Amata attempts to rise and help her. Altheda is the first to rise to her feet and stumble towards the old woman.

ALTHEDA

Are you alright?

ASHA

No worse--

She coughs and splutters.

ASHA(CONT'D)

--for wear.

Altheda nods and bends down to extend a hand out to her. Asha takes her hand and rises, leaning on her walking stick for support, shaking all the time.

Amata coughs on the ground and Altheda rushes over to her.

ALTHEDA

Sweet girl!

AMATA

I'm alright. I'm alright.

She raises a hand to still Altheda and rises onto one knee and

then the other and finally onto her feet. Altheda sighs a sigh of relief and lets a smile crawl over her face. She thrust her hand into the air and does a little hop.

ALTHEDA

Ladies, look around. It is us. We are chosen!

She twirls and beholds the majesty of the green garden before them, with flowers and bushes and bulbs sticky with dew of all variant colours of the rainbow spread about. Her rejoicing feet leave footprints in the soggy, spongey moss, soaked with the morning dew.

Asha turns and a smile too overwhelms her visage and she jerks about in glee. Amata, a weak smile growing on her lips, moves towards her friends.

The creepers squeak and squirm and another body plops onto the ground where she once was. She spins to behold Sir Luckless, gasping for breath and wide eyed.

Altheda rushes towards him and cries out.

ALTHEDA

What! How can this be?

Sir Luckless clutches at the armour around his chest and breathes deep rattling breathes as he rises to one knee.

ALTHEDA

Only one can bathe in the Fountain!

She yells into the air. Amata stares, bewildered, at Sir Luckless getting to his feet. Asha shuffles her way forward, away from the flowers to the scene by the now repaired wall.

ASHA

I agree. It will be hard enough to decide which of us it will be, without adding another!

She snarls at Sir Luckless who looks back at the women with unease and a twitching eye. His eyes catch sight of his sword a few feet away from him behind Altheda.

She stares him down and Asha slowly raises her wand, of dark black wood. He raises his gauntlets in submission.

SIR LUCKLESS

Good women! I mean you no harm. I have no more idea for my being here than you do.

He looks down at his sword again and Altheda follows his gaze.

ALTHEDA

Ha! No weapon to befit a soldier?

Asha chuckles at this and Amata blinks, retrieving her wand from the inner folds of her robe too. Sir Luckless takes a step back.

SIR LUCKLESS

Good women! Good women. Please, I implore you! I have no intention of staying. I shall retreat at once.

He backs into the wall and turns to look for the hole, grabbing only at cold, wet stone.

Amata snaps from her trance and her brow knits together.

AMATA

Faint heart! Draw your sword, Knight, and help us reach our goal!

She points her wand directly at him and he quivers, turning back to face them.

SIR LUCKLESS

M-m-my sword i-is--

ALTHEDA

--yes yes! It's over there!

She points at it and he looks from her to the sword and back again. Asha keeps her dark wand fixed on him, Amata too, as he crab-walks towards his weapon, not breaking eye contact, and bends down to retrieve it.

ALTHEDA(CONT'D)

And as much as I would love to argue your pathetic fate, we are running out of time. So the only order of business would be to kill you!

Asha and Amata's wands rise higher into the air, threatening him. He sheathes his sword and raises his gauntlets up once again.

ALTHEDA(CONT'D)

Or... You join us.

AMATA

What!

Asha looks in confusion from person to person in the garden and around at the foliage.

ALTHEDA

We could do with the extra force. So venture with us, Knight... And we'll spare your life.

Sir Luckless nods his head up and down vigorously. Altheda smiles.

ALTHEDA(CONT'D)

Good. Now, come. The sun is rising in the sky.

EXT. DEEPER GARDEN- DAY

The group march in single file with Sir Luckless at the front, hand ready on the handle of his sword, followed by Altheda, Asha and finally Amata, the latter two wielding their wands at the ready.

They walk a path lit by gentle sunlight that filters through dense leaves of trees high up above them. The ground on which they walk bounces with each of their steps and butterflies and bees buzz by.

Large orange and yellow bulbs droop into their pathway which the adventurers must dip to avoid. Huge petals of blue and purple fall to the sides of healthy plump yellow buds covered in pollen and being visited occasionally by a friendly bug.

The group trudges onwards, in silence, Altheda keeping her eye on Sir Luckless and Asha and Amata taking in the scenery around them.

EXT. FOOT OF THE HILL- DAY

The group journey on until the pathway and ground begin to slope upwards.

AMATA

Pray it is not just me, but I do feel as though this path is growing more tedious.

ALTHEDA

You are right, sweet girl. We are reaching, at last, the foot of the hill, atop which lies our objective.

ASHA

Indeed, and what a pleasant stroll it has been.

She chuckles at herself and Amata huffs.

AMATA

Really, old woman? You are not finding this arduous on your health?

Asha raises her hand in dismissal of her questions.

ASHA

Old woman? Pah! Nothing can break these bones, not even time.

Sir Luckless stares at the ground before him as he walks. His strides slow when he observes, on the dew, a trail of slime which grows and grows in width and viscosity the more steps he takes.

Eventually coming to a halt, his head lifts to the trees to see a large, pulsating sack, oozing slime, throbbing and hanging from a branch of a tree.

Altheda bumps into his back and grunts.

ALTHEDA

Who said you--

Sir Luckless points up at the sack and Altheda follows his finger. Her face grows pale and her mouth opens wide.

Amata

What is it?

She too follows Sir Luckless' finger, as does Asha. The sack throbs and whatever sleeps inside it struggles at its seams. The branch quakes and creaks from the weight of the thing and a ripping sound ripples around as the skin of the cocoon splits open. Bile and ooze pour down from the sky and splash all over Sir Luckless, followed by a long fleshy, almost transparent worm creature writhing out of the sack and splattering down onto the ground with a gross squish.

The MONSTROUS WHITE WORM wriggles and gets its bearings. The group huddle in fright and step back away from the creature. A bloated bulbous white head lolls on what can only be called the head of it and two symmetrical rows of three milky black eyes blink independently of each other.

Slithering around in its own slime, it blinks two blind eyes in Sir Luckless's direction and rapidly begins sliming towards him.

Sir Luckless closes his eyes as he cowers from the creature which stands luring above him. The women too, cower with Altheda being the only one to sneak a peak.

THE WORM

Pay me the proof of your pain...

The words come gurgling out of its mouth and bubbles bursting and gargling. Sir Luckless, shaking, lets out a defiant yell and draws his sword from its sheath.

Altheda, too, starts to scream and grasps at rocks on the ground which she begins to fling at The Worm over Sir Luckless's shoulder.

The rocks bounce off of its skin, futile. Sir Luckless swings his sword at The Worm, aiming to slice its head off, but the sword shatters in half with a shimmering clang. The Worm barely flinches and slithers to and fro in front of the group.

Amata, with wand raised, steps forward past Asha.

AMATA

Incensa illuminavit!

Fire sprays forth from her wand and showers down on The Worm but to no avail. The creature continues to slime and slither, unharmed and unburnt. Amata huffs in frustration and raises her wand once more.

AMATA

In figure!

This time ice shards fly from her wand and slice into the creature but draw no blood. They simply fall from its body, forced out by ooze and pulsating fleshiness.

Asha straightens and raises her wand too with a shaking arm at The Worm.

ASHA

Subitoque Perire!

A black mist streams from the tip of her dark wand and hovers around The Worm. Asha smiles as the creature is engulfed in it and turns to her comrades who smile back at her. Their heads turn back to the large white wriggling body fighting the mist which dissipates into nothing.

Asha gasps as The Worm stretches its gruesome long neck until its dead blind eyes stare right into hers. She shudders and hiccups sobs. A grumbling gurgling sound comes from the inside of The Worm's belly.

The sunlight pokes through the high leaves of the forest canopy and shines in Asha's eye. She blinks and looks up at the sun in the middle of the sky, at her zenith. Tears stream from her face.

ASHA

It is hopeless! The fountain will shut before we
destroy this beast!

Her eyes shut tightly and more tears fall. Altheda takes a step to her but stops. Sir Luckless and Amata remain still but look on with concern.

She weeps and moans and clutches her side while leaning on her walking stick. The Worm slithers closer to her and its grumbling turns into a purring.

Asha opens her eyes to the creature's face right in front of hers and lets out a terrified squeak. The rest of the party gasp but remain statuesque.

The Worm's hidden mouth peals open to reveal layer upon layer of suckers. It places its mouth on her whole face and drinks the tears from her cheeks with two suction.

Leaving trails of ooze and slime all over her wrinkled face and black-silver hair, The Worm slithers aside and wraps itself into a coil, resting its bulbous head on its body and closing its eyes to drift off into slumber.

The members of the party look at each other in a moment of suspense until Amata and Altheda leap into the air with rejoice. Sir Luckless laughs out all the fear in his chest. Asha wipes the ooze from her eyes and face, disgusted, but as soon as she can see, she begins to laugh too.

Altheda clutches at her sides and then gathers herself.

ALTHEDA

Well, like you said, time is of the essence. Let's
get going.

She takes two large strides forward and gingerly passes by the now sleeping Worm. Amata, Sir Luckless and Asha follow her example.

EXT. HILLSIDE- DAY

Altheda marches along the path and up the ever increasing slop of the hill. Asha struggles to keep up with all the goo obstructing her. Amata holds her hand and guides her up the slope. Sir Luckless strides carefully, holding his broken sword by the handle to his chest.

The party walks on and on, not speaking a word to each other but slowly they begin to huff from the exertion of traversing the slope.

AMATA

How much further--

Her panting interrupts her sentence.

AMATA

--do you think it is?

ALTHEDA

Not much farther. Keep your will strong, sweet girl.

She places one heavy foot in front of the other and forces herself against gravity a few steps further up the hill. The garden bulbs lie only at the bottom of the hill and at the top. Other than that, it is but a hill covered in soft spongy moss and grass.

Sir Luckless's armour chings and changs as he struggles and Asha begins to wheeze. Amata stumbles with the effort of supporting Asha but catches herself in time.

Altheda's breath has too become heavy and she stops her marching and bends down, leaning on her knees to observe words carved into the ground before her. She reads them aloud.

ALTHEDA

Pay me the fruit of your labours...

She looks at it puzzled and is joined by the rest of her crew. Sir Luckless scratches his helmet-less head while Amata and Asha try to catch their breath.

SIR LUCKLESS

What here does this mean?

ALTHEDA

I know not, but if it be anything like our last challenge, we may have to account for lost hours.

She lifts her head and gazes around the hill. They have no other company and there is no threat in sight.

Sir Luckless's eyebrow raises and he retrieves from within his armour, a coin. Altheda watches him but says nothing. He looks down at her and holds out the golden circle for her to gaze upon.

SIR LUCKLESS

All the fortune to my name.

They stare at each other for a moment before he walks over to the words and places his coin neatly upon them. Before it can land peacefully on the ground, it bounces and rolls away down the hill.

SIR LUCKLESS

No!

He rushes after it but it is too far out of reach. His shoulders drop and he sighs deeply.

AMATA

Worry not, good Knight. All ailments are promised to be healed.

She places a comforting hand on his shoulder which he looks at with gratitude. Amata smiles sweetly at him and he blushes, looking away.

Altheda, rising to her feet, continues on the journey up the hill. Amata looks after her with despair and with one last huff lifts Asha to her feet and they walk. Sir Luckless, slightly giddy, follows too.

The party trudge on and the sun moves westward in the sky. They take step after step but the words remain firm in the ground before them, never moving out of the way.

They remain in the same spot no matter how many steps are taken.

ALTHEDA

How--

She marches forward with more vigour than before, panting and huffing and holding the hems of her robes up so as not to trip over her own feet. Amata moans and Asha coughs.

AMATA

How can one walk and stay in the same place? It's futile.

Her pace slows to a stop and she holds Asha up by the arm. Altheda looks over her shoulder at her friends and swings an arm for encouragement.

ALTHEDA

Courage, friends, and do not yield! The fountain is ours for the taking!

Sir Luckless continues too and his metal boots clank with every step in his march. Altheda is on the verge of jogging up the hill and panting furiously.

The sun is high in the sky and on the setting side. A bead of sweat forms on the top of Altheda's brow and joins with others to form a little stream down her nose.

She wipes it and as the drops fall glittering to the earth, the inscription blocking their paths vanishes. Grass and moss grow over the letters once carved into the ground.

Altheda stops and looks at the ground, Sir Luckless too. Amata and Asha watch from the back of the group, clutching at their sides.

Altheda blinks and places a shaking foot on the ground where the words were and a step past that. Again, she leaps into the sky with joy.

ALTHEDA

Woo hoo! We did it!

Sir Luckless laughs and claps his gauntlets. Amata's face lights up and she smiles but Asha can only look up the hill and mind her own sweat from her eyes.

EXT. HILL SUMMIT- DAY

The group move forward, sweating and panting. Sir Luckless is drenched with sweat in his armour and all three women swim in their own sweat too.

Altheda is the first to lift her head and see the summit. A smile overwhelms her lips and her eyes glisten.

ALTHEDA

There! Look! The Fountain!

Amata lifts her head as do the other two and before them, just a bit ahead, on the top of the hill, stands the glorious fountain, shedding crystal tears and flowing with the clearest water. It is surrounded in a circular, symmetrical garden with herbs and trees bearing plump fruit and flowers of blues, pinks, yellows and oranges.

Altheda picks up her stride with new found energy and begins to skip merrily towards the fountain.

ALTHEDA

Hurrah! Hurray!

Sir Luckless joins her and flings his arms up into the air.

SIR LUCKLESS

At long last! At long last!

Amata beams and jumps in the spot. Asha smiles weakly and stares with tears in her eyes at the fountain. The group cheer and squeal. Altheda's feet bounce on the moss but stop dead in their tracks before a stream flowing strong before her. She stares down at the black water flowing around the hill, barring their way.

Sir Luckless catches up with her and stares too at the water, the smile now gone from his face. In the center of the stream sits a smooth stone on which words are carved. Sir Luckless read them out loud.

SIR LUCKLESS

Pay me the treasure of your past...

The two stand side by side staring at the stone until the others reach them. Amata, panting, looks at the stone and frowns.

AMATA

And this? What now?

ALTHEDA

There had to be a third, sweet child. Such challenges always come in threes.

Asha looks down at the stream and quietly begins to weep. Sir Luckless turns to her and rests a hand on her shoulder.

SIR LUCKLESS

Good woman. Do not cry. We have conquered every challenge before and there is just this one left.

ASHA

The sun. The sun, it soon shall hide behind the horizon past what can be seen from the hilltop and all shall be for naught.

She buckles to her knees, wheezing and small tears dripping from her chin. Sir Luckless rises swiftly and moves back to the stream and removes the shield attached to his back.

ALTHEDA

What shall you do?

SIR LUCKLESS

I shall float across. I will be able to help the rest of you from there.

Before Altheda can reject, he flings his shield into the air and lands on it in the stream. The current pulls the shield under the water and Sir Luckless sinks with the weight of his armour. Amata gasps and clutches tighter onto Asha while Altheda leaps forward, placing a foot in the stream and keeping the other on land. She lunges for Sir Luckless's gauntlet and grabs it, clinging to his grip.

ALTHEDA

Help me!

She struggles to keep Sir Luckless from being swept away in the flow, water spraying everywhere. Amata drops Asha gently and rushes to Altheda's aid. She grabs hold of the knight's hand too and pulls with all her might. The two women struggle before Asha shuffles over and yanks on both of their robes. Slowly the three manage to heave Sir Luckless from the depths of the stream and onto spongy land.

He splutters on the ground and tries to gather himself, soaking from head to toe. The women pant and huff at his sides. Amata extends a gentle hand.

AMATA

Dear Knight, how do you fair?

Sir Luckless coughs up black water and looks up at her fair face.

SIR LUCKLESS

I will fair fine, m'lady. Thank you.

Altheda kneels down beside him and looks back at the stone. Asha collapses onto the moss and catches her breath. Amata remains standing.

ALTHEDA

Pay me the treasure of your past...

She stares off blankly into the distance, lost in thought. Amata stares down at her hands and slowly retrieves her white wand from her sleeve. She whispers.

AMATA

It all comes in threes...

The three other members of the party lift their heads to look at her in confusion. Amata looks tenderly back at them and, with a dainty hand, raises her wand to her head, resting the tip on her temple. From it she draws a stream of white liquified mist, connected to her wand as if on a string. Her face expresses slight discomfort and her eyes, closed, wince.

She pulls the ghostly white thread from her temple and lets it dangle on the tip of her wand. The three look at her with wide eyes and she smiles at them.

AMATA

Memories of happy times... with my vanished lover...

She looks to the tip and ghostly white gloop that dangles from it. With a flick of her small wrist it flies into the air and falls into the rushing black waters of the stream.

The group stare at the stream as the memories get swept away by the current and in their place rise smooth stepping stones from the black water.

Quietly the group rise to their feet and step cautiously over the stones, across the stream, not saying a word.

EXT. FOUNTAIN- DAY

Droplets catch the light of the setting sun as they fly from the sprout of the fountain and down and away. The flowers quiver in the warm breeze and the tree's leaves sway.

The group make their way up the hill against the backdrop of the ruby sky. The sun is setting.

Altheda stops feet away from the edge of the fountain and its crystal clear waters. She turns back to her comrades.

ALTHEDA

It is time... To decide...

Sir Luckless lowers his head.

ALTHEDA(CONT'D)

Who shall bathe--

Asha moans terribly and crumbles to the ground, her walking stick falling beside her.

AMATA

Asha!

She rushes to the old woman's side but Asha raises her hand in protest. With pain in her eyes and in her face, she looks up pleading to Amata.

ASHA

No! Please! Do not touch me.

Amata, with wide eyes, takes a step back. Sir Luckless raises his hands, and broken sword, to his head in despair. Altheda sways where she stands.

ASHA(CONT'D)

The pain, it's too much.

She clutches her sides and her chest and splutters blood onto her robes. Altheda blinks rapidly and then races around on her feet, looking into crisp green bushes and inspecting the variety of flowers and herbs.

Sir Luckless watches her, with tears in his eyes and Amata too.

AMATA

What are you doing?

ALTHEDA

I'm going to cure her. With the greenery in here- it's like none other that I've seen!

She does not turn to them as she speaks, but continues stuffing her hands and pockets full with herbs and leaves and spices and plants. Sir Luckless takes a step towards her.

SIR LUCKLESS

Well then please, kind woman, make haste. I fear time is at its apex.

He looks to the suffering Asha, laying on the moss, tears streaming from her eyes as she coughs and splutters with rattling breath.

Altheda picks one last flower and rushes over to Asha's side. Kneeling, she splays all of the foliage before her.

ALTHEDA

Water! Water!

Sir Luckless, from a hidden contraption in his armour, reveals a small gourd of water. He hands it over to Altheda who grasps it, stuffs selected herbs and grasses into the spout. Re-corking the gourd, she swirls the content within around and around for a couple of seconds.

Asha continues to splutter, blood trickling down her chin.

SIR LUCKLESS

Now m'lady! Now!

In a swift movement, she uncorks the gourd and pours its contents down Asha's throat. Asha chokes and splutters at first but ultimately accepts the liquid into her system.

At once, her eyes open up in sparkles. Vigour returns to her cheeks and her muscles become sturdy instead of rigid. She pushes the gourd away from her and smiles at Altheda.

ASHA

Oh my!

Altheda makes a small move away and Amata gasps as Asha slowly begins to rise to her feet without the help of her walking stick.

AMATA

Oh! Sweet Asha!

Tears stream down her face and she clasps her hands against her lips. The old woman begins to take a step towards her, past Altheda, her smile growing wider and wider.

ASHA

I am cured!

She leaps into the air and throws up her fist. Amata shrieks in delight and Sir Luckless laughs nervously. Altheda rises slowly to her feet with a sweet smile on her lips too.

SIR LUCKLESS

I cannot believe it. That worked.

ASHA

I have no need of the Fountain- let Altheda bathe!

She leaps into Amata's arms and the two roll around on the moss and grass together in glee. Altheda turns her back and returns to the bushes. Sir Luckless looks from the rejoicing woman to her somber walk and his smile fades.

SIR LUCKLESS

M'lady, will you not take it?

He gestures towards the waters and Altheda's looks at him from over her shoulder. She giggles and bends down to pick at a cluster of flowers.

ALTHEDA

If I can cure Asha's disease with this--

She gestures to the contents of the fountain's garden.

ALTHEDA(CONT'D)

--I shall earn gold aplenty... my woes are over.

She stands and turns to look at Amata, lying on the ground beside

Asha, with a smile.

ALTHEDA(CONT'D)

Let Amata bathe.

Amata fixes her long blonde hair out of her face and looks at Altheda with wide eyes. She looks down at the smiling Asha and up to Sir Luckless who bows to her and gestures towards the fountain.

Slowly Amata begins to shake her head and tears brim in her eyes.

SIR LUCKLESS

M'lady, what is the matter?

She stares before her and wipes her tears away with tight angry fists. She huffs and puffs and then lets out a little laugh which builds into a chuckle.

Sir Luckless's face is riddled with unease. Altheda's back is turned as she tends to plucking the plants.

AMATA

What does it matter. There is no reason for my curing anymore! I am without joyous memory of my dearly beloved. I see now... I see now the vile, cruel and faithless man that he was!

She punches the ground and tears shake from her cheeks. Asha stops rolling and smiling and looks up at Amata with concern.

AMATA(CONT'D)

But no more! He is gone. It is happiness enough to be rid of him...

Sir Luckless looks down to his metal boots and toes at the moss. Asha rises slowly to her knees, not taking her eyes off of Amata. Wiping the final tears from her eyes, she sniffles and turns to face Sir Luckless.

AMATA(CONT'D)

Good sir...

He raises his head to look at her, with a sorrowful expression. She smiles at him through her tearful eyes.

AMATA(CONT'D)

You must bathe, as a reward for all your chivalry!

She thrusts out her chest on her last word and forces herself to rise from the ground. Asha watches both of them and Altheda returns to the group, overflowing with foliage.

Sir Luckless looks into Amata's eyes whose smiling eyes look right back at him. Slowly he lowers his head, with a shy smile and nods.

In the last rays of the setting sun, Sir Luckless clanks forward in all his armour into the crystal clear fountain water which ripples out before him.

He wades in waist-deep, approaching the sprout of the fountain itself. Amata, Asha and Altheda watch from the edges of the

waters.

He submerges himself in the waters and stays under for a couple of moments. Amata takes a step forward with worry on her face when he does not re-emerge.

With a magnificent spray of droplets, Sir Luckless's head rises up above the surface of the water and splashes about. Amata sighs a sigh of relief.

He turns back to his party and his torso rises too until he is waist-deep in the water once again. His armour now rusted, he wades through the ripples to the edge of the waters where Amata stands.

Sir Luckless flings himself at the feet of Amata, spraying her white robe with water.

SIR LUCKLESS

My dear lady. Sweet woman. You are without a doubt the kindest and most beautiful woman I have ever beheld.

He reaches a chivalrous hand for hers and she takes it, blushing. Asha rises to her feet, watching the couple all the while with Altheda.

AMATA

Oh, my dear knight!

He takes a breath to continue.

SIR LUCKLESS

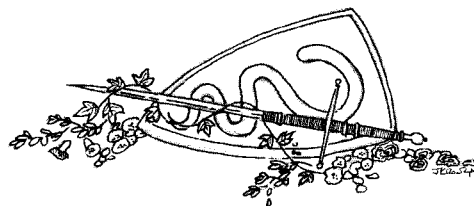
M'lady, with my heart in your hands and my eyes only for you, from this moment onwards, now and forever. I implore you, so soft and tender, so kind and gentle, for your hand in marriage?

Amata gasps and Altheda and Asha put their hands to their mouths and chests. Amata clears her throat.

AMATA

Dear knight, I have searched long and I have searched hard for a person whom I feel I can trust and is worthy of me and my companions. You sir, have proven yourself beyond measure.

Her smile beams at him and his at her. He rises to his feet and she leaps into his arms, almost sending him off his balance with a large hug. Asha and Altheda look at each other and smile and giggle and the group make their move down the hill together, arm in arm and the sun falls below the horizon.



THE FOUNTAIN OF FAIR FORTUNE

High on a hill in an enchanted garden, enclosed by tall walls and protected by strong magic, flowed the Fountain of Fair Fortune.

Once a year, between the hours of sunrise and sunset on the longest day, a single unfortunate was given the chance to fight their way to the

Fountain, bathe in its waters and receive Fair Fortune for evermore.

On the appointed day, hundreds of people travelled from all over the kingdom to reach the garden walls before dawn. Male and female, rich and poor, young and old, of magical means and without, they gathered in the darkness, each hoping that they would be the one to gain entrance to the garden.

Three witches, each with her burden of woe, met on the outskirts of the crowd, and told one another their sorrows as they waited for sunrise.

The first, by name Asha, was sick of a malady no Healer could cure. She hoped that the Fountain would banish her symptoms and grant her a long and happy life.

The second, by name Altheda, had been

robbed of her home, her gold and her wand by an evil sorcerer. She hoped that the Fountain might relieve her of powerlessness and poverty.

The third, by name Amata, had been deserted by a man whom she loved dearly, and she thought her heart would never mend. She hoped that the Fountain would relieve her of her grief and longing.

Pitying each other, the three women agreed that, should the chance befall them, they would unite and try to reach the Fountain together.

The sky was rent with the first ray of sun, and a chink in the wall opened. The crowd surged forward, each of them shrieking their claim for the Fountain's benison. Creepers from the garden beyond snaked through the pressing mass, and

twisted themselves around the first witch, Asha. She grasped the wrist of the second witch, Altheda, who seized tight upon the robes of the third witch, Amata.

And Amata became caught upon the armour of a dismal-looking knight who was seated on a bone-thin horse.

The creepers tugged the three witches through the chink in the wall, and the knight was dragged off his steed after them.

The furious screams of the disappointed throng rose upon the morning air, then fell silent as the garden walls sealed once more.

Asha and Altheda were angry with Amata, who had accidentally brought along the knight.

'Only one can bathe in the Fountain! It will be hard enough to decide which of us it will be, without adding another!'

Now, Sir Luckless, as the knight was known in the land outside the walls, observed that these were witches, and, having no magic, nor any great skill at jousting or duelling with swords, nor anything that distinguished the non-magical man, was sure that he had no hope of beating the three women to the Fountain. He therefore declared his intention of withdrawing outside the walls again.

At this, Amata became angry too.

'Faint heart!' she chided him. 'Draw your sword, Knight, and help us reach our goal!'

And so the three witches and the forlorn knight ventured forth into the enchanted garden, where rare herbs, fruit and flowers grew in abundance on either side of the sunlit paths. They met no obstacle until they reached the foot of the hill on which the Fountain stood.



There, however, wrapped around the base of the hill, was a monstrous white Worm, bloated and blind. At their approach, it turned a foul face upon them, and uttered the following words:

'Pay me the proof of your pain.'

Sir Luckless drew his sword and attempted to kill the beast, but his blade snapped. Then Altheda cast rocks at the Worm, while Asha and Amata essayed every spell that might subdue or entrance it, but the power of their wands was no more effective than their friend's stone, or the knight's steel: the Worm would not let them pass.

The sun rose higher and higher in the sky, and Asha, despairing, began to weep.





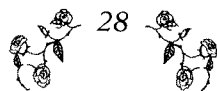
Then the great Worm placed its face upon hers and drank the tears from her cheeks. Its thirst assuaged, the Worm slithered aside, and vanished into a hole in the ground.

Rejoicing at the Worm's disappearance, the three witches and the knight began to climb the hill, sure that they would reach the Fountain before noon.

Halfway up the steep slope, however, they came across words cut into the ground before them.

Pay me the fruit of your labours.

Sir Luckless took out his only coin, and placed it upon the grassy hillside, but it rolled away and was lost. The three witches and the knight continued to climb, but though they walked for



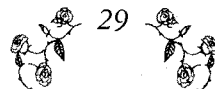
hours more, they advanced not a step; the summit came no nearer, and still the inscription lay in the earth before them.

All were discouraged as the sun rose over their heads and began to sink towards the far horizon, but Altheda walked faster and harder than any of them, and exhorted the others to follow her example, though she moved no further up the enchanted hill.

'Courage, friends, and do not yield!' she cried, wiping the sweat from her brow.

As the drops fell glittering on to the earth, the inscription blocking their path vanished, and they found that they were able to move upwards once more.

Delighted by the removal of this second obstacle, they hurried towards the summit as fast as they could, until at last they glimpsed the





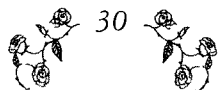
Fountain, glittering like crystal in a bower of flowers and trees.

Before they could reach it, however, they came to a stream that ran round the hilltop, barring their way. In the depths of the clear water lay a smooth stone bearing the words:

Pay me the treasure of your past.

Sir Luckless attempted to float across the stream on his shield, but it sank. The three witches pulled him from the water, then tried to leap the brook themselves, but it would not let them cross, and all the while the sun was sinking lower in the sky.

So they fell to pondering the meaning of the stone's message, and Amata was the first

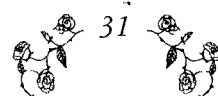


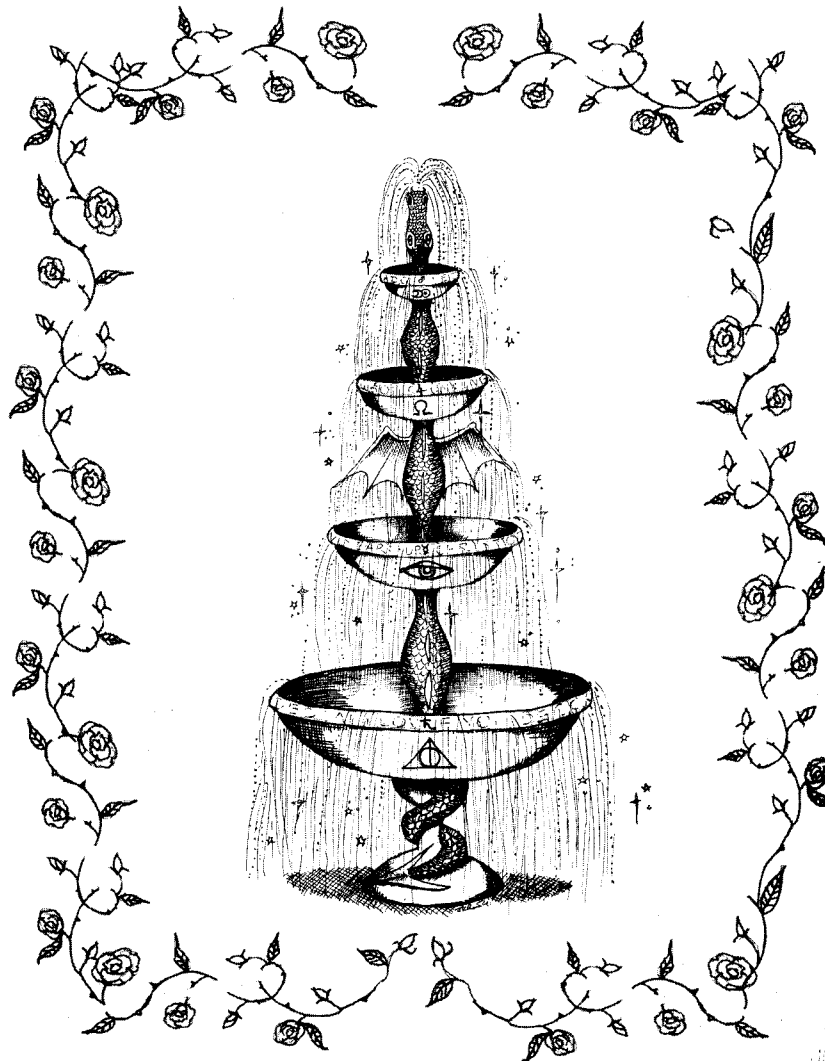
to understand. Taking her wand, she drew from her mind all the memories of happy times she had spent with her vanished lover, and dropped them into the rushing waters. The stream swept them away, and stepping stones appeared, and the three witches and the knight were able to pass at last on to the summit of the hill.

The Fountain shimmered before them, set amidst herbs and flowers rarer and more beautiful than any they had yet seen. The sky burned ruby, and it was time to decide which of them would bathe.

Before they could make their decision, however, frail Asha fell to the ground. Exhausted by their struggle to the summit, she was close to death.

Her three friends would have carried her to





the Fountain, but Asha was in mortal agony and begged them not to touch her.

Then Altheda hastened to pick all those herbs she thought most hopeful, and mixed them in Sir Luckless's gourd of water, and poured the potion into Asha's mouth.

At once, Asha was able to stand. What was more, all symptoms of her dread malady had vanished.

'I am cured!' she cried. 'I have no need of the Fountain – let Altheda bathe!'

But Altheda was busy collecting more herbs in her apron.

'If I can cure this disease, I shall earn gold aplenty! Let Amata bathe!'

Sir Luckless bowed, and gestured Amata towards the Fountain, but she shook her head. The stream had washed away all regret for her



lover, and she saw now that he had been cruel and faithless, and that it was happiness enough to be rid of him.

'Good sir, you must bathe, as a reward for all your chivalry!' she told Sir Luckless.

So the knight clanked forth in the last rays of the setting sun, and bathed in the Fountain of Fair Fortune, astonished that he was the chosen one of hundreds and giddy with his incredible luck.

As the sun fell below the horizon, Sir Luckless emerged from the waters with the glory of his triumph upon him, and flung himself in his rusted armour at the feet of Amata, who was the kindest and most beautiful woman he had ever beheld. Flushed with success, he begged for her hand and her heart, and Amata, no less



delighted, realised that she had found a man worthy of them.

The three witches and the knight set off down the hill together, arm in arm, and all four led long and happy lives, and none of them ever knew or suspected that the Fountain's waters carried no enchantment at all.