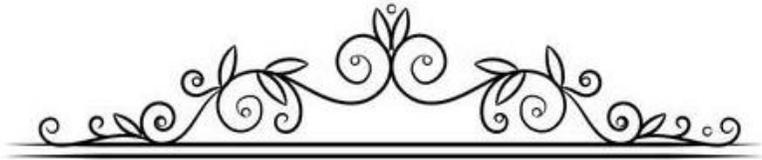
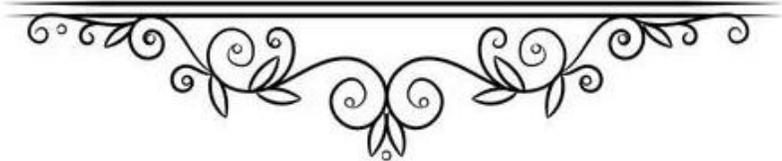




Christus, Petrus. *Portrait of a Young Woman*. Around 1470. Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin.



# **As Pure as Porcelain**



Michael Bookout  
2020

© Copyright 2020 - All rights reserved.

# CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One An Uncalculated Mixture .....	3
Chapter Two Setting the Stage .....	6
Chapter Three.....	7
Chapter Four The Silver Witch.....	9
Chapter Five A Full Wonderful Moon.....	17
Chapter Six Shirene the Lone Wolf .....	30



# Introduction



And it came to pass in the frozen months of Albrecht Germany, a city state in the year 1392, that a beautiful and young woman named Porcelain would be introduced to Prince Damion Von Heir who was first in line to the throne where upon sat his beloved father Lord Albert Blacienscheine.

Porcelain had only the smallest of stations in Albrecht, she being and born female and yet with a bit of compensation in that she was the only daughter to the Hess family whom by trade had managed the city finances on behalf of the king, working most competently the river ports which sided along in two equal halves the amazingly pristine, clean and efficient city Albrecht.

The city was moderate in size but with great wealth due to the multiple ships of commerce which passed by her daily and paid passage rights as was the decree of King Laschien of Ernate, the axis city state of all lands of the Germanic speaking peoples.

And so it was this winter season the Christmas ball had, as always been that which all male suitors of age and, those maidens of acceptable age, received with polite hesitation, marital offerings embellished with all the decorative festivities as they pranced around in unison and instructed by the various notes emanating from the orchestra. These young person's found their way to receiving halls and balconies strolling with debutant-like conversation, arm in arm as they had been given leave once introduced formally under the careful eye of their governesses, parents and accompanying relatives, in the acceptable norms of the time and culture of that day.

And Porcelain was of remarkable character, upright, sure, and even as some had spoken, a bit too formal, even secretive in her overall presentation of a carefully cloistered self, and yet, this was only a crafted a covering of whom she was inwardly.

For in reality the word romantic was spelled within her with a capital 'R' and played itself to the full in all her waking hours of observation, personal demeanor and delightful, and in ghostly dreams where gentlemen riding upon great steeds in shining armors, arriving back at the castle, a bit scared having fought with dragons and glowing with pride of victory.

And it was just with such a young woman of seventeen that on the dance floor only one year earlier as she and a partner were dancing, that Porcelain and Prince Damion Von Heir momentarily bumped into each other's shoulder, both she and he with that slight second of embarrassment turned to see whom they had touched and, when as if by an electrical shock, there sparked a communication of destiny between them.

And of those sitting and appreciating the merriment it was Madam Alike the unofficial matchmaker and broker of marriages did indeed see and more aptly felt in her perceptive mind, that spark of connections out on the dance floor she, Madam Alike, by the evenings end would inform both sets of parents of something she was so certain.

And so this Christmas party with all the music, dancing, decorations, smiles, laughter and gifts also did acknowledge the engagement of Porcelain and her Prince and the entwinement joyfully agreed upon by both families save for a person of one only, Damion's youngest sister, the Princess Shiriene.

Not many days of the future did Shiriene put on her black cloak with its maroon inseam and draw tight the fastening cords and placed on her coarse leather boots and walk into the still dark night to trudge thru the snow into the woods and walk the lengthy path known by very few to the slight opening where the Silver Witch lived whom procured potions and released curses and was rumored to eat live rats whole.

# Chapter One

## An Uncalculated Mixture



In the very still early morning of a certain year King and Queen Laschien received a wonderful gift of unimaginable value as their son, soon to be prince Damion came into the world with not a sound nor a sigh. The nurses having washed him and wrapped him in cloth handed it to his father who bore a smile so large that the tips of his manicured beard jumped up to touch the lower edge of his eye lids.

Queen Laschien, though exhausted with her nine month ordeal capped off with the intense pain any mother experiences with the birth of her first born petted the small head of Damion as her husband sat on the edge of her bed and gently bowed the child down to his mother whom as well kissed the child upon his tiny fingers and the palms of his hands and then slid back down upon her pillow to rest to sleep.

Damion was followed in birth by his sister of three years younger Shiriene and then against the doctor's wishes due to Queen Laschien's age, she tried birthing yet a third child to be named Tamilien Tae if he were a son but alas that which was indeed born boy, child and the Queen mother perished due to complications.

At this time Prince Damion was of the age seventeen, well-educated as all young men in valor in honor and growing still in grace and compassion and who was absolutely worshiped by Shiriene

The passing of the Queen and her still born was of immense grief to all the cities' Albretch populace as the Queen had provided much charitable workings side by side with the doctors and nurses in the dispensaries, bandaging the cripple, feeding those ill with fever and altogether made great effort to help the poor to advance their state of living.

And days following the burial as the king did grieve the loss, it was instructed of her brother that she, Sarinian should not show any outward sorrow so as not to be a burden to their father.

Damion in his role as the older, protective brother, would take his Sarinian on long walks thru the forests and to the free flowing mineral baths and waterfalls of their proud land, all the time instructing her and assuring her that somehow God would make all things well for their family and that she would continue to grow to be as her mother, charitable and wise and that she would be in her own right a remarkable princess who all the people would make fine assessment of.

And of these times Sarinian grew more fond of her brother and it may be said to an unhealthy level of anxious anxiety believing that she could never hope to have a man to marry such as Damion, thus proposing in her heart that herself and her brother were in all sense married.

And upon one of their walks for which Sarinian had as before prepared a basket of food and placed in a wonderful fruited mixture of wine, she set before her brother the blanket and bid him to sit as she spread out the foods and drink and then set herself, they enjoying fine, amiable weather in a gentle clearing of verdant green grass and listened with delight the slight murmurings of the river as it percolated with plops of waters upon the smooth stones making a music that mimicked the sound of the lute.

“My brother,” said Sarinian “I have made this lunch special.”

“Like all your meals Sarinian,” complimented Damion as he sipped upon his cup of wine.

“Thank you, brother,” said Sarinian with sincerity and yet with a hesitant tone of voice.

And as Sarinian whose head was nestling close upon her own breast trying to gain the courage to speak, Damion put his arm out and with his hand lifted Sarinian’s chin so that their eyes met in a way they never had. “You wish to tell me something from your heart my sister, and I am here to listen.”

But instead of speaking Sarinian placed her hand into the pocket of her blouse and lifted out a locket on a chain. Damion seeing the locket said, “Our mother’s cameo.”

“Yes,” said Sarinian carefully. “I want to know if you would agree upon wearing one half the locket. And the other half I shall wear. I want this to represent something for togetherness; a bonding between us.”

“But Sarinian,” said Damion “we are brother and sister; that is a life bondage which nothing could ever break.”

Sarinian’s eyes moistened and a tear, like a loosened diamond trickled down an uncharted path upon her cheek.

“And you cry. You cry because you miss our mother. But she as you and I and father as well, will never not be bonded together; forever we will be.”

“And just the same” said Sarinian wiping the tear droplet away “I would like this cameo father gave as a pledge to mother on their wedding day and which she never once removed, to be something for us both to share. A symbol; a physical pledge.”

The day gave way to a long conversation and both Sarinian and Damion whom had drunk all the portion of wine and who had become tired lay down his head in his sister’s lap waking hours later his clothes a bit disheveled his body feeling a bit stiff and yet relaxed in a way he had never felt before.

As brother and sister walked home and talked further of the cameo Damion did give into Sariana’s wish and agreed that the blacksmith would be consulted as to how best to cut the locket in the most precise way and then with two fine silver necklaces attach both halves, symbols that would be the noticeable physical pledge Sarinian had devised.

## Chapter Two

### Setting the Stage



The curious, forthright person Porcelain had grown to become now eighteen a remarkable age for the time as the rate of death among young persons mimicked the rate the sun rises and then does in its few hours of proclamation dip to the horizon and thus disappears altogether.

And thus it is for our story, Porcelain is well groomed and had been taught in the ways of being a fine lady, and as we have said before, an only daughter of a wealthy merchant family, she does now indeed command a certain respect betrothed to the heir apparent of the Albretch throne.

Porcelain was seen by the community at large to be quite a fortune of grandeur for of her eyes her resplendent beauty was doubly emphasized by her chocolate black hair, full, silky and lush, her skin, if you will: porcelain in hue and radiant, and emerald green eyes that shone as two perfect gemstones.

And of her personality, thus to emphasize the more, her intrigues of conversation, brilliant mind, observational skills, categorizing and thus evaluating any and all movements both physical and physiological of every person and all persons; it would be enough to say, if all truths were come to the table as rumors would come as blossoms to a rose bush, indeed, she, Porcelain should be ideal for the throne of Queen when time would open to destiny.

### Part II

Thus have we set forth upon mutual agreement that Porcelain will be the so called protagonist of our story and, not to let the dragon out of the bag so to speak, Porcelain will be the one to be accused of cold, heartless murder, that being, the one person she had been betrothed to and would marry, he, her husband intended, Prince Damion.

## Chapter Three



Not all that comes to life on planet earth is born perfect. There are giraffes whose one ear as if poured from a perfect mold, stand firm in its perfect position to hear and even wiggle as a warning that the tall, lumbering giant is angry: annoyed. While of the other ear it can only be said is deformed.

There is the banana tree that produces lush, full bundles of crescent formed fruits of a delicious, nutritious wonder while a neighboring plant growing a stone throw away produces layer after layer of limp yellowish somethings that nurture nothing and no one.

Give the test of perfect to all species of any living dimension and there within each one you will find there are those that function and those that function outside what indeed their species does do.

Japeth was born as such. Hadley a full person, born as a travesty in tortured timing, something created with a splintered spine causing him to walk crookedly. His facial posturing is alarming in that his features seem misaligned as his one eye seems to be popping out of its socket and the other is crimped. His skin, a reddish salamander color and wrinkled far beyond its age; Japeth's voice is raspy if he does speak' where mostly he hisses or makes a scowling sound and of the sound it is neve polite, only angry.

People of the city referred to him as 'beast' as many would be so far to curl to do, Japeth at a young age was kept by the Kepler family and grew to learn the blacksmithing trade that father Kepler forged, he and his three sons, whom when their father was not near would poke poor Japeth with hot pokers and roll with laughter when Japeth howled in pain.

In the city person's all knew of Japeth and in time his pranks of cruelty would be the default answer as to where their child's cats or dogs had gone missing as was on more than one instance he would be found to

have a hidden lair where Japeth skinned those animals to death for something he found to be joyous.

The queen took special interest in Japeth with equal pity as she had with soldiers who lie in sick bay weeping about a limb that was severed in battle. She had a long friendship with the Kepler family as the king had the Kepler smithies in full time work. It was the queen who suggested Japeth live with the Keplers as Japeth had simply been abandoned by its mother and left in proximity of the King and Queen's bedchamber. Sariana would accompany her mother when she visited the Kepler home to look in on Japeth and of course listen to gossip about the goings on in and around the city which Mrs. Kepler had kept volumes of stories that she would save and with great glee share with the queen and Sariana.

## Chapter Four

### The Silver Witch



The fires for both heat and light; several bowls of oil surrounded The Silver witch's residence, burning and flickering with their crackling snarls off the walls and timbered over headed trusses, the fire in the hearth was low, dense, and emitted a putrid smell and Siriene sat in the furthest chair from it, though chilled, she did not have to cover her nostrils in disgust.

Although Siriene had come two other times the cottage of Silver, having at their acquaintances incept, the mutual contact with her cities most honored mystic, Damine Damine, whom for his fame upon the battlefield as the king's official medical advisor, did indeed wave his hands over the king's arm when it had been pierced by an arrow shot by one of the Laman Lord's arrow smiths in the battle of Platitudes, the arrow disintegrated as the king wrestled with pain and alas the miracle so spoken of, there was no piercing in the armor of the king's, no wound, no blood, he Damine was given a permanent residence in the castle, whom as his age grew into its lengthy, finite years, practiced more into the dangerous arts of subtle witchcraft, was approached by Silver to see if he might want a discipleship with her, he only able to go to perimeter and whom would be called a 'dabbler' of the dark arts, nonetheless was in legion with Silver if not by any other lineage than that they both were allowed into the regions of arts which proved to be at certain levels, quite dark, when did sit the Witch across from Shiiriene and she the visitor coming with a request, felt an ugly churning of the stomach.

Far from being an entity with gnarled skin, rickety voice and distempered clothing and hair, Silver was altogether quite good for her looks with faded cerulean blue eyes, dotted in the center with infinite black pearls for pupils, a well-kept head of full grey hair (thus her name Silver..., Shiiriene had noticed upon their first meeting, that Silver had an illustrious display of valuable gems woven among her greys, twisting

and undulating upon the precise combing of strands) these gems again on display this day gave Shiriene the wonderment of how much worth the gems stones would value laid upon the surface of The Paulshard families gem stone cutting table?

The Witch Silver as she was alternately called, had a very way of making her visitors configure between her controlled and yet severe mood and movements which cast the rare visitor to her cottage in an internal pose of uncomfortableness that when they spoke to The Witch they had two battles internal, one their general uneasiness of soul and two their real, cerebral fear that they were in the presence of the One True Devil their parents had whispered of, and the Church had warned them of since childhood.

And when Silver smiled, it became yet one other wrestling of soul and consciousness, as her teeth were perfect in their display. Bethany would rarely display to a visitor her teeth, to be all but unbelievable in their perfect alignment; no gaps of vacancy, no greenish in coloration as presented in babbled books of craft and fantasy telling in these bounded, illustrated tales the king himself had so delight in collecting and did have read to him by his scribe, his most beloved scribe: Petrous the Kind, whom he and his king did debate upon the purpose of the author's messaging in the stories of ancient Greece and Rome wherein the gentleman soldier or the widow of such, would go to the sea caves, risking their identity and traveling on foot with faithful servant, to ask or plea a prayer of the Oracles of the day.

And so, the two women stared at each other, Sariana knowing which would speak first and so waited patiently, albeit nervously.

“You are seeking a love potion perhaps?” said Silver while entertaining a wry crook at the corner of her mouth which Sirene could herself not help but smile at.

“Something else” said Sirene and looked hesitantly to the floor.

“Not a love potion,” said Silver almost in a whisper. “Hummm....” she mused. “A death potion?” queried the witch and then caught up her own words...”No, such a well refined princess of the king's court would

never and ever entertain a thought of this; taking that of another person's life is a mortal sin according to church legend....to be cast into hell, that eternal place of burning and anguish; yes, I have heard of such a place," she said now with what could be interpreted as an 'almost' smile. "And most surely you have not come to ask for a healing balm, for we are so very not with these items here in our humble abode," and as if by magic a black cat with inordinately long whiskers which were entirely bright green appeared at the hem of Silver's skirt and wove its way in among the cloths of the skirt and the several fine lace slips which wisped up when the feline went outwards and inwards.

"Look at you my child," said the witch Silver, folding her fingers in upon themselves, her thumbs protruding and tapping to music that was not in the room. "Such a wandering spirit hovers about you; one of consternation and turbidity. So, I am undone," Silver said rapidly untwining her fingers and extending her arms up her fingers as if to comply with full surrender of the situation

### **Part I: The Making of a Witch**

Martique Dyre did not simply arrive a proclaimed witch. For every story there is a first story. The cause that gives way to the ultimate effect.

Appropriately enough, Martinique (Silver) was as every child expectant of all life's good not thinking that evil did fall from on high even upon the most harmless of persons. And it is not as if Martique did go to a mirror and proclaim herself an initiate of the dark arts of the nether gloom or thought that she may be stylish wearing a pointed hat, carrying a corn sweeper broom made of one pole, twine and a gathering of strands of flaccid twigs wearing a not to well-fitting black dress with scuffed black high waisted boots and tarnished buckles.

But of course reading anyone's life story there often is that one defining moment when that person is going in one direction and then some jutting, jarring sign post of a circumstance positions that person as if by the will of Nature Herself in quite the opposite way.

And for Martique, that jutting, jarring moment came when her younger sister Bethany burst through the door of their small apartment

and collapsed onto the floor inches from the chair she as a young child had claimed was “Mine!”.

So full of life, her beloved sister, she, Bethany, yet but one year younger than herself, Martinique had always felt responsible in every way for her sister’s happiness; her safety and for her life journey.

And now to rescue her sister as she curled up on the floor like a wounded cat, crying uncontrollably and then pushing her head deep into Martinique’s lap, sobbing, once she was rescued by Martinique from the blistering hard floorboards, now on the tattered but clean sofa and as Martique stroked her sister’s hair and kissed Bethany softly, she stared forward as if into a fog and without even having to ask, knew that Bethany’s marital engagement had been severed by the man who would one day be king of Albrecht, Prince Albert Blacienscheine.

## **Part II: Sisters**

You would never understand true sisterhood had you not experienced it. It is a secret coven all its own. You must have been called. You must be invited. You must be an initiate.

A tree grows in a forest yet alone, yet in the community of all the other trees and fauna; the soil, the animals and birds are there supporting it by coexisting.....

And if this tree does survive the menacing beetles that bore into its bark or the mold that has caused entire forests to rot to ruin, or the ravaging fires and hail storms and floods that as well destroy and consume all natural communities, then it is fairly an even bet that the tree, once nothing but a random seed cast perhaps by the winds, watered by rains, given voice by the sun, that this individual among all the symbols that give glory to the name Nature, that yes in this very verse of life endeavor, she Bethany had so thankfully, and full out emotionally accepted Prince Blacienscheine’s proposal of marriage, that kiss, that first sweet kiss. All her very few years of life those storybook tales; the bringing forth of all that was so carefully interior she, Bethany had from a little girl wondered at, the magic, the taste, the fear of two pairs of lips, touching softly for that first time locking into eternity those two persons.

“He did?!...he really did kiss you?! This morning? You swear it?” So joyous was Martinique for Bethany she grabbed Bethany’s hand and took her sister’s index finger forcing upon Bethany’s own breast, crisscrossing it upon her heart “Swear to me sister, you really will be his wife?!”

That day both young ladies swooned with the possibility of it all. They would both tell their parents together after the evening meal and until then they grabbed onto each other's arms and danced and swirled throughout the house giggling and singing like crazed schoolgirls having eaten too much chocolate.

And so it was, as dinner was preparing, their mother and the two maids working the kitchen, perfecting the soups and meats and vegetables and the two girls giggling still, putting their hands to their mouths with glee, setting the table and pouring the glasses of wine and spring water from the specified jugs; the wine of course from crystal and the water from small wood casks. Bethany knocking over a wine glass she had just filled but of no effect, fortunately it was the white not red.

Both parents gained in suspicion watching the obvious notion that something was being kept secret between their two daughters, and not very well at that.

After the main course, and before the desert their mother folded her arms about her as all mother hens their wings when confronting an action straight on, said “Ok, ladies this mirth you must share with your father and I or you will be sent to your rooms without sampling the dainties.

Both Martinique and Bethany looked at each other and with both their eyes blinking “yes” they burst out “Bethany is to marry the prince!” “I am betrothed to the prince!’ they said simultaneously.

But of course, mother and father were aware that this was no doubt the subject to their normally sullen dinner gathering. For weeks earlier the matchmaker had spoken to them as they stood in the portico after Sunday mass and shared that the prince’s family had told her of their son’s inquiry and request and approval. And yet, mother and father with as much surprise as they could act through let out a well congratulatory

as mother rushed from his seat to hug her youngest daughter and father moved with unequaled hast to the wine cabinet and opened a vintage Riesling.

After dinner and desert the maids were instructed to let the dishes and silver wait until morning and were invited into the music room to sing songs around the piano, mother playing and Marguerite going to Blane's the caretakers cottage telling him to put on his boots and coat and come join the festivity. Bethany was to be wed and God willing children would soon follow!

### **Part III**

Sirene left the Silver Witch's cottage able to quite articulate her request.

Trudge she did, the sun rising behind her casting shadows before her as that of her own consternation, swearing and cursing as succinctly as field laborers; Why could she not expand her emotions into words?

### **Reminisce**

A secret mix of stew gurgled and spluttered in the cauldron hanging over the fires of molten embers. Silver sat for many moments and as her kitten purred while suspended in the animation of its dreams upon her lap, Silver stroked gently upon it back while whiskers turned to multiple different hues,

“Of course, she came to ask for a death potion, a ‘curse of death’ at the very least,” said Silver to herself. “Such high and lofty expectations for one so young as herself. But then again, I had coarse thoughts myself when I was her age; I wanting to be a princess and then someday a queen.” she almost laughed.

“Now presenting her Ladyship: Dame Silver Witch of the Court...”.

Silver visualized herself in flowing, gorgeous robes walking into a great hall with servants and subjects lined to her sides approving her every step.

And it was as if a crescendo of a perfectly orchestrated concert gathering and the person in the care of the cymbals dropped one onto the stage and it rolled on its side and spun several times before it exhausted itself in its own circumference settling to a sure stop with a clap.

This is the very interruption into her dreams experienced many times before, Silver's youthful times of grandeur the shock that would turn from joy to ugliness as if from behind a thick curtain of netted filament a figure appeared: "Bethany, my child my young sister".

Silver would sometimes yell out and yet Bethany did not respond, statuesquely she moved as well she could have been seeming a two dimensional cut out piece of cloth from a tapestry, silently, solemnly in across a grand and yet intimate theater stage, thus disappearing stage left, through another parted curtain into darkness.

And as tears welled in Marguerite's eyes, Marguerite, the Silver Witches eyes, yes even a witch doth cry. Moments past the cat awakened and jumped from the warmth of the Silver Witch's lap, she is sitting alone again as most always, a gurgling, sputtering stew brewing, Silver's internal death of what false reality for her was her only child.

Tears dry and Monique' dreams dissipate. ("Yes, Sirene wishes a death, of that I am certain and yet that which kept her tongue still was that of the infinite times sitting in the pews of the church nave. Secure she sat, her shoulders touching her equally pious family members. One time her sister or father's shoulders, one time other her siblings and most especially her brother, heir to the throne. Silver had seen them walking through the forest on their way to picnics; carefree, jolly laughing. Sometime in deep communion. Something of her brother" thought Silver?"

And yet the sermons from the pulpit, severe old Germanic virtues circulating the church by day and into evening services. The Virtues. The Righteousness. The sins of the unjust. And the Cardinal sin of murder. God doth know the thoughts of faith and fear of believers.

And "Doth" The Silver Witch know the thoughts of Sirene as well. She may not have been able to speak or be able to profess the darkening

moods of her mind but she “Doth” show them in her attempt to cover them sitting in her chair and in her frock.

Wolves most surely stalked her as she walked to my home this evening, bandits as well. Snow cold ice’ the silence of death and yet none of these troubled Sirene as she trudged fore and aft.

The sun was spiking its early morning and most unwanted greetings through the minute cracks in Silver’s wooded cabin, The shutters had been wrapped in cloth acting as bandages and yet the sun crept in ”Time for bed; even a witch needs her beauty rest,” said Silver to the forest of hanging cobwebs which laced the cabin roof beams, her arms outstretched as she stood in all the glory of her oneness. Alone, silent as death she frowned within herself, “Bethany gone to the nether world. One day soon the king will pay.”

## Chapter Five

### A Full Wonderful Moon



At some time in their honeymoon Porcelain and Prince Damien, her husband of less than a day, would sit and piece together with fond reminiscence every aspect of the three days gone before of the glorious celebration of the King's firstborn and his lady of life.

But tonight as the candles hummed and flickered in unison as if their life was orchestrated by angel wings in some reverential chorus, Porcelain was in her toilet applying a cream blue eye shadow to her lids, her lipstick a suggestion of her mothers, a deep blood red glaze, she assured Porcelain would set her already hungry man into a sweat.

Hardly had Porcelain and Damion been alone during their engagement in that no servant's rumors of their pre-marital fondling would break out of the fortress walls and into the town's back alley ways where gossip and nasty stories could fly through from one block to the next being carried on magic carpets where those sitting upon the top were those persons of crinkled face and hands who had a particular penchant for tattle tailing and yell highlighted succulent stories that out of marital bondage the Prince and his maiden were wrestling in unholy dirt.

And yet both their mistress guardians did deflect Damion's and Porcelain's stolen moments of lust, and what they were doing behind the castle statuary or colonnades these guardians all female found it necessary to break into fits of loud coughing or yelling after the animals that dotted the living interiors or drop pots or to get into loud, mimicking fits of anger with another person to deflect the moans and childlike laughter of the engaged young couple.

And tonight, as Porcelain had put down her lipstick into its container, all the cautions and all the unknowing and all the lust they had for one another could commingle in full display.

Porcelain could hardly contain herself and yet with steady hands fluffed her hair and looked directly at herself in the mirror. She smiled. Pleased even reflective of what she knew would in moments the true seal of her man's love for her and she for him.

Porcelain wore a simple nightgown, an elegantly woven cloth of fine pearls this nightgown, chic, and not opaque, simple, and seductive, thus showing off her frame: Porcelain was curvaceous and yet not overly so: breasts and hips and nipples, and an inward turning navel: a thin but firm neck line, five feet in height, hands with long but not odd finger lengths: a giving length of tongue: hair that fell as a full water fountain upon the chiseled shoulders and arms and down to the waist and buttock: her eyes wide, expectant, she entering the bedroom from her secure toilet: he, Damion, clothed in a simple robe and below naked, handsome: hers.

Porcelain walked with quiet dignity and pressed her pelvis against Damion's, and she salivated as she pressed her lips to his. Damion was tall by the day's standard, lean, muscular, his hands coupling her body: their rhythm, as if scripted from practicing, their breath synchronized: Man, to Woman, Woman to Man.

Damion lifted his wife from off the floor and swiftly carried her to the bed, the sheets readily pulled aside, the man unbuttoning his maidens garment, one hand upon her shoulder, one hand on her spine, and then pushing open her legs, her thighs, entering her with his hand, feeling the wetness of her desire, she with her arms around his shoulders receiving him, his member, firm and sure, their movement perfect, their climaxes deep, rhythmic, guarded, free and full.

### **Part I: Ceremony**

Weddings begin with a vow long before any invited witness guest arrives to sit in the church pew. But once that day arrives those persons to be married ask the sun with due reverence that it might climb a bit faster as it climbs to its heights.

Porcelain was about her room, her mother and father asleep, the singular maid who had struck the fires of the home before the day of Porcelain's birth had again risen to a chilling, dark hour and had the

warm mixture of coffee and heated bread at the ready when Porcelain crept down the stairs so as not to waken her parents.

“And our Lady intended,” greeted Lauran as she smiled knowingly and ever so affectionately to Porcelain as she pulled a chair for her and then went to fetch a patchwork shawl to wrap round Porcelain’s shoulders as if Porcelain was her own child.

“Good morning Lauran,” said Porcelain with as much affection as had extended her. “I don’t think I slept more than a few minutes...I am so very excited, and scared as well I must say,” as she pulled forward her shoulders in a bit of a shudder as Lauran tucked in the shawl into its own folding.

“Your prince is a fortunate one is he,” said Lauran with a giggle; “does he know about your quick temper?”

“He has had a year to observe me; it is his own failing if he has not guessed at it,” said Porcelain looking up to Lauran as Lauran poured the coffee, the women both giggling and causing a wink each with their eyes.

Lauran sat next to Porcelain once she was suitably set and sipping at her coffee which was exceptionally hot and dipping her toast in the large bowl that was mixed with milk and sugar. He’s handsome as any man,” said Lauran with a complimentary word. “More than most, handsome is he.”

“I know I love him Lauran and I can’t explain it,”

“Never will my dear; that is why they call it love. Never a more mysterious explanation for something unexplainable.”

“Were you in love, ever, Lauran?” asked Porcelain and as these words came out her mouth she wondered if she might be better not asking, for it seemed to Porcelain as she blew upon the spoon to cool her coffee that being in love was something so special that very few were privileged to attain it.

“Oh, yes, my dear,” said Lauran as she too blew upon her spoon “Your servant Lauran was once in love. “And as she said this Porcelain could

hear a dip in Lauran's voice and felt that something in the far past was calling this poor woman to some heartfelt, soul felt memory. "Yes, I remember, your servant Lauran remembers."

And thus it seemed that in some cloudy landscape not far from where the two woman sat that Lauran when as much the age of Porcelain now, held hands with the wood cutter's son Chavron and then as if by the sheer wonderment of the moment the crafty Chavron had tilted his shoulders and bent his head and touched without permission his lips to hers.

What had just happened? asked Lauran of her own consciousness and yet knew exactly that the touching of her lips by the lips of a man was some act that had brought her into being something which might be called early womanhood.

Four curiously shaped pieces of skin, wet, his smell, what would she call it? Wet wood? Yes. The carpenter's son. Wood chips and bark, sawdust. His lips a gel feeling, hers as well. It was not loving that momentary move by Chavron as they sat side to side; too close a-side-to-side if her mother had seen them or one of the priests. But they were all but hidden. A carefully placed couple of crates off to the side of the carpentry mill, and a conveniently large bush making their conveniently makeshift bench a place for the crafty Chavron to place a kiss upon her. That crafty son of a carpenter.

And of all of this, in that Lauran was sitting motionless processing all this - almost love- Chavron again placed his lips upon her lips and left them there a long and an almost embarrassing time, a very long time indeed.

And months of this scene Lauran found herself quite pregnant weather she was in love at this time or not, she was indeed a woman now, fully and, expecting a child, "A mere consequence of allowing Chavron to kiss her that day; obviously it was purposeful, she allowing herself to 'happen by' the workhouse with a misguided errand, with her carefully combing her hair to style, and pleating her dress neatly with just the right dew of perfume round her neck.

And to be a carpenter's wife was not so humble a position, she cared for her man, feeding him full, sleeping with him well, baptized her child, attended mass regularly, worked the endless chores of keeping a respectable home.

Her child, a boy grew rapidly, responded with honor to Chavron's and her words, and became an ardent student of the skill of furniture making and decorative interior carvings. But as with a sudden gust of wind on a relatively still landscape, somewhere a fire burst out and while her man and her son and all the apprentices were busy about their craft their lives were consumed by the readymade tomb of what was once Lauren's life.

Porcelain made not a sound as in what a few paragraphs were spoken by a figure, a mere servant of her family, a tragic life gone unnoticed by her as she in all her growing up years simply asked for more porridge or complained about the cabbage that it had not been boiled enough, the sheets of her bed had been washed with too much starch and itched at her soft skin; always complaining, never thankful of this servant.

What few clumsy words Porcelain could offer Lauren as condolence left her anxious to leave the warmth of the kitchen as fast as she could politely finishing her breakfast and moving back up the stairs.

## **Part II**

The primping and coif of the hair and finishing to makeup seemed to progress so slow that they might have to postpone the wedding date for later in the month.

And yet when her mother and the assistants were satisfied with their creating an artistic perfection then Porcelain was led to the full-length mirror to admire herself and every person's work.

Porcelain smiled deep within herself: ("Just as the princesses of long told stories, I too one day will co-rule with a just and mighty hand, the sure rock fortress her man would run home to with trophies of the battle field. And when our eyes meet, I shall give him that special nod of the head that only women who own their man can do as a sign of perfection. Mother, you have taught me all").

It was an evening ceremony and the castle was laden with the orange glow of fire from the castle wall couplets and through each window as if harboring a sun of their own, flickering gems of tallow and twine beckoned Porcelain approaching family carriage. A quiet waft of muffled themed horns moaned through the air and children dressed in purple with hats decorated with long white feathers lined the drawbridge, each child holding small candelabras and speaking with their throat's soft sonnets.

And as the carriage filtered through the gate the children gathered from behind and behind them soldiers as well as the press of the cities populace to the central court where Porcelain, her mother, her father, and Luran stepped down to face Prince Damion standing center a long line of relatives, and persons of remarkable rank both military and civilian.

The priest and his accolades surround Prince Damion and his father who was seated on a plank and attended to by two stout young soldiers and dozens of young girls with their braided hair and fine dresses held bunches of flowers who were instructed to lead the Prince and his betrothed down the aisle laying down the petals for the couple to walk upon.

Damion approached Porcelain and lay in her upturned palms a silver box with which she opened and removed a fabulous ring. Porcelain's mother took the box and Porcelain placed the ring onto her marital finger.

The crowd made way and the pedal distributors who plucked the flowers in pieces and placed them to the ground with the care that they were laying down sacred steppingstones.

The procession moved slowly and carefully Porcelain and Damion strode arm and arm, the respective parents and closest of relatives all humming and singing in talking voices portions of the oldest of Germanic songs; the people of the city as one person floated thru the overhanging walkways where from each window colorful cloths and bunches of flowers as if by organic life grew of their own invention.

And to the chapel and in the doors, some of the flower maidens looking with troubled faces as they hurriedly cast down all their pedals and

lacy leaves were taken to the side of the elder maidens whom proportioned their floor offerings with more prudence and frugality and had taken care that the pedals would last to the steps of the altar.

The music and singing stopped, the guests were seated and the priest and his accolades took their positions as Porcelain and Damion knelt down upon two silk pillows; a prayer was given and Porcelain and Damion were instructed to take their seats as well the congregation.

The ceremony was lengthy as several of the priests each enjoyed the attention given them by all upturned eyes, as well the senior father spoke at length of purity, honor, valor, commitment, of the social order and need for marriage. There was the proposal comment that if any one person should have knowledge why this couple should not be joined in matrimony, every person who knew of Shirene, who was noticeably not in attendance, prayed inwardly that she would not yell some venomous objectionable words from the choir loft.

Many blessings were given, a cup of wine and wafer were presented as the sacred blood and body of Christ and songs from the congregation were lifted to the top of the chapel arches with resounding help from the musicians.

And to seal the ceremony when all words had been exhausted the young couple were asked again to kneel upon the silk pillows once more and a final blessing was ushered over them with the senior father, his arms bathed in fine robes arched them over the marital party and then lay his hands upon each of their shoulders. Amen.

### **Part III**

The reception for the now wedded couple was nothing if not astounding. Walking into the rectory hall all the guests felt as if they were entering into some gossamery womb of infinite glory.

There was no estimation as to how many candles glowed and flowers that flooded the senses, the air sweet with chamber music and a cacophony of plants, ferns, and flowers. A leopard was in a cage

prancing fore and back and multiple birds whose feathers had been highlighted with touches of pure gold sat chirping and squawking.

The Princes steed Gerick was there present among so many and animal beings fed on tufts of wheat while cats and dogs meandered among the hall as it quickly filled with well-wishers who were directed to their tables and seats by male and female runners alike.

As the Prince and his now Princess stood before their table setting and all those in attendance listened to one final prayer for the blessing upon the food and then it was that the young couple sat as a signal for everyone else.

Damion's father had had a bit of trouble entering the hall as those who carried the poor, rather sickly man had slid off the bench he was being carried upon. He was then carried in their arms like a child who had fainted and placed delicately into his seat, his young attendants worrying they may see some punishment for their bumbling but the king had found it quite humorous albeit painful when he tumbled upon the stone floor, in that one of the young soldiers had stepped upon the tail of a dog and as both the dog and one of the maidens screamed she maiden grabbed the king's attendant by the arm causing him to dip with his shoulder thus capsizing his lord.

And of course there would be multiple toasts and the presenting of a silver organ wheeled in on a large pallet, a gift from King Laschien whom with great apology motioned that he was unable to attend the wedding due to overwhelming demands upon his time and instead sent his foppish nephew Dantiene, who proved to be an unproven talent when he ripped the cloth from the organ that had kept it free of dust and provided a simple gift wrapping, in the action covered himself completely with it.

There were other more planned pieces of entertainment, as jugglers and acrobats and clowns herding miniature horses jumped, danced and somersaulted while glorious bowls and tureens of wine, and great dishes of foods were served by the most competent of hired servant waiters.

And once the morning sun began creeping up the avenues and city streets of Albretch and making itself available through shuttered windows, the banquet hall began clearing of revelers and Princess Porcelain and Prince Damion, having kissed goodbye each relative and were the recipients of multiple hugs and infinite well wishes, crept quietly from the hall and hastened to their bed chamber where love would be consummated.

#### **Part IV**

It rustled rather than stood, presenting himself before Silver who was not in as good a frame of unhappiness since when she could last recall. He or rather It, was indifferent as to what task Silver might have summoned him and yet was never not fidgety.

Sometimes it was a job of robbery, a local theft or theft from wanderers in their own neighborhood. Or theft from a different principality where Witch had heard of some slightly guarded or casually unguarded object of substantial worth. These times she would instruct Entity to take a couple of friends with him for at least one or even both persons would be used as decoy and when they had provided Entity with enough time to steal a precious lamp or other something of worth such as jewels, the decoy would follow purposely inaccurate instructions and would be captured giving Entity time to get far away while the one or two other accomplices would be tortured and executed.

Entity had also brought friends to Witch's house so they could be used to test out one of her potions that had not worked out to a perfect solution given to rats or other rodents or animals.

The friends were told they were off to have supper with the famous Silver Witch; sometimes they died of this potion mixed in their soups sometimes their mind exploded inside their own heads and they ran screaming out the door into the forest covering never to be seen or heard of again.

And on occasion, the victim friends would disappear or turn into some other life form or grow an extra arm or their eyes would explode out of their skull.

Not very nice to be so untruthful about the supper but often it came to great efficiency.

“Entity, Entity, why stand you there in your aloneness? Care to sample a bit of my porridge; it has come to a full savory froth just this morning?” questioned Silver with her invitation which was a jest at best.

Entity who was not one to ever smile, would, in the company and safety of the only other entity whom he felt a kindred spirit, did indeed smile as did Silver. “Then it looks like I shall have to save it for my next visitor.”

“Nevertheless, you will be needing body strength for your next assignment if indeed you wish to take the task.”

Entity was of all persons allowed into the inner castle on the occasions that there was a strenuous or odious task to complete such as removing a dead person and hauling it by whatever means to the commoner’s grave.

And it was this month that Silver learned that Entity would be accompanying his adopted father and brothers to work on a new installation of the king's chambers; the cornices and the plastered walls were to be upgraded and refinished. There would also be the making of frescos and as it was Entity had shown himself to be quite excellent at this craft.

“I wish then for you my friend,” said Silver in a voice pattern that Entity had not heard her speak in before, almost a hesitant one “to find for me a piece of jewelry. And” she continued having taken a rather deep breath “get it for me. Steal it if you have to. Use any means available to secure it; a cameo is what I am referring to. It is in the possession of the king; I have the description of it here in this drawing.”

Silver took from her pocket a reasonably well-crafted ink drawing on parchment and handed it to Entity. And as Entity studied the drawing Silver took another breath and then exhaled allowing her words to drift off her lips as if she were savoring the complete flavor of a refined cigar. “And if all other means fail to obtain the cameo I give leave for your

clever hands to resort to...” and here Silver left off speaking both she and Entity knowing what an incomplete statement in the avenues of theft and deceit meant.

### **Part V: And to the Hunting Lodge**

There would be a great train of people following Damion and Porcelain to the city gates. The honeymoon night had registered perfection as was surmised by the maids who cleaned the bedchamber and observed carefully the bed sheets once the newlyweds had gone for brunch to the town longhouse and grinned knowingly between themselves that “Yes!” it had been a successful first encounter between the honeymooners.

The king begged pardon for the day activities as he had a sour stomach and remained in bed attended to by the doctor and servants. A cage of colorful finches swung on a hook near to his bed and the king smiled as they sang and bickered among themselves and with their tiny beaks primped at their feathers.

### **Part VI: At the King’s Table**

It had been one glorious life. When Albretch was a city in its infancy, it was king Laschien who had had the foresight and designated it to be a gatekeeping route for shipping once surrounding tribes had been subdued, routed and instructive, detailed treaties signed. The castle had been enlarged many times its original size and workmen were constantly at work, never with a plan that it would ever be complete.

The harsh winters piled upon the city its full might and fury of wind and snow ensuring constant maintenance for all the months. The white layered sheets of ice encased the city walls and city buildings the weight of which often caused roofs to collapse as the continual seeping and dripping of waters seeped up under floorboards procuring rot.

The king smiled while he lay back in a sullen mirth, his hand rubbing his tummy; so much was expected of him from the first moments of his youthful understanding that he was to rise to greatness in all his life's endeavors.

Personal tutors groomed every aspect of his life as if they were parting each strand of his hair and intermingling them with every other so that the design might present a mold of perfection and regal beauty.

Lord Albert was placed on a horse almost before he could walk. He would not be fitted for a suit of armor until he had become full grown but a leather jacket, boots and vestments were continually crafted to suit his growing limbs and rounded torso which were thick and heavy to take the form of, as it were, 'kiddy jousting'. This jousting amounted to long sticks with leather and cloth wrapped snugly around poles and he and his tutors would hold them with both arms and run at each other and try to poke the other one off his feet and onto his back.

Lord Albert of all his preparations into becoming a man of war the duly enjoyed this game and he and his tutors spent many hours laughing as they ran across the yard at one another in the soft ground which was poked with small naturally formed basins of water from the evening rains. Lord Albretch would come from these practices covered in mud and at the end of the day his nurse would scold him playfully that he should never be so tawdry in public or private life. "It does not suit a king," she would say and as the years of his growth expanded, he came to love this nurse whom he would affectionately call Nana.

And when he ascended to the throne king Albert provided a special room in the castle for his Nana and special privileges of foods and gifts up and until the day of her passing. Once buried in a more formal burial ceremony than any other servant had ever done for them, the king ordered that his dear Nana's room should be sealed off and that no person again should enter it.

He did count himself a person most fortunate, a king whose rule had been less encumbered than many of his predecessors.

True, there had been skirmishes with warring tribes, but these had been dispatched with slight, and yet deadly effort. The King had also called upon him and his troops in several instances but these protectorate exercises of once again dispatching the enemy were short lived.

Ah! and of his queen. She, most resplendent. Most careful of her man attending to the ways of a wife, and ruling potentate. “So lucky was I to have her those many years,” he said to himself as he dabbed at his moistening eyes with his bed covering.

And of those wonderful times at the lodge and the tremendous celebrations of men and armor jousting, taking prizes; the music, the fanciful plays, and concerts! Such joy.

And of his son Prince Damion; other children and cousins and dear, close friends; but Damion was special. First born, well in health, firm of mind, a quick learner, he loved his mother, honors his father. Such joy!

But then again came the vomiting. The king was not long for this world and yet all was secure in the preparation when he passed, he was so very sure his son would be a triumphal successor. “Such joy, such comfort for such an old man as I.”

## Chapter Six

### Shirene the Lone Wolf



Now that Damion was engaged Shirene found herself endlessly alone. Damion, in the midst of being inclusive of all things in planning the wedding ceremony and his fervent desire to spend as much time with his intended as possible. He also suddenly burdened with so many extra projects to attend, his father, her father, frail and sadly not long for the world, Damion was heaped upon with more duties of administration. Her 'project' of watching over and worshiping over her brother had now all but ended.

Damion's affections for Shirene never did cease, in fact they were more enhanced as his heart had found new horizons, he had not known were a part of this earthly life and could express himself more. It was as if he had traveled for many years among mountain passages, stumbling sometime upon rocks strewn in the road, or having succeeded in jumping and climbing over downed tree branches or fording fast moving streams of water those cold and those icy. And for all his efforts as the Prince he had rounded a jagged cliff and walked into a mystic gorge with unspeakably high mountains topped with glacier snows, a wonderous, endless carpeted valley of excitingly manicured trees, a perfect cerulean blue sky which sheltered the entire scene, a movement from a soft symphony.

Passing in the hallways of their castle home there was as always a sure greeting of brother and sister eyes, a warm smile and despite her contrived reserve in front of the servants and other castle residents and visitors she never could not help herself reaching out her arm and tapping Damion on the shoulder, letting it rest maybe a second or two and then going about her chores, her business of being a princess all which for her had become mundane and even a pronounced boredom.

And yet that which carried Shirene more than any other emotion through her day was her sheer disdain of Porcelain and how this no person of royalty was in the slow, sure process of taking her brother from her and on into sitting by her brother's side in the capacity of go regent.

To escape her responsibilities and to purposely go to seek a place to sulk, Shirene would ditch into one of the many secret passages of her castle home and make her way from hallway to hallway and end invariably at the unassuming wood door which led out into the garden she and her mother had often escaped to.

There in this ivy covered small hidden space with large walls covered in ivy a place that was as deathly silent as a convent was the stone bench which she and the Queen would sometimes sit as a default for their favorite wood bench under the honeysuckle, if it was wet with dew depending upon the season or the time of day.

And luckily for today Sirene the lone wolf, the wooden seat was suitable, and she sat down pulling the honeysuckle blossoms which were in the perfect bloom and squeezed out by the stem the sweet droplets of yellow nectar.

Shirene had never set there with another person than her mother and this single time seemed remotely like the feeling she expected when at one time she would lie in a gossamer shroud of white lace her death hastened by poison perhaps, or simply old age, she having finished her course well or not, successful or no, it would hardly matter at that time.

Shirene lifted off the buckles of her boots and released them one by one onto the ground and then let her bare feet smooth down the grass as she enjoyed the individual blades caressing the skin between her toes. She was not in the mood this very moment to necessarily let the cumbersome, growing hatred of Porcelain encumber her stolen moments here.

Instead she put her head back upon the back of the bench and watched as two finches pestered around their recently formed nest high up in the ivy in expectation of squawking never not hungry youths.

“A family,” Shirene mused. “I should like one I think, But then perhaps not. I might die in pregnancy; so many mothers did. Shirene stopped in mid thought, “Indeed I could die. No, I should rather rule a kingdom. Or perhaps I should conquer neighboring lands for myself; a feared woman warrior with death-to-loyalty troops. Then it would be for me a Queendom and it would be my position whom to pardon for criminal transgressions and whose heads to cut off. Shirene laughed her boisterous expression scaring the finches and causing them to flutter away and out over the wall.

Shirene had made no particular plans beyond serving her brother as he mounted the throne. She had particular fancy in being his forever most trusted advisor. The subjects of this Germanic state would learn in a short time to fear her opinions knowing well she had her brother's ear.

But no. This was not to be not now with that bitch in his life.

Shirene did sit well beyond the normal time it took her to sort out thinking about anything troubling her or for her plots and plans to attack and conquer enemy states. Shirene laughed again but this time in a low growl. Hatred was at the forefront of this expression.

And then she placed on her boots, buckled them, and stood. Shirene went up to the ivy where the finches had woven their home. Shirene stretched up her arms and with her hands grabbed the nest and yanked it from its position. Shirene looked momentarily at the nest and then crushed it in her palms. She then cast the twigs and dropped the mess onto the ground. And with one last action before leaving the hideaway and walking back to her rooms thru the dark cold corridors she crushed under her boot what remained of what had been something of a home.