

Project 2: A Collection of Short Stories

Marina Morgan and the Quest to the Wasteland

The Witch's Apprentice

It was not very often that there was something interesting to do, though she supposed that a country at peace was better than a country at war. She had no desire to become a commander, which would be required of her should Kydia come into conflict. Often the King would call for an audience just so she could perform a magic trick for some visiting duke or other. She was not a fool or clown, and detested these audiences. Other times the Queen would invite her for tea in the garden. She preferred these quieter visits much more, though they were still quite boring. At least in the garden she could collect any herbs or plants she needed. This morning, however, there was a foreboding sensation heavy on her heart and a darkness throughout the castle. There was something wrong.

Upon entering the throne room, she received the usual cordial announcement. "Presenting the Royal Sorcerer of Kydia, Marina Morgan!" Marina bowed to the King and Queen, whose faces were both downcast.

"I regret to inform you that the reason for our summoning you here is because of our son." The Queen said.

"Has something happened to Prince Andrew?" Marina asked.

"The Prince is missing. His bed was found empty this morning, except for a singular letter on the pillow. It is sealed with some magic sign none of us can decipher." At the King's gesture, a servant shakily held the letter out to Marina, afraid of its power. She took the letter and her eyes widened in recognition.

"This is wicked sorcery, your Majesty. I recognize these runes. There is only one witch in Kydia responsible for this: my former mistress, Orchidia." At the mention of the name, the Queen gasped and collapsed at her throne. The King and their servants rushed to catch her, and Marina slipped away in the midst of the chaos. She whispered into her palm and blew on it, willing the words to reach the King and Queen's ears.

"I will catch her," she assured them. "Don't worry. I'm not afraid of her anymore."

She took the letter into her office, holding her palm over the runes. It burned her, but she whispered under her breath to try and unlock the envelope with counter spells. The burning sensation of Orchidia's magic was horrifyingly familiar, and Marina's thoughts were unwillingly brought back to her time as an adolescent, studying with her former mistress.

9 YEARS AGO

She coughed, black soot covering her face and hands. She stood up to stretch her aching back, but Orchidia snapped.

“How can you expect to be great if you’re not willing to suffer? Bend down again, and don’t stand back up until every inch of the fireplace is clean!” She had such a haughty, nasally voice that made Marina’s ears ache. Still, she couldn’t fight back. The witch would probably kill her if she even gave so much as a dirty look.

“Yes, of course.” She couldn’t understand how doing all of the cleaning and cooking would help her become a powerful sorcerer, but she was a mere apprentice. She had no say in the matter.

She took advantage of being in the house and studied while Orchidia was out or at night while she slept. She had a large collection of books, and Marina consumed them at an inhuman speed. She read about potions and spells, astronomy, herbology, anatomy and biology. She adored the literature books as much as those on science or witchcraft. She gorged on the tomes, more than she could digest until she was sick with knowledge. She practiced casting spells in the woods, and drew runes with chalk, which she would cover with dirt or water come morning. She kept a journal under her pillow detailing the different plants used in different potions, practicing in Orchidia’s cauldron and washing it quickly before she came home again. She suffered, but she also grew more and more powerful, enough that even the witch began to take notice.

“Wicked girl! Have you been using magic under my roof, without my permission?” The witch exclaimed. Marina confessed to her crime, but the witch only sought to make profit instead.

“Then you will complete all my client’s requests for potions in addition to your usual chores. If you fancy yourself a magician, you must work like one!” Marina held her tongue, but Orchidia had hardly worked a day in her life. She truly was very powerful, but hardly ever used even a fraction of that power for anyone but herself.

She toiled away, completing request after request while Orchidia visited friends and lovers far from home. Marina did the best she could, and after some time people began to take notice of the talented apprentice who lived in the wicked woman’s home. People like Lady Catherine, one of the queen’s ladies in waiting, whose son fell ill. She rushed into the shop one morning, pushing past another client whom Marina was delivering a potion to.

“Apprentice! You must help my son, he is dying!”

The poor girl, swamped with dozens of other requests to aid ill relatives, had to turn her down. She was already preoccupied with so many others, and still had to do Orchidia's chores like cleaning her home and cooking dinner. More than that, she was apprehensive. Of course she had studied, but from what Lady Catherine described, it was no mere illness. She recognized the symptoms as a curse. Orchidia herself would have to step in.

"I will tell my mistress for you, but I cannot guarantee she will help you."

"Forget your mistress! I've heard of your talents, apprentice. You can help me!"

"I'm sorry," Marina tried to turn the woman away, "but what your son is suffering from is a curse. I don't think, even with all my practice, that I'm strong enough to help you."

The woman fell to her knees and grovelled at her feet. Marina was horrified at this noble woman that was so desperate she threw herself at the ground and begged.

This was the first time that Marina realized she had power over another's life. She also realized that she had the power to do something, to not live in fear of Orchidia anymore. She felt sorry for the woman, and finally relented.

The girl felt small in the luxurious carriage, tiny next to the massive gates of the castle, and positively miniscule upon seeing the great hall. She followed Lady Catherine as she rushed down this hallway and that hallway, into a room where a young man was attempting to rest while scrunching his face in pain. She had pictured a child, but this was a grown man.

Even without approaching him she felt the effects of dark magic which filled her with anxiety. When she gazed upon the man, she recognized the features which Orchidia had gossiped about before. It was a past lover, whom had rejected Orchidia for another woman. In her jealousy, she declared that she would curse him, and fate had brought Marina here to undo her mistress's magic. It was funny in that way, because Marina knew Orchidia well enough to do this. She told this to Lady Catherine, who gasped sharply. It seemed she had no idea Orchidia and her son had even ever met, as he was engaged.

She took a chalk piece from her satchel, and drew around the bed. She asked Lady Catherine to leave the room and fetch her water, sugar, and some letter she had written him. If she found it strange, she said nothing and ran to retrieve the items.

Because the curse was born from hate, Marina would use love to counter it. His mother's love, as

represented by the letter, would surely be strong enough.

When the preparations were complete, Marina waited until dusk to activate the runes. Orchidia's hate burned her as her curse countered her magic, but Marina kept going through the night.

Come morning, the man was well again, and Lady Catherine sobbed. She asked what Marina would like as payment, promising that she'd give her the world if she asked.

"More than anything I would like an escape from that wicked witch. While she's off cursing young men and meeting friends, I work tirelessly to complete magical requests and take care of her home, with no thanks in return. Please rescue me from her. Protect me from that woman, I beg you!"

"If you are strong enough to undo the spells of someone like Orchidia, then I will grant you an audience with my lady, the Queen and her husband and ask them to take you on as their personal magician. If all goes well, you shall become Kydia's new Royal Sorcerer!"

The Giant's Friend

The King and Queen, terrified of the witch Orchidia, offered to put together a team of soldiers, servants, and even cooks to support Marina's quest. However the Royal Sorcerer declined, stating that she needed no one but herself and she would face the wicked woman alone. Everyone wished her farewell and a safe travel, and she set off.

The letter was addressed to Marina herself, as Orchidia assumed she would be the only one able to open it. It was filled with vile curses, insults, and threats towards Marina and Prince Andrew, who was currently being held captive by Orchidia. She wanted a large sum of gold for him, but Marina assured the King and Queen that they wouldn't need to pay with even a singular nugget, for she would rescue him herself. Through magic she divined Orchidia's location, far away in the most western corners of Kydia. She was out in the Wasteland. Marina herself had travelled all over, and she was afraid of nothing.

After a week of riding on horseback, sleeping at various inns and even helping locals once in a while, she arrived upon Jotunville, the town of giants within the mountains. She remembered coming here once before and sought her friend.

"Marina Morgan?" a giant at the village entrance exclaimed. He cheered, and the rest of the giants came to welcome her, offering shelter for the night.

She found her friend, the strongest warrior in the village, and greeted him. That night they sat around a roaring fire to swap stories of battles and conquests and mundane things like her life in the castle and their life in the mountains. She explained why she was on this journey. He scowled when he heard Orchidia's name, flames roaring in his eyes.

"Take this, my friend. It will protect you from evil magic." He handed her a cape, made of a golden sheep's wool. She was amazed at the item and gingerly held it before putting it on her person. She instantly felt the warmth of kind magic and wondered where the giants acquired this enchanted item. When she asked, her friend simply told her it was a secret.

"It would've been nice to have this when we fought so long ago." He mused. She smiled at the memory of their battle.

8 YEARS AGO

When Marina Morgan first became the Royal Sorcerer of Kydia, there was much to learn and much to do. Of course as a representative of Kydia she was educated like royalty on important matters like etiquette and dress. She was able to acquire all the magic spell books she needed to grow stronger, and train with soldiers in the King's militia. For her first task, the King entrusted her to take care of the giants in Jotunville who were disturbing the peace in the small farming towns outside Kydia's capital. She claimed that it would be child's play, and the issue would be resolved quickly.

The cocky sorcerer rode into Jotunville alone on horseback, hopped off and called out into the mountains, "The King of Kydia has requested that the giants of this village cease their rampant murdering of innocent humans. If you fail to honor his request, you will answer to me." Her voice echoed throughout the village. One giant came out, and Marina tilted her head up to face him. He was like a man, only four or even five times as tall. He was dressed in a handmade leather armor.

"And who are you?" His voice boomed.

"The King's Royal Sorcerer." She declared, showing off the emblem pinned to her cape. She took off her hat so he could clearly see her face, wild red hair, and black eyes.

"It's a bluff, there's no such thing." Another giant, a woman this time, came from the village after overhearing the conversation. She was also dressed in a similar armor.

“It’s true, look at that emblem. Only members of the King’s court wears it.” He said.

“If it’s true, prove it. Use your magic to win a duel against our strongest fighter.”

Marina accepted the challenge and agreed that at sundown, they would face off against each other in the fields outside the village. She noticed that all the giant warriors didn’t carry a single weapon, and she concluded that for a giant, his fists alone might be the size of her body and thus a weapon wasn’t needed. The giants had size and strength, but Marina had intelligence and magic. She had to prove herself in this battle; if she lost here it would be humiliating for both the King and herself.

She decided to divine the warrior’s identity and found a lonely pond outside the village. She decided that it would do, and at once began to chant words in ancient languages, dropping flowers from the village into the water and watching them ripple until the image changed and she saw his face. “His name is Goliath,” she muttered to herself. He was the strongest and largest of all the giants, beloved by everyone. He might be ten times her size, but Marina packed a lot of heart and grit into her demure frame.

Giant or not, there was one thing every living creature feared, and that was death. She knew how she would win.

At sundown she made her way to the battlegrounds and met the warrior face to face.

“Hello, Goliath. May the best win.” She said.

He grunted in agreement, and got into a fighting stance. It seemed as though his only plan was to squash her like a bug. He brought his great fist upwards and sent it rushing down upon her, but a sudden gust of wind carried Marina out of the way. He tried again, and the wind carried her away once more. The giant grew frustrated at the magician flitting about like a fly. Marina bent down and grabbed a stick, uttered some ancient language and threw it at his feet.

His laughter boomed with the echo of the mountains. “A stick won’t hurt me. I can see that you’re desperate.” He taunted, but then looked down in shock, for the stick had turned into a snake.

“What?” He said. Marina threw more stick-snakes at him, and they began to merge together into one giant serpent, coiling up his leg. He shook and swatted at it, but it hissed.

“Careful now, it’s venomous.” She warned, throwing another stick and making the serpent larger.

“I will not surrender!” He exclaimed, though he was sweaty and red with exertion at trying and failing to

pull the creature off. It hissed again and sunk its fangs into his calf, and he cried out.

The giant fell with a roar, causing the other giants to come and see what was happening.

“Goliath, what’s wrong?” The female giant from earlier called out to him.

“I surrender!” He exclaimed. “Now cure me, sorcerer! Take this vile creature away!”

“There’s nothing there.” The other giants said. “What is he talking about?”

Marina laughed and asked Goliath to look down at himself. He did so and found nothing but a bundle of sticks on the ground at his feet. There wasn’t even any mark from fangs. He was completely fine. “It was an illusion,” she explained. She feared that he would become angry and take revenge for the trick, but he laughed instead.

“I, and the rest of Jotunville will accept your request. Tell your King that he can depend on us from now on, and that his sorcerer will always be welcomed here as a friend.” He said.

“You aren’t mad?”

“I have never been brought down by a pile of sticks. I respect your trick, as you defeated me without ever truly harming me.” He said. Marina left the village contented to have proven herself as a capable sorcerer, and to have earned new friends in an unlikely place.

The Jeweler’s Thief

Marina Morgan, now equipped with a golden cape, rode on to the Wasteland. She was afraid for Prince Andrew, hoping every day that Orchidia hadn’t hurt him. She had grown fond of him, as she met him when he was very, very small, a shy child who always hid behind his mother or some servant. She entertained him with magic tricks, the way she remembered her father had done when she was very small herself. Now barely a teenager, that awful witch had captured him.

She made great progress with the protection of her new cape, halfway to the Wasteland by now. Still, her horse had to rest occasionally and so she stopped at the great city of Asterfall, located in the middle of a gorgeous valley of flowers and protected by a forest. This was a wealthy city, where even so-called peasants had expensive jewels.

This was another place she had been before, though it was as a girl. As she stared at the glittering emerald

on a woman's necklace, she recalled the days she spent here, and what she did to get by without magic. Distracted by her memories, she ended up walking right into the jeweler's shop.

She pulled her hat lower and perused his creations. Lots of beautiful, shining rings and necklaces and bracelets, and even hats decorated with the sparkly stuff. She felt a tug in her heart. She was this country's Royal Sorcerer, she could have all she wanted back at the castle. But her younger self didn't know that she would ever be in this position.

An old man with knobby knuckles but a steady hand approached her. He cleared his throat. "Hello Madam. Do you need any help?"

She was embarrassed, and adopted a fake, high-pitched voice. "None at all!" She chortled. "Just browsing!" It was overly obnoxious and hopefully, extremely off putting. She pulled her hat lower.

The old man had grown shorter since she last saw him, however, and he stepped slightly closer to see her face. His eyes widened in recognition.

"Marina Morgan?"

She sighed. "Yes. It's me."

Somehow, she ended up in a private room being poured tea. She didn't know why he would bother to entertain her as a guest, even if she did have a fancy new title. She didn't deserve this kindness so many years later, but she knew he had a big heart. She explained her new position and talked of her adventures, as well as the journey that she was on to find and face Orchidia. He recoiled in disgust at her name.

"I just remembered!" The old man said after a moment of silence. He left and quickly came back with a locked box. He fetched the key and gave it to Marina to open. "You can have this."

She hesitantly unlocked the box and gasped. It was a jade necklace, the same one from so long ago. "Oh, I can't accept this. I don't deserve this. Where is the real owner of this necklace?"

The old man's face grew grim. With lips pressed into a thin line he shook his head and said, "She's moved on. After you left, she wasn't ever able to really recover."

"No..." Marina said. Tears bloomed in her eyes, and the old man quickly grasped her hands.

"Please, take it and take care of it for her. You're fighting evil, so you need it. You've changed, Marina, I know you have. Move on from the past."

She put the necklace on, allowing the old man to attach the clasp for her. Instantly she felt the warmth of kind magic once again, and wondered how the old man had enchanted the item. It wasn't possible, but magic was all about the impossible she supposed. She mulled over it and thought that maybe the previous owner's feelings were strong enough for the enchantment to manifest... though that was dubious. Right?

"Now, would you like more tea?" He offered. She accepted, the same way as so many years ago.

10 YEARS AGO

Before Orchidia, when Marina was just a runaway trying to survive on her own, she spent some time in Asterfall. It was a long way from her hometown, but she snuck onto a cart carrying goods from farm to farm, and finally made the trek to Asterfall on foot. She had nothing but a few coins and tattered clothing to her name, and summer was ending. Soon it would be cool, and then came the snow. She would die if she didn't find any living accommodations.

But when she came to Asterfall and saw the riches on display she smiled mischievously. For a girl like her, there was plenty for the taking. She eyed one woman's ring and carefully followed her until she entered a shop. It belonged to a jeweler, she realized, eyes sparkling at the luxurious gems on display. An old man, the jewelry maker himself most likely, approached her.

"Hello," he smiled at her sweetly. "What brings you to my shop? Are you friends with Jane?"

"Of course!" She lied.

"Oh come right in! I'll serve you some tea." He said. Marina decided to wait until the man turned his back, then take some of the most valuable gems and run. She could sell them in another city, buy herself some clothes and food, and run away again. She didn't know where she was going, but all she knew was that she had to get as far away from home as possible.

Instead of the old man coming back, a girl around her age stepped into the living space instead. She was tall, with long dark hair and had kind eyes like the old man. She served the tea and greeted her. Marina apprehensively shook her hands.

"Hello. I'm Jane, but I don't think we've ever met, although you told my grandfather we were friends. What brings you here?"

Marina couldn't get caught. She would have to cover for herself for the time being. "The truth is that I'm an

orphan. I have no money, food, or clothes. Not a single possession to my name.”

“What is your name?”

“Marina Morgan.” She recoiled while mentioning her last name, her last connection to the father she had run from. That, and the magic lying dormant in her veins, of course, though that’s not something she realized at the time.

“Marina, why don’t you stay here? I’m studying as my grandfather’s apprentice, you could do the same! Learn his trade, work in the shop, and settle down with us!” Jane offered. She had such a kind heart.

Unfortunately for Jane, the Marina Morgan of a decade ago was a different kind of person. She was not cocky or powerful or even a magician. The young and weak Marina was filled with nothing but anger and fear. She thought that there was no one looking out for her but herself, and she had to do everything to put herself on top. She accepted Jane’s suggestion, but never once truly thought that she would be able to make a life there. From the beginning, Marina was planning to run away.

Still, she stayed in their home for a long time. She shared Jane’s bed as she offered, and ate her meals with the small family. She found out that Jane’s parents had died young from illness, and she was left only with her maternal grandfather. She suffered from a weak constitution, and often fell ill herself. What the old man did was honest work, and he had a lot of passion for it. Marina, even with her betrayal in the back of her mind, did her best and learned about molten metal, the value of various gems, and design. She learned about the preferred tastes of women in Asterfall, and how to bargain with traders. As Jane shared her bread, and her grandfather commended her for a job well done, Marina saw that family could mean love, though she still wasn’t sure she could ever truly believe it.

She spent a year in that place, living and learning anxiously without any thought of abandoning her plan. She was waiting for a chance, and one day it arrived. Two women entered to peruse the shop, and she listened to their gossip as she swept the floor.

“There’s a new powerful witch residing in the capital.” One whispered.

“Really? How dreadful. Witches are such horrible women.” The other shook her head.

“That may be, but she can cure illnesses and brew potions that can do anything from make you beautiful to fall in love. I heard that she’s in need of an apprentice.”

“What’s her name?”

“Orchidia.”

It was the perfect opportunity. Marina would learn magic! She had never truly attempted it, but she concluded that she must have some innate talent for it considering her father’s powers.

It was the end of August. Jane was very ill at this time, though her grandfather wasn’t particularly worried as she often became sick at the end of summer. That evening, the old man presented the sick Jane in bed with a gorgeous jade necklace as a birthday gift. Marina thought it was the most precious and beautiful thing she had ever seen. That night, she planned to leave, and left into town to spend some time by herself admiring the views of Asterfall. When she returned to the room, Jane was sitting on the bed, staring at a shoddy wooden box.

“Would you care to explain what this is?” Jane said hoarsely, in a low tone barely restraining her anger.

It was Marina’s box of jewels she had taken from the shop over the year. Every now and then she would take a necklace or a ring, which she was planning to sell once she left.

“Give me that.” She scowled, and snatched the box away from Jane. “It’s mine.”

“It’s not yours. It belongs to my grandfather. They’re his work that he was going to sell. You stole it.”

“No—“

“Get out of here!” Jane yelled. “You’re no longer welcome, you disgusting thief!” She coughed until she was gasping for air, her throat unable to support the outburst.

“Please, at least let me sleep here tonight! In the morning I will go.” Marina pleaded, tears in her eyes. Ever the kind-hearted one, Jane agreed that Marina could stay until the morning. She watched Jane carefully take off her beautiful jade necklace and place it in a box. When she was sound asleep, she took both her box and the one containing the necklace, and swiftly ran out the door. It was pouring outside, so Marina donned a cape and held her head down, though the droplets beat the back of her head.

She vowed to never return to Asterfall. There was a trade route from this town to the capital, and she planned to sneak onto a cart to get there. Just as she had reached the center of the town, she heard Jane’s voice calling after her.

“Marina!” She yelled, but Marina only ran harder. She slipped because of a puddle, dropping the necklace. The jade glimmered in the moonlight, and Jane stopped to pick it up.

“You were even going to steal this too?” She said. “What’s wrong with you, Marina? We cared for you all this time, and you were only hurting us.”

“You were a fool to trust a stranger. That’s what you get for being kind.”

“I saw a person in need, and I wanted to help her. I became your friend. My grandfather sees you like his family!”

Marina’s blood boiled at the mention of that word. “I have no family. I am alone in this world, and I will take care of myself.”

“That’s ridiculous.” Jane scoffed. “You’re not alone. You have people that care about you, people that love you even—” She coughed and shivered. She ran after Marina in the cold rain without so much as a cape or even a hat to divert some of the rain. Her nightgown was soaked.

“I’m going to go now, Jane. It’s true that you and your grandfather took care of me, and for a time I thought that maybe I could stay. But I have frequent nightmares, and they remind me that everything could fall apart one day.” She explained. Marina took off her cape and gave it to Jane, who needed it more than she. With a second glance, she handed back the jade necklace as well.

“Someday, Marina Morgan, I hope you find a place that you belong. I hope you find peace within yourself.” Jane said.

“I don’t know if there’s any hope left for me. Farewell, Jane.”

The Wizard’s Kin

The closer she got to the Wasteland, the darker her thoughts became. It was the effect of all the gloom and dark magic swirling around out there. It was a barren place where the lowest of society were exiled and evil magicians came to convene.

Wizards and witches were very rare, which was why it was a big deal for one to reside in a certain town. There were many so-called good magicians, and bad ones too, though Marina thought that she herself didn’t reside on either side of the spectrum. At the end of the day magicians are human, guided by their own self-interest. As the Royal Sorcerer, Marina sought to do her best, but she always prioritized herself. She supposed she got that from her father.

If Orchidia was in the Wasteland, that meant she had begun to dabble in darker magic than ever before. Unlike the superficial spells she sold to people in the past, she must've been working on killing curses, demon summoning, necromancy even! She never thought such a vain and haughty witch like Orchidia would ever go so far, but she must have been humiliated when Marina drove her out of the capital.

She was a three-day ride away from the Wasteland now, but she had one final stop to make. The seaside town of Seidonport. Her hometown.

As soon as she stepped foot in town, the people began to whisper. Not because the Royal Sorcerer had come to visit, but because little Marina, the daughter of the sea wizard Markus Morgan, had returned. The wife of the inn's owner, Agnes, ran up to her horse and cried out, "Marina, is it really you?"

Marina gracefully jumped off the horse and took off her hat, bowing respectfully. The royal emblem glittered next to the jade necklace Marina now wore. "I am the Royal Sorcerer of Kydia, and I am on a quest to find the witch Orchidia in the Wasteland who has kidnapped the Prince. Please, will you grant me a place to stay for the night?"

"Don't be a stranger!" The woman said, "Come in!"

When Marina entered the parlor, the woman's husband and sister were there, as well as her five children who had all grown in the past eleven years. Marina's heart was heavy.

"We heard a rumor from a merchant at Asterfall, but we couldn't believe it. We doubted you would stop by, but here you are." Agnes held her hands. "I'm glad to see you're doing well."

When she thought of her childhood, it hurt immensely. Of course this place was a safe haven for her during that time, and it gave Marina the courage to stare Agnes in the eyes and ask, "Where is my father now?"

"Markus Morgan disappeared ten years ago. When you left him, he angrily awaited your return, and his anger slowly consumed him until he went insane. He returned to the sea and hasn't come back since."

Agnes' sister spoke then. "When he went under, the sea became very foamy, and the beach was suddenly full of pearls and fish! It was quite strange, but I collected some. When I heard you were coming, I strung the pearls together on a hat's trim with the help of the hat maker. Consider it our welcome gift." She smiled in a bittersweet manner and presented the hat to her.

Marina tried it on, surprised to find it enchanted as she felt the rush of protective magic. These pearls were

the last gift from her father. They were born from the sea, just like he had been. Just like she had been as well, or so she always assumed considering her father never made his past clear to her. He never told her about himself. He was such a secretive man. She was overcome with sorrow and regret, and broke down crying, thankful for the gift.

22 YEARS AGO

Seidonport was a small town which relied on the fishing industry for money. There were many families and elderly, but young people often left when they grew old enough. The citizens led a very boring life, until out of the blue a man arose from the water, shocking the children playing on the beach. The kids ran into town to tell what they saw, but no adults believed them until the man walked into town himself. His clothes were completely soaked, but in front of everyone he cast a spell and instantly dried himself off. The townspeople asked him who he was, this strange magician with flaming red hair who was seemingly born from the sea.

“My name is Markus Morgan. I come to your land seeking a position as your town’s wizard. In exchange for my protection, I would like help raising my human daughter, Marina Morgan.” He was holding a small baby to his chest, who was calmly sleeping in his arms. The townspeople accepted, amazed that a wizard would now reside in their town. Any good and prosperous town had a witch or wizard living in it. People saw this as a clear sign of Seidonport’s success.

For many years, the innkeepers took care of Marina most of the time, clothing, feeding, and educating her. She often liked to play in the bath and felt comfortable in the water, and refused to eat fish just like her father. The mere sight of it made her upset. Agnes thought she was a strange child, but she put up with it for the wizard who was protecting their town and because she felt sorry for the child. Marina’s mother was gone. Markus had no idea where she’d left, but the day Marina was born she ran away. Markus had no idea what to do with a human baby on his own. The way he spoke made Agnes think the wizard wasn’t merely a human wizard, but no one knew what he was. The townspeople concluded Marina must have some supernatural or magical blood as well, though there wasn’t much they could do about that either. Life went on.

Marina was very happy with her father at first, living in a home constructed right on the beach. She loved the water the most. He was able to use the water to heal the townspeople with illness, and he purified their own drinking water once which had been poisoned in a certain incident. With his enchantments on fishing equipment,

they had twice the fish they usually had. People from all over Kydia came to Seidonport to see the great sea wizard, and the tourism brought great profit for all.

Once a year, however, Marina would cry to Agnes about how her father had to go on his annual search for Marina's mother. He refused to tell anyone her name, and left for months at a time. There were periods which he spent more of the year away than with Marina. As the girl grew older, she became more and more bitter at her father's disappearances and angrier with her non-existent mother. If she had left them, then her father should despise her and not desperately search for her, she reasoned.

Marina became very rebellious and hard to control, even for Agnes who had cared for her since she was a baby. She destroyed things and stomped all over people's gardens and cursed her father's name. Whenever her father was home she picked a fight with him over every little thing, and he would lose his temper and yell at her.

Once when Marina was eight or nine years old, she and her father were sitting together by the fountain in the center of town.

"In two weeks time I will leave again." He said curtly. "You're getting older. I'm still not completely sure about this... but I thought that I may teach you sometime."

"Teach me what? Anyways, what does it matter? You're away so often I'll never have any time to study. You care more about that stupid wench than me."

"What's wrong with you? Don't call your mother that way!"

"Mother? I have no mother! Where is she? The woman who gave birth to me? I haven't known her my whole life!" Marina said.

Markus became unbearably angry with Marina, and in front of everyone yelled in her face, "It's your fault she's gone! The love of my life is gone all because of you! You should have never been born!"

Once his true feelings were spoken, he couldn't take the words back. Marina became angrier, only to be met with a slap in the face or a shove into the ground. She would come to Agnes with new bruises and bloody noses and tears. Seidonport became a stormy place, prone to boating accidents and lightning storms and cursed fish. The fishermen would bring up their nets only to find fish bones and garbage instead of the fresh fish they were blessed with during Marina's childhood.

When she was eleven, Marina confessed to Agnes that she wished to die just so she wouldn't have to bear

her father's rage any longer.

"I have no mother, I have no father... there is no one who wants me in this world." Marina sobbed.

"Marina, that's not true! I love you like my own daughter, you know." It was a futile attempt to comfort her.

Marina hugged Agnes tightly. "Thank you." It was the last thing Marina said to her before she left without so much as a word to anyone else.

The Royal Sorcerer

Marina clenched her fists tightly. She felt sick to her stomach, for she had arrived at the Wasteland. It was a barren plane, currently full of ice and snow. She touched her golden cape, and felt warmth encompass her. She touched the jade necklace and felt its protection. She touched the pearls on her new hat, and courage filled her soul. Her quest to the wasteland had been full of sorrow and regretful memories, but now she would put an end to it and save Prince Andrew.

She left her horse behind and decided to continue the quest on foot. She didn't want to submit the innocent animal to these horrible conditions. Dark magic continued to swirl around her, but the magic items she had been gifted drove it away. She stomped through the snow, and slowly, dreadfully, made her way towards Orchidia. She could sense her magic nearby, but had no idea where she was hiding.

It was starting to get dark. Marina drew a sign in the air, and a flame blazed in her palm. She held it out, and it lit up a large radius around her. Orchidia had to be close. Whispering spirits clutched at her cape, and Marina shook them off. Their voices curled around her, close to her ear, and she pulled her hat lower. Her footsteps became heavy, and the snow started to pull down at her, sinking her into the ground. She mustered all her strength and ran.

Up ahead, in the nothingness of the Wasteland, a log cabin appeared. There was smoke coming from the chimney, and in order to not freeze to death she decided to risk entering what was surely an illusion. She ran at the door and knocked, but the instant her palm rasped against the wooden frame the door swung open.

The interior was decorated like Orchidia's old home, and her eyes widened. She couldn't sense that women's magic at all here, yet it was clearly her home. Actually, now that she thought about it, she couldn't sense magic at all, not even Orchidia's which she had been tracking. There was a small table by the entrance with two cups of tea laid out. The one closest to her was in a light blue teacup, her favorite back at the castle. She stepped closer.

The aroma was that of chamomile and honey, her preferred tea since childhood. Everyone knew that you shouldn't drink from enchanted food, as they were almost always cursed. Yet the Wasteland had been so cold, and everything here seemed so inviting...

Marina sipped the tea.

The world melted around her. The fire was snuffed out, and the teacup was gone from her hands. The cabin's walls disappeared, until Marina was standing in the snow by herself. She wasn't sure if it was reality or a trick, but her head hurt at the warped visions. She held onto her hat tighter and clenched her eyes shut.

"Marina, please open your eyes."

It was Orchidia's voice. She did and prepared to strike at the woman, but she stood in front of Marina with Prince Andrew asleep in her arms. They were no longer standing in the Wasteland, but some sort of palace which she had never seen before. There was a window Marina rushed to, but when she looked outside she saw nothing but fish and undersea plants.

"Where are we?" Her voice was garbled, but she could somehow breathe.

"We are in a memory. I thought of how to explain myself and apologize. I must have gone over a million scenarios in my head, but this is the best way I could think of. I thought if you saw everything for yourself, you would understand." Orchidia sounded so uncharacteristically soft and sad, so unlike the vain and selfish woman Marina worked under as a girl. She handed the sleeping prince to Marina and walked away. Prince Andrew woke up and rubbed at his eyes just as Orchidia faded away.

"Come back here!" She shouted after Orchidia, who left them alone in this undersea palace.

"Marina? Where are we?" The boy asked.

"I don't know Andrew, but I'm going to get you home."

They walked hand in hand, exploring the palace. They came upon the ballroom, which was full of strange people with blue and green skin and fish like appearances. In the center of the crowd, Marina spotted her father Markus, dancing with a woman.

"Who is that?" Andrew asked innocently.

They turned as they danced, and Marina got a clear look at the woman's face. She looked the most human of everyone there, and there was an air bubble surrounding her head. She had flaming red hair, but her nose, eyes,

and lips were exactly the same as Orchidia's. This woman was almost identical. Actually, Marina realized when she heard her high-pitched laugh, this woman was Orchidia, albeit a younger version of her. There was a bulge in her stomach that indicated a pregnancy.

Marina took Andrew and ran away into the next room. What was Orchidia doing with her father in this undersea palace? Was this his home? Was Orchidia his wife? Andrew tugged on Marina's palm and pointed at the balcony. She watched through the glass doors as another apparition of Markus and Orchidia appeared. Such familiar people appeared like strangers to her.

They spoke in hushed tones. "I'm scared Markus. I never wanted to be a mother, and your father doesn't approve of our relationship, even now. They may try to hurt me."

"I will never let anyone hurt our little Marina." He grasped her hands. "And I will absolutely never let anyone hurt you."

Marina stood shocked and frozen. If she was viewing a memory, that meant that Orchidia was her mother. Andrew tugged her hand and led her into the next room.

There was a soldier holding a spear to Orchidia's throat. "Once that child is born, you will run far, far away and leave Prince Markus alone. You will surface, and if you take even a single look backwards, the rest of you and your child's life will be cursed with misfortune."

The memory began to shift and change to show her Orchidia rising to the surface of the ocean. Marina watched in horror as Orchidia took one forbidden look behind her at the palace, and her red hair slowly turned black and her eyes lost their light. When she landed on the shore, she looked just like the Orchidia Marina knew. The memory became warped and destroyed itself, and Marina found herself and Prince Andrew back in the snowy Wasteland. She never saw Orchidia again.

Prince Andrew shivered, and she held him tightly. She ripped off some fabric from the golden cape and wrapped it around his neck like a loose scarf. Marina had to get them both out of there, she knew, but she couldn't do anything but shake and sob and hold the little prince tighter.

After a long while, she found the strength to walk out of the Wasteland and find her horse. After months of journeying, she retraced her steps and made it all the way back to the capital of Kydia and personally returned Prince Andrew into the hands of the King and Queen, who couldn't thank her enough.

Epilogue

The Royal Sorcerer and the Queen were sitting in the garden, having tea together. The Queen couldn't help but say, "You've been different since you came back, Marina. Are you alright? It's been almost a year."

Marina had a blank stare. She was looking at the pond in the center of the garden. It was beautiful. She loved watching Prince Andrew play in the garden. She often cast spells on flowers so they could dance for him or talk to him. Even the King and Queen would get dirty in the mud just so the boy could play with them. She enjoyed seeing the happy family together. Although she once found it boring to play tricks for audiences, it now filled her with joy to be the reason for other's smiles.

She thought about her own family, having been destined to be destroyed even before she was born. Her misery was inevitable, and it depressed her. She still tried her best to fight it.

She set her blue teacup down and smiled at the Queen. "Oh, I don't know if I'm alright. But I'm beginning to understand. I think with time, I'll be able to heal."

"That's good to hear. Now, would you like more tea?"

"Gladly."