

INT. ROOM IN THE HORSE'S HEAD INN - NIGHT

A BABY CRIES INSISTENTLY AS ARLENE PACES.

ARLENE

Shhh, shhh, shhh, it's all right. Everything's all right...

SHE HUMS A FEW BARS FROM "THE SINGING SISTER" AND THEN STOPS.

If this goes on any longer, Bailey might just throw us all out!

AS IF ON CUE, SOMEONE APPROACHES THE ROOM AND THE DOOR OPENS.

BAILEY

Anna! I've already had to apologise to two customers for that one's squawking. I swear, you and your sister are nothing but trouble.

ARLENE

I'm terribly sorry, Ms. Bailey. I don't know what do - I've fed him, I've changed him, I've rocked him...I think he just misses his mother.

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BAILEY

Well, don't we all. Get that imp to sleep before he wakes up the neighbours too!

THE DOOR SLAMS SHUT, CAUSING THE CRYING TO INTENSIFY.

ARLENE

Oh, dear... Well, I can't blame her.

ARLENE MAKES GENTLE HUSHING NOISES TO THE BABY. THIS DOES NOTHING. SHE SITS DOWN.

ARLENE

All told, little one, we have that in common despite our... other differences. My mother died when I was born. And you... you're too young to remember your mother.

ARLENE SIGHS.

ARLENE

My father always said Ardel and I looked just like her. Her red hair, her face. Sometimes, when he was being more attentive, he'd tell me how I sound just like her

(MORE)

ARLENE (cont'd)

when I sing. She loved songs, too. And stories. Sometimes, if Father was drinking himself into oblivion or dismissing me, or if Ardel was being particularly cruel or both or I was feeling simply awful, the nurse would sit me on my knee and tell me a story to cheer me up. There were a couple of different ones, but there was one I think you might like right now.

AS ARLENE NARRATES, HER VOICE BECOMES MORE
RESONANT THE WAY IT MIGHT WHEN SHE SINGS.
GRADUALLY, HER VOICE OVERTAKES THE CRYING OF
THE BABY AND THE GENERAL ROOM AMBIENCE.

ARLENE

Once, there was a queen who had everything she could ever want. Her husband adored her. Their kingdom was peaceful, and prosperous. They ruled their people fairly, and were respected in turn. But the greatest thing she had in the world, when it came, was her child. But one night not long after it was born, the unthinkable happened. Her child was stolen away from her by that terrible Trickster, the Prince of the Faer Folk, whose true name must never be uttered.

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SOUND: HOOFBEATS

ARLENE

All the king's men searched far and wide across the kingdom for the child, but found nothing. And so she set out herself to bring her child home.

SOUND: HOOFBEATS STOP

ARLENE

She travelled three days and three nights until she came to a cliff-face she could not see the bottom of. Perhaps it was the wind, but she imagined she could hear the crying of her child below.

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She knew she would need rope to climb down, and she had none with her. So she fashioned ropes from her finest scarf and belt. A steep price to pay, but some things are worth it.

She climbed and climbed and climbed until she reached a cave at the bottom of cliff. Inside the cliff was too dark to see, and she no torch with her. So she fashioned one, ripping cloth from her finest dress and dipping the scraps in her finest perfume. A dear price to pay, but some things are worth it.

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At the end of the cave was a thick and heavy door. Try as she might, it was locked and held firm. There was no

(MORE)

ARLENE (cont'd)

key in sight and nothing she had on her that would fit into the keyhole. So she took a knife and cut off her little finger. A terrible price to pay, but some things are worth it.

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SOUND: LOCK RUMBLING, HEAVY DOOR OPENING

ARLENE

She fit her finger into the keyhole and opened the door. Beyond it was a tunnel, winding further and further into the dark. The queen held her torch high and continued on.

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SOUND: HEAVY DOOR CLOSING

ARLENE

She crept through winding tunnels and the dark, only slightly aware that the door had closed behind her, locking her in. Her torch was nearly dying when she heard it.

SOUND: MANIACAL LAUGHTER REVERBERATING AROUND
CAVE - The trickster, cackling up ahead.

The laughter stops.

ARLENE

Through an opening, she saw The Trickster warming itself by a fire and taunting her child. Desperately, she began to sing a lullaby, so sweet that even The Trickster was lured to sleep.

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A WOMAN SINGS WORDLESSLY.

SOUND: LOUD SNORING

ARLENE

Only once she was certain did she creep out of her hiding place. She moved forward silently and gently took her child back.

SOUND: SINGING AND SNORING STOP

ARLENE

As soon as the Trickster felt the child leaving its grasp, it started awake and the queen fled. She ran into the dark as fast as she could, but she was tired and unable to see in the dark. As it advanced towards her, menacing, she clutched her child tight and prayed to Galadon.

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SOUND: EARTH RUMBLING

ARLENE

Suddenly, the tunnels shook and the ceiling fell down, crushing the trickster but sparing the queen and her child.

SOUND: RUMBLING STOPS

ARLENE

As she looked up, she saw daylight falling upon her face. The collapse of the ceiling opened a new tunnel to the surface. Waiting for her patiently was her horse. Weeping, the queen thanked Galadon and mounted her horse, returning home with her child safe in her arms.

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THE AMBIENCE OF ARLENE'S VOICE ENDS. IN THE ROOM, THE BABY HAS STOPPED CRYING. SHE SIGHS IN RELIEF.

ARLENE

And that's the end of the story. You seem to have liked it, little one. When I was little, I liked it because I wanted a mother like that. I wanted someone who would do anything for me. I wanted a mother. Of course, Galadon does not give us what we want the way it's told in stories. But Galadon sent me Gwen. And since then I've never wanted for love in my life.

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(beat)

Little one, whatever happens, I promise you won't ever want for a mother the way I did.

ARLENE KISSES THE BABY'S FOREHEAD, THEN YAWNS.

ARLENE

It's still dark. I think it's best all of us try getting at least a few hours' sleep. Good night, little one.

END OF MINISODE.