

Allura

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Dedication

For Troy. And for Catie-Scarlett. May you always remember your special power to create magic.

The Pink Pill

Her one act of defiance was to dye her hair red. Bright scarlet. The look suited Allura's pixie frame. However, the bathroom looked like a murder scene with the dye splattered on the shabby and cracked tiles. She had an unexpected image of the splashes of blood being the result of killing her foster-mother, the wicked witch, and escaping her bondage. Immediate guilt for such a thought made her quickly scrub the mess as if she was cleansing her mind. After all, she was the kind of person who couldn't even accidentally tread on an ant without feeling like a murderer.

Thinking of how the dye turned the water to red in the shower, it had looked like blood running down the drain and she shivered in foreboding. At the time of opening the packet, she was excited about the brilliant colour and no longer looking like a mouse. She wasn't so sure anymore.

"Allura, get out here girl. What's taking you so long?" her foster-mother Mrs Hunter yelled as she pounded on the door to the tiny bathroom.

"I'll just be a minute," Allura said calmly in response, ignoring the urgency. It would only be another menial task demanded of her in her life of slavery to an elderly, crotchety invalid. It could wait a few more seconds. Allura didn't know where she got her patience from, anyone else would have left this old lady years ago. She just couldn't.

Yet a new spirit of adventure was growing inside her. She felt a sense of wonder for an unknown future that had opened up and dreams of romance had flooded her system. *Maybe it's*

just hormones, she thought. She had read about them. Always with her face buried in a book, she had no experience with men. It wasn't like she was free to go on a date anyway. Putting her hair brush down with one last look in the antiquated mirror, she left wondering what reaction would await.

Aged eyes widened when Allura exited the bathroom.

“What have you done girl? You look ridiculous.” Mrs Hunter appeared fragile in her old age. She stood with apparent difficulty in her white night gown, her face all gaunt and covered in wrinkles. Yet her mean spirit was far from frail. It had not decayed with age, instead seeming to grow stronger as her body weakened. A disapproving scowl was drawn upon her ancient visage, her eyes cold and her crooked nose only completed the look. *She really is a wicked witch*, Allura thought.

“Why aren't you lying down?” she asked, putting on a brave smile. Taking an arm, Allura led the old lady back to her room. Pulling the blankets back and puffing up the pillows, she watched as Mrs Hunter groaned loudly as if getting into a position of rest was causing her pain, when the effort of angrily beating on the bathroom door had caused less. Allura was amused at the strange game and almost fond of the old lady's need for her attention.

Mrs Hunter continued her tirade.

“Nothing is going to make you attractive, you're too plain. I don't know what you were thinking. Do you want to look like a prostitute? You can't hide trash with glitter.”

These kinds of nasty words were not new to Allura's ears. The sinking feeling in her stomach and the pain in her heart caused by these slurs she had learned to soothe long ago. She

managed by retreating into her books and fantasy world. The constant tongue-lashing had never stopped Allura from living in her imagination and seeing magic in the mundane. She lived in a vibrant inner world of non-stop entertainment, which was handy considering the drudgery of her life. She was always free in her mind. This frustrated Mrs Hunter to no end, deprived of the satisfaction of seeing her cower. Mrs Hunter had no power there.

“Oh, I did it for fun. Do you remember that song you liked, Girls Just Want to Have Fun?” Allura laughed. That was a happy moment they had shared when Allura was thirteen. Mrs Hunter had surprised her by buying the single for herself. She didn’t know until then that even old ladies still have a little girl inside them who wants to play every now and then.

That was before Mrs Hunter lost her husband and her health, instead letting a grumpy old curmudgeon squash down any desire for light-hearted joy. Never a particularly sunny person herself, it was like she had turned into her husband - who had been even more miserable.

Grief does strange things to people. Each have their own way of mourning loss. Mrs Hunter had lost her faith in life and was clinging to Allura like a drowning soul. Strangely, Allura coped well with grace beyond her years. In her eyes this old lady had saved her, given her shelter and discipline that fed her with a determination for a better life.

Mrs Hunter suddenly smiled at the reminder of happier days. Her face lit up for a moment and then hardened.

“Get me my tablets, you’ve made me late to get to sleep,” she snapped, “and don’t think you can ever amount to anything

with your stupidity. Red hair of all things! I can't stand looking at you."

"Okay, I'll go and get them," Allura replied calmly, even though she suddenly felt a wave of anger sweep through her whole body. She felt like her chest was exploding, as if a monster inside was bursting free, shattering her heart.

Walking into the kitchen, she rummaged through the medicine cupboard and put together a concoction of pills, slamming the cupboard door closed. *Maybe I'll give the old witch a 'magic' pill tonight,* Allura thought. Picking up the largest tablet – a pink one – she held it in her clenched fist. *I hope this puts you out of your misery,* she thought.

Allura suddenly smiled at the image of Mrs Hunter swallowing the tablet and choking on it. *This will be interesting,* she giggled. She sighed, realising what she really wanted was a loving response. The old lady was not the sentimental type, words like "I love you" were never spoken. *Imagine hearing those words, what would that feel like,* she wondered. It was an elusive dream.

Taking the medicine and a glass of water on a tray and returning to the bedroom, Allura placed it next to the bed. Mrs Hunter took her time to swallow each tablet. Handing the empty glass of water to Allura, she looked at her in a moment of clarity, without the usual malicious glare.

"You've been good to me. Thank you," she whispered softly as drowsiness took hold.

Touched, Allura grasped onto the hopeful joy it brought her.

"You're welcome. Goodnight Mrs Hunter. I hope you sleep well," she said as she left the room. Allura was comforted

by the small kindness of a thank you. In her own small bed, with her favourite book, the pages dog-eared, spine broken and the cover torn, Allura fell asleep quickly.

The blaring alarm woke Allura in the morning. Usually she was awake before her alarm buzzed by Mrs Hunter yelling out for her. Allura always kept her door open. *Something must be wrong*, she thought. Walking towards the old lady's room with trepidation, she was horrified to find her unmoving and cold to the touch. *She can't be dead*, Allura thought in shock.

Allura was in Mrs Hunter's home sitting across the kitchen table from Mr Johnson, who had arrived unannounced. After making him a cup of tea, she was waiting for him to reveal the reason for his visit. He was an elderly man with bushy eyebrows that rose high on his face to reveal gentle, kind eyes. His jovial manner contrasted with his sharp, professional suit, all black and white.

"I'm sorry for your loss Miss Wilson. Heart failure, they said. Very sad. Mrs Hunter was your foster-mother?" he asked in a preamble. He already knew the answer.

"Yes. She took me in when I was 12," Allura said numbly as she was thinking about how she had cursed that tablet. She hadn't expected her to die. *How is that even possible? It's not!* she thought. *It was more likely her own bitter soul that killed her, because her heart had surely failed many years ago. The tablet had nothing to do with it,* she concluded.

Allura glanced up at Mr Johnson.

“I think I saw you at the funeral when Mr Hunter died,” she said.

He nodded.

“That’s right. I’m the family lawyer. I’ve known Mr and Mrs Hunter for a long time,” he replied. “Which brings me to the point of this visit.”

He pulled up onto the table a black briefcase, opened it with a click and pulled out a folder.

“I have here Mrs Hunter’s will. She has left you her entire estate.”

“But what about her family?” Allura gasped in surprise.

Mrs Hunter had a brother and sister, both social climbers and full of distaste for their older sister’s gruff husband and lowly profession. Allura had met them briefly and they both had made their disdain of her crystal clear too. Their antipathy towards their older sister was not very well hidden behind false smiles and pontifications about their church being the only saviour for the loss of her husband.

Mrs Hunter had taken Allura along after one of these church invitations. She walked out in the middle of the service with a huff when they were raising funds for a new jet plane for the minister. She angrily scoffed at such righteous hypocrisy of her siblings, remaining staunch to her own creed of minding her own business. Besides, her Christian duty was fulfilled taking in the homeless Allura. She angrily refused to speak to her brother and sister and their spoiled children since.

Not thinking her estate would be much, for the old had lady lived so frugally, Allura was not expecting any great riches.

However, it moved her to tears at the thought of her foster-mother's generosity. *Maybe she did love me after all*, Allura thought.

“Miss Wilson, the estate is quite considerable. I've calculated the life insurance, the shares and the house to a value of \$4,500,000”, Mr Johnson told her.

“Um, I don't understand. How could she have so much money? I thought this was public housing, not her house?” Allura asked incredulously.

The whole area looked like a government housing project full of square fibro boxes, a minor few stood out with neat gardens. Mrs Hunter had worked hard on her garden, instructing Allura what to do of course. Yet, the old lady had lived like she was poor. Allura, having come from nothing, felt rich merely having a stable roof over her head. Mrs Hunter had never been generous with anything other than the basics needed for survival. That included a block of chocolate to consume in one sitting on weekly movie nights. She loved those nights.

Yet, nothing had indicated to Allura that she was living with such a wealthy woman! Her mind was in disbelief. All she could think of was why Mrs Hunter didn't allow herself to enjoy her riches. *What a waste*, she marvelled.

“Mr Hunter made an investment in a start-up company; he was known to be a bit of a gambler. Well, it's now a global conglomerate. It made Mrs Hunter a wealthy woman after he died, yet she barely took an interest. I managed it for her, of course. The reinvestment and compounding over the years means you now inherit an extraordinary fortune. Though I expect you might receive some complaint from her relatives, I want to assure you this is a legally binding will made by Eleanora

Hunter when she was sound of mind. It cannot be contested at court, though they might try.”

“Oh, well they should have something. After all, they were her family,” she said without any hesitation.

Allura had quit school early to become Mrs Hunter’s full-time nurse. Since then she had never known anything as self-indulgent as a day off. Nevertheless she had never expected such a reward. It was beyond her wildest flights of fantasy.

“I’m not sure that is wise. They will most likely take it and despise you for it,” Mr Johnson said with his intimate knowledge of this particular family. He wouldn’t usually offer his personal opinions, however he felt strongly about this one. He found himself wanting to look out for her.

“We all have our ways of enjoying ourselves, I guess. Some seem to enjoy drinking in resentment like it is soda. Besides, acknowledging their bond as her closest relatives will make me feel better about accepting this money,” Allura said.

“Miss Wilson I will sort it out for you,” he said with surprise written all over his face. Looking at Allura, she had seemed a shy, quiet, and diminutive character when he first met her. The scarlet hair was a dramatic change. It was like a new fiery spirit had emerged from within her, refusing to be beaten down.

Yet the blazing shade of red in her thick hair greatly contrasted with her calm grey eyes. He was momentarily dazed. He wondered how long this money would take to corrupt such an innocent young woman, whether it would help her when all the sharks are drawn to wealth and naivety like a magnet. The

look in her eyes gave him pause. *Perhaps the sharks won't be ready for her*, he mused.

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