

## DESCENT OF THE WAYWARD SISTER

By Gabrielle Harbowy

It was an unfortunate and shameful predicament that led me to seek lodging with my estranged older brother. We were strangers raised by the same parents with more than a decade between us, like serial lodgers with only a house and a pair of kindly if distant landlords in common. I knew nothing of his secrets, nor he of mine.

His was a stately row house on a venerated downtown block. It was the sort of street along which young businessmen walk with ambitious longing, and ladies make a show of disembarking from their carriages so that other ladies might see them welcomed inside. I came to his doorstep in the evening, in the rain, with the glow of the streetlight forming a halo behind my bedraggled, dripping hair. My brother was a stern-looking man, but I was accustomed to charming my way into the hearts of stern-looking men. The words spilled past my lips: I confessed to him that a grave misunderstanding with a young gentleman

had ruined my station, and that I had nowhere else to go. Upon my repeated apologies, sobbed between solemn assertions that I would not inconvenience him and only needed a safe place for my reputation to convalesce in privacy, he took me in with a nod and a long-suffering sigh.

At once, he arranged for me the sorts of diversions appropriate for a lady: music lessons, and embroidery, and dancing. It was an unexpected kindness, perhaps evidence of how deeply he had been moved my plea. Or perhaps to keep me occupied while he was away all day, toiling at whatever labor provided him the financial resources for such a well-situated home. He did not discuss his work with me, and I did not ask. When he returned home in the evening, we dined in formal silence at opposite ends of a long, impersonal table. After coffee, he received callers and retreated to his study, leaving me once again on my own.

I rarely saw him. Still, hints of his secrets soon began to make themselves apparent. The servants – for he had several – were not at

sufficient ease with me to treat me as one of their number, as I would have preferred. However, they were unaccustomed to another presence pacing the halls by day, and forgot to guard their tongues. They whispered about him, about the house, about the visitors, about the need to keep a vigilant eye on me to prevent me from wandering where I shouldn't. There were doors, I learned, that were perpetually locked. To these rooms the house servants were forbidden entry, and strict punishment might befall any well-meaning girl who rearranged his books, or so much as shifted his papers.

A locked door, however, had never been a match for my curiosity. Indeed, I had made my livelihood upon the riches and secrets they shielded. Willpower and gratitude held me back for a full two days, but on my third day in residence I claimed headache in the middle of my piano lesson and sent the tutor away. It was, I thought, something a spoiled lady might often do, and indeed the nice gentleman seemed willing enough to escape my dreadful playing while presumably keeping his full

afternoon's fee. With the servants distracted by the afternoon bustle as they prepared for their master's return, my slender lock picks and I crept into every room on the upstairs floor, in search of a bit more background on my closest blood-relation.

He was quite a collector of books. Some were slim volumes, but most were old and weighty, with thick leather covers. They were most certainly of value simply due to their apparent age. The markings on many of the spines were in some sort of code of glyphs that made no sense to me, but I was no student of languages, having barely any schooling even in my own. Some of the books were illustrated: ink drawings of fantastical creatures the likes of which I had never seen. I paged carefully through several, but received no further enlightenment as to their purpose.

Soon enough I was bored with my brother's diversions, and was again craving some more active form of entertainment. The immaculate, well-appointed home was a lovely prison, and a self-imposed one, but after my more accustomed freedom I found it

confining nonetheless. I could not divert myself with physical pleasures, as was my inclination. I could not contrive a trip to market as an excuse to get out on my own for a bit, since the household staff took care of the shopping. I had run out of boring, book-filled rooms to explore, and even the thrill of stealing spirits from the bar in the library grew quickly old to me.

It had been kind of him to attempt to turn me into a lady of society, and within a matter of days I had learned enough of the protocol to put on an eager show of it when I was in his presence – it would have been ungrateful to do otherwise – but in truth I was not taking naturally to it. Needlepoint and music were tiresome to me, and the tutors he had called upon to educate me in the domestic arts were as dull and sour as old milk. I had been too long on my own, or perhaps I had simply seen too much of the lively underbelly of the world to be content sitting still. I entertained the notion that one of his companions might be lured away from the page and into livelier pursuits of the flesh.

But my brother made a point of not introducing me to his callers. At first, I thought perhaps he was taking me at my word – I had promised to be inconspicuous. Then I wondered if he might be ashamed of me, concerned that his association with me might mar his standing with his peers. That made me only more determined to meet them.

I should not have bothered. They were stuffy, distracted men, sallow of skin and nervous of disposition in that particular way that marks a scholar. They spoke to each other in low tones, in some archaic language whose syllables sounded as though they damaged the throat to produce. Where I had looked upon their introduction to the evening routine in hopes that it might signal at least a bit of excitement, to my disappointment, they were too lost in their own heads to even notice the charms my low neckline put on display. Whatever it was that they retreated to study, it lured them more convincingly than I could. And the servants were on their guard; when I lingered outside the door to listen, I was quickly shooed away.

I'd heard nothing of much import, anyway. "Soon," and "sacrifice," and "summoning" amidst more of that pretentious guttural grunting, the dry turning of pages, and heavy, anxious footfalls.

It was my fifth day of residence and I was pacing yet another despondent circuit through my brother's richly-appointed halls. So it was that I happened to be passing the cellar door just as a curiously plaintive cry issued from beyond it, quiet enough that had I not been just there, just then, the tread of feet upon the wooden floors or the constant bustle of sounds from the kitchen would have obscured it from my notice entirely. I paused and strained my ears, and in short order it came again. Human it was, without question.

It was quite conceivable that a maid had locked herself in while fetching some stores or other for the kitchen. And while it struck me as strange that the others might not have missed her if she had been trapped in the quiet gloom since breakfast time, I should not have been surprised that her cries had dropped to the desperate, weak wails of one

who has lost all hope of being heard. If the others thought her to be on some errand, I thought, they might think her simply delayed in town, not trapped below their feet.

I had not thought to investigate the lower level of the house, but now I hastened to the door, loosening from my up-swept hair two of the slender pins that had been the hallmark of my former trade. “I’m coming,” I called through the keyhole, “hold fast!” Thus saying, I turned my full attention to the lock. Like a proper maiden, it resisted for a token moment. But, upon further adept agitation of its slender hole, it relinquished its charms with smooth, willing finesse.

“Good girl,” I murmured to it. Pausing just long enough to give a fold to the doormat inside the top landing – and thus prevent the door from closing again and delaying the liberation of my panicked charge – I squinted my eyes and descended into the dim cellar, lifting my skirts to avoid a graceless fall down the unforgiving stone stairs. Candlelight flickered from around the corner, but the unseen lass had gone silent.



“Hello?” I called out. “You can come out now, darling. The door’s open.” Self-conscious for a moment at the thought of my brother’s response if he heard me address his maid in such a way, I squared my shoulders. I had never been of a standing to keep domestic

servants; in fact, I felt something of a rapport with the frightened girl. I myself was nearer to her station than to my brother's.

Only a desperate whimper answered me, echoing off the stone from around the bend. Carefully guarding my footing against the unseen, I started toward the cellar's only light and sound. "Oh, you needn't worry about bringing it all up in one go. I'm here now, to watch the door for—"

For truly, I had found the source of the pleading voice, and the sight before me surged a tight flush of heat through my bosom and a lightheaded tingle behind my disbelieving eyes.

The room was too large for the few flickering candles to reveal to me the true scope of it, but at its center was a massive stone table drawn about by a thick chalky circle on the floor. And on that table, limbs bound at the four corner points, the gentle creature I had assumed – which assumption might still be correct, I reminded myself – a scullery maid.

Blond, pale, and exquisitely curved with the

roundness of a youth spent sampling a fine larder's wares, she wore not a stitch. Her soft belly and ripe breasts gleamed in the light as if the whole of her body had been painstakingly brushed with oil. She glowed golden, such a beacon of beauty in the dark that for a stunned moment my eyes were blind to the features of her confinement: the thick iron manacles pulling at each dainty wrist and ankle, and the thicker, imposing leather-bound tome propped open as if to a particular gilded page between her parted thighs.

"Oh!" I exclaimed, shaking myself from my reverie with an embarrassed fluster. "Oh, my darling, hold fast. I will free you! Oh, what has my brother done?" Picks still at the ready, I approached her nearest wrist with all haste.

But no sooner did my fingers close over her fluttering pulse than her slippery arm lurched under my grasp, the clanking of her chain resounding loudly through the darkened stone chamber.

"No!" she cried. "You mustn't!" Her body writhed like a pale, sinuous serpent and a flush of blood darkened her cheeks. "Please,

miss,” she whispered, and I had never heard a voice so urgent or so sincere. “Please, that isn’t the release I need from you.”

So stunned at her words that I could barely hear them over the pulse pounding in my own ears, I took a bewildered step back, surveying the lass and her condition. “What, then?” I stammered.

She arched her back, elongating her torso and the twin gleaming globes of her bosom – ruby-capped and quite stiffened in the cool cellar air, I had to note. And as she relaxed her upper half with a tormented sigh, her lower quarters shifted with their own will, pleading with me in slow, firm circles I could not explain away as anything but wanton. The book, thicker than any stiff-backed tome I had seen in the upstairs libraries, was positioned *just so* between her wide-parted thighs. The raised texture of its embossed spine barely brushed the crux of her womanly center as she writhed. It was clearly the source of her torment, yet not sufficient to occasion her relief.

“Please, miss, it’s been tormenting me like

this for so long, miss. I just need some release. With your fingers, miss, or your dainty kisses, or I really don't care precisely what. Please, just a bit of release and then I'll be still like a good girl and hold the book again."

Her hips rocked all the while as she pleaded with me, a steady stream of words that no doubt would only have continued had I not stepped in toward her again and given her hope that I might grant her outlandish request: To leave her here, chained nude for some unspoken scholarly perversion, yet to effect upon this stranger caresses of the most intimate nature.

Yet, she was quite lovely. Breathtakingly so. Plump and soft and round in just the right proportions, and clearly desirous of me. Her hips moved with urgency, and her wide eyes and moistened, parted lips begged for attention. Her lust was consuming her, but it was genuine. I had never been one to shy away from the stirrings of lust. Though the circumstance was rather unusual, it was, truth be told, the very authenticity of it which stirred a tingling heat in my own loins that I

could not deny.

Her flesh was feverishly hot under my hands. I roamed her skin, tasting the glossy nectar that anointed her, sliding along each curve until my fingers plunged boldly into the velvet-soft valley of her cleft. I stroked and soothed her to one wave of bliss after another. Beautifully responsive, she was. Her shudders and sweet breathy cries became my sustenance, my air, until it seemed I lived only to draw her arousal higher, to tickle and rub and suckle in such ways as would reward me with more sighs, more moans, more eager trembles and stiff thrashes of her pristine flesh.

Pressure was building within me, too, and soon I could not deny my longing to free her, even just briefly, so that she could reciprocate the intimate soothings I had already suffered long days and nights without. Now with each touch I bestowed, I thought not of her pleasure, but of how desperately I longed to have those same touches gifted upon my own stiffened peaks; my moistened valley.

“Yes, yes, my darling,” I breathed as her

breath again grew labored and short, heaving her glorious bosom. Her cries had taken on the quality of words, nonsense words strung together in a language born of passionate abandon. Guttural, thick words that seemed to damage the throat in their utterance. I encouraged them, coaxed them, as if they spoke right to the knot of desire at my heated core.

And then, silence.

I looked up from her glistening body and followed her wide-eyed, hungry gaze.

It lurked in the shadows, a deeper region of black within a darkness that at first seemed broken only by the shifting absence of flickering candle-glow. I did not know how long it had been watching us, but now it moved forward and its form demanded attention. It was massive, with hide an inky black that gleamed green in the candlelight; a shift of color I would not have predicted from the ink drawings I had spied in the study. There were too many thick limbs in motion for my dazed mind to accurately count, and extra appendages, as well: throbbing, glistening

appendages that spoke to the hulking creature's desire, if not to its gender. I should perhaps have been afraid of the creature, but I was not generally inclined to be the fearful sort, and my new lover's own lack of fear only reinforced my own. The hum of my own need dominated in my veins and I could only think of opportunity – at last, opportunity! – not consequence.

The maid on the altar – for that was surely what the stone table was – strained at her bonds. “It's here!” her breathy whisper announced, though she could spare no glance toward me. I took no offense at her inattention – the pulsing, veined tips of a particular trio of protrusions had me quite transfixed, as well. I so dearly needed the release I had just bestowed, was so intoxicated with desire, I could think of nothing beyond putting those tips to their obvious uses.

The thing stepped forth from the shadows, gliding as if through the murk of molten secrets. Beneath my skirts, my own molten secrets begged for attention.

“Do you think, darling,” I whispered back

slowly, blindly reaching behind me and patting the stone upon which she was spread, “that there’s room enough up here for two?”

Includes *Into The Darkness* by Galen Dara  
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