

Tin Angel

by spiderwort

Tom Riddle's twisted origins through the eyes of his mother, his grandmother, and a young Muggle woman.

The title is a song by Joanie Mitchell from her album Clouds. The milieu, of course is JK Rowling's. They are both my idols, strong, talented women, unafraid to expose their deepest feelings in music, prose, or poetry.

Falling Angel

Chapter 1 of 1

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1. Falling Angel

Varnished weeds in window jars

Tarnished beads on tapestries

Kept in satin boxes are

Reflections of love's memories

Everything was in place. She had gathered some bits of finery to brighten the hovel...colored accents against the drab. The marsh ferns she'd picked, dyed, and dried, and placed sagging in a too wide jar in their only window; the tapestry she'd rescued from her mother's hope chest, daubed free of mildew with water and hung still damp to cover a stretch of rotting timber by her bed.

Her father and brother were out baiting Muggles in the village. She knew they wouldn't be home much before morning, as they carried a jeroboam of Firewhisky apiece and more hatred and personal venom than they knew what to do with.

She fingered the bottle in her apron pocket as she stared into the looking glass. Her image told her silently as it had from her childhood the same thing Morfin screeched daily, almost gaily: you are the ugliest creature that ever walked the earth.

She had pleaded with her father so many times to teach her how to do a Body Glamour and had been rebuffed every one.

"What you want with that paltry magic, wench? Trying to make yourself look better? Yer brother ner me care much one way er t'other about yer squint, so long as you can see enough to do the laundry and slap a meal together."

But she'd dogged his steps, offering to trim his stone-hard toenails, to harvest marsh weeds for a balm to ease his spattergroit, to chase down Nogtails for his favorite soup. She whined that the village women talked about her in their low, hating voices as she waited in line for their bread and meat, that the Muggle men kicked at her and made

signs with their fingers to ward her off. One angel-faced child, egged on by his friends, had opened his trousers and urinated down her skirt. At that last, he gave in.

"Filthy Muggles got no right to abuse a Gaunt like that, even though you are the ugliest creature to ever... oh, well. Nought much to a Glamour, really, 'cept you've gotter have a decent imagination..."

Imagination! Merope Gaunt had that and to spare. Fantasy was her constant and only companion. It comforted her with visions of a rat-free house, a clean kitchen, a father who cared, a sane and sober brother... and the love of a man, one man in particular, a god rather, disguised as a Muggle, whose name she dared not even think.

She'd first seen him in her mirror...with a cast of a childish Reveal-Your-True-Love Charm...and thought nothing more of it until she saw him in the flesh riding past the hovel one day on a fine gray hunter, his nose wrinkling in disgust as their eyes met. After that, she wrote out her dreams of them together with a stub of stolen pencil on the paper the village grocer wrapped her purchases in and kept the scraps like a journal in two lidded boxes she'd lined with bits of red satin she'd found in the village tip.

She listened carefully to her father's rambling lesson, and it wasn't long before she could cast a Glamour on herself that was easy to look at. It hid that wall-eyed squint the Muggles called the Evil Eye with the face of an almost pretty girl with clear skin and a healthy, shining head of hair.

She already knew how to make a simple love potion; all girls...magical and Muggle...did, but her dead mother's spell book told her that for the charm to last and last, it would require an additional ingredient: some personal essence of her god. The grimoire suggested blood or tears or...she blushed to think of it...male ejaculate. She knew she had no chance of drawing any of these willingly out of him. There was, however, one fluid that he would have for her in abundance.

She managed to collect it by simply placing herself in his path one morning, ungainly and wretched, as he rode by. His horse reared at her sudden appearance and, as she clutched at his boot, the expected look of loathing distorted his handsome face. He cleared his throat and spat at her, called her hag and freak and other words she didn't directly recognize but whose meanings were quite clear. She carefully preserved the spittle running down her cheek in a small phial she had in her apron and used it that evening to complete the philtre.

Now, she came out of the hovel and sat on an old chair, waiting in the one dress she had that wasn't gone to rags. She had carefully hand-scrubbed it the night before, fearing a Scourgify would be too harsh for its fine, worn threads.

It wasn't long before she heard his spirited horse snorting and trotting up the slope past the hedge that separated the house from the path. Often he had a female companion. Lately it had been the stiff-backed, yellow-haired Carla. But he was alone today. Carla was indisposed and would be for some time. She smiled to herself. A Loose Bowels Hex had seen to that.

The hoofbeats came nearer. She assumed the Glamour and sauntered out onto the path, working her hips the way she'd seen the village sluts do it. The motion stimulated some natural lubricity, and she felt a glow come over her quite unrelated to the quickening of her pulse.

She had timed her move perfectly. Again, the horse reared at her sudden appearance, and the god had to exert himself to the utmost to keep it from bolting.

"See here, wench, what do you mean by...?" He stopped, crop poised to strike her, but now uncertain. He was not seeing the ugly, skinny thing that lived in the hovel behind the hedge, but a nice-looking, buxom young girl with chestnut hair softly curling about her shoulders.

"I'm so sorry," said Merope, trembling at his closeness. "I didn't mean..."

"It's all right," he said, lowering his hand, mistaking the trembling for fear. "I say, are you from around here? I thought I knew all the village girls..."

Indeed he did. Since she'd first seen him ride by the hovel and felt that maddening tickling in her loins, she'd kept a close watch on his activities in her mirror, using a variant of the charm that first revealed him to her. She'd watched with straining, jealous eyes as he wooed various village girls in woodlands, barns, pub backrooms, cottage lofts, and once, the makeshift WC at the train station. She knew what he liked, none better. And now she, like all the others, could give it to him.

She glibly reeled off the spiel that she had practiced for months: that she was a cousin of the Gaunts, taking care of their house while they were visiting relatives in the south. As he swallowed that lie, she opined that he looked thirsty and offered him and his horse a drink from the well behind the hedge. He followed her avidly, accepting the potion-laced cup and never taking his eyes from hers.

It was so easy after that. As he came at her under the heady passion of Eros, she deliberately faded the Glamour out until, caught in the throes of practiced lust, he could drink in her every blemish: the concave, consumptive chest, the strabismus, the lank, greasy hair, the spotty complexion. But the potion did its work. He leapt upon her, as if she were the Venus every man yearned for, kissing her neck, her shoulders, her cheeks, her breasts, touching her everywhere he could reach at once, working his way slowly to the places she longed him to discover, the soft inner places where every woman was beautiful.

But her innate modesty overtook even her desperation, and she led him out of sight inside the house. He ignored the mattress which she had strewn with pungent herbs to ward off vermin, and backed her up to the nearest wall, pressing her into her mother's faded tapestry. The tarnished beadwork pricked at her skin, but the pain of it only fed her inner fire...

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The boy pulled himself by sheer force of will out of the trance, quivering with triumph and loathing. He had managed the complex Vision of Desire neatly and with no damage to his person. The circumstances of his parents' coupling left him at first horrified, then livid, then strangely calm.

He breathed deeply the sharp, chemical-laden air of the orphanage laundry room and gathered up the remnants of his experiment: the candle, the knife, the bloody handkerchief, the bowl, the love-knot from which he had cut tiny whiskers of hair for the potion.

How lucky that Matron, in a maudlin alcoholic haze, had saved his mother's meager effects to bequeath to him when he 'came of age.' He had almost told her to toss them out, but as his eyes raked the tawdry collection, one item made him stop her.

What's this, Mrs. Cole?

Celtic Love-Knot, Tom. Your mother must've had some Irish in her. It's simple enough to make. A lock of your own hair and your beau's, looped over and under, over and under... and round and round into a ring. It stiffens nicely when you pull it tight. And the ends flow into each other like that. There's words too... a spell... I knew them once... when I was young. See there... two colors of hair. I remember your ma was fair when she came to us. Must be your dad had dark hair, like your own. Ah, I remember the night. Near frozen she was...

He had taken the box from her...it was of a softish wood and lined with water-stained red cloth. He already knew the bald facts of his birth and his mother's death. He wanted more knowledge of his antecedents, particularly his father, and that love-knot would help him get it...

Now in the still quiet of early morning, he reflected on the Vision. It gave him a certain feeling of power to be able to see inside his mother's mind, to know her loneliness, her fear, her one all-consuming passion. She had wanted this man's love so badly and had been willing to humiliate herself to get it. And she...they...had created him, Tom Marvolo Riddle, out of his father's lust and his mother's need. There was small comfort in that. It revolted him rather.

He had expected the Vision to show him...what?...his father's feelings as well? He did not know...did not want to know...knew perhaps already. He felt a compulsion to meet the man who drove her to this...his Muggle father. What he would do beyond that, he was not sure.

But he was sure of one thing: long after their first night of lovemaking, after the Muggle had abandoned her, his mother held onto the sensation of him penetrating her, straining, thrusting, pounding, even as she walked the streets of London alone on a frigid night at the end of the year. She carried his child, likewise pounding, thrusting, straining, but to escape her beaten body, not enter it. Tom Riddle had a lonely, screaming birth, and she died without ever touching him.

