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THE LITTLE MAN AND THE MAID

by P.K. Graves

Sitting by a brook on a fresh summer morning, a girl strummed and hummed and sang her poetry with a small harp. Her face smiling above the instrument was fair as the day to see, and the sun in her hair turned it to pure gold. But her fingers played evening and autumn, and her words told of her love for the Lord of the Other World.

As he passed through the woods, past a thin place between her world and his, a young man of the little people spied the girl sitting and playing in the morning. Smitten with her beauty and the peace on her face, he stepped out of the woods and went to her and took her hand.

"So fair are you, I've decided to make you my own wife," he said to her, without a hi or hello.

But the maid only smiled. "It's not your wife I'm desiring to be," she answered gently.

He let go her hand and sat back on his heels. She went back to strumming her harp. The gentleman smiled, none too kindly, and said, "It's for kings you'll play. Rich men will throw you all their money, and poor men their hearts, just to have a song from you. Your name will be known across the land and for all time to come, if you'll only be mine."

The girl just smiled, strumming. "I'm happy enough to play for my own self, and that's the truth."

The gentleman hopped around to look her in the face. "Then it's the love of a good man of your own people you want. You'll have better from me. I'll be a prince for you,

tall and handsome, and I'll love you forever, if only you'll be mine."

Her smile never changed. "It's content I am to sit here in the sunshine and play my music. I'm no woman for you," she answered.

The gentleman's brow furrowed grimly. "Then I'll take the quickness from your fingers and make your beauty wither and die. I'll turn all your thoughts on what you'll never have and all your contentment to despair."

Still, she only smiled. "All things pass," she said. "Youth and beauty, talent and happiness, all go the way of the summer into winter. Whatever discontent you curse me with will pass, too. As will I. As will yourself."

The gentleman stamped the ground with rage. "Then it's to Death's own self I'll send you. You'll feel his cold kiss on your rosy lips and his hands filling with your warm breasts!"

Her smile deepened. "I'll be your wife, if only to stop your pestering me," she said. "But it's three wishes I want from you, or not a day of joy will you get from me."

The fine gentleman clapped his hands and turned himself around three times. "Ask what you will of me and it shall be yours."

She set her harp aside. "First, I want to always be young and beautiful to you." The little man nodded eagerly. "Then," she said, "on the day you tire of me, that's the day I will die." Her husband-to-be fairly licked his lips with agreeing. "And last," she whispered. "I wish...I wish..." She had no words for it, for the great thing she wanted. But see it she could. In place of the shining summer morn, her land of twilight. It sparkled with stars; the breeze carried to her a scent of roses and moss. And somewhere in that world was the one she loved more than any other.

From her heart to his mind, the gentleman felt the truth of her wish. "You'll have it," he said. "Whatever it is you truly wish for, it will be yours. If, for all that, you never tell me no; you bring me a pint when I tell you so; and you'll not nag me more than's absolutely necessary?"

"I will," she said. He grabbed her by the hand and whisked her off under the hill and made her his wife.

And under the fairy hill, among the tree roots and rocks, they commenced to live. She was a good wife to him, always young and beautiful to him as she wished, never telling him no, bringing him his pints when he wanted them and not nagging him if he hap-



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pened to come in late of an evening or a morning. The children she bore him, the pixies and elves, the boggles and hags, she loved with all her heart, and they she, so good was she to them. They were a large and happy family for a good long while.

But one day, after a few centuries, her husband came home later than usual.

"Wife," he said, "come and kiss me one last time. For it's tired of you I've grown. I'll have my freedom like any other young man in his prime, to rove the world and find my love where I will."

And she went to him and kissed him and he took her back to where he'd found her, and left her by the side of the brook on the same summer morning to have her second wish.

Her harp lay in the grass, waiting where she'd left it, but she did not now reach for it. She lay dying, aging and withering all at once in the day he'd grown tired of her.

In her eyes the light of summer still shone. The aches and pains of her body troubled her not at all, for in place of the bright brook and the woods she saw her third wish coming for her from over a dark hill.

Death himself bent beside her. He placed his cool lips on hers and lifted her in his strong arms and took her back to his own twilight land where he made her his queen. True love they shared, for that had been her wish, and so they loved each other forever.

And the leprechaun was none the worse off for knowing nothing about it at all.

MEDUSA

by Sr. Lou Ella Hickman

she wears them
ringlets of punishment
because she was a woman
ravished by a god
this is her pain: licking the air
they hiss the unforgivable...
her gaze touches into stone
all who would dare to look



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