

Cavalcade Story Entry

Title: Spitting Image

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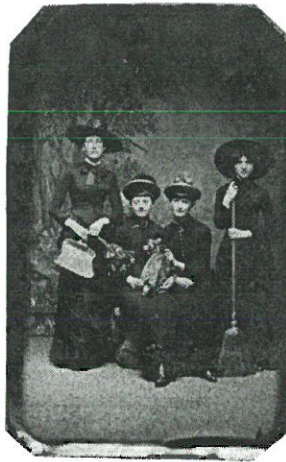
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Avenly Hansen

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Spitting Image: An excerpt of a strange dream



“Stop that!” She hissed at the twins, who, for reasons unfathomable had opted to bring their infernal bird to the sitting. Ari only looked up confused, sounding hurt.

“Stop doing what?”

“Make him hold still! The photograph, it won’t turn out right!”

Chrysie looked delighted to hear this particular frustration, she eased back with a contented smile murmuring softly “Avistice”. At Chrysie’s strange utterance the bird stilled, now almost statue like. Or dead, which would be a malicious hope, but in her mind a great relief. Chrysie looked up now too, while simultaneously patting Ari’s hand as she moved her arm to better secure the petrified perpetrator, “All is well off now.”

It was true enough a thing to say, but she’d only done it to upset me further, with a resigned sigh I brought my attention forward, allowing the photographer to proceed. Verity had stood silent all the while. She had no questions to ask, but at a glance I could see a smile in her eyes that did not match the firm set of her lips. She was suppressing laughter, something very few would ever expect such a somber smirk to mean.

There was a flash, I blinked rapidly in the afterward and released myself from my assumed pose. Glaring at the two demure girls as they remained in their seats, quickly engaging in excited prattle as their pet seemed to thaw out of the strange stupor, “The two of you are absolutely insufferable,” I declared. Then I promptly left to hold my dignity, and to save myself from the cruel judgement I’d just served.

“Sage!”, Verity called at my retreating back. “Learn patience, before you are called to teach it.”

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Sage, Chrysanthemum, Arcadia, and Verity; these women were the legend that ruined my life. Now, the regular passerby probably isn't too educated on how the genealogy of a witch coven works, but when you happen to *be* a witch, they lay down the whole confusing mess early on. For witches, it didn't matter who you were directly related too, you draw from the whole magic gene pool. This fact is especially important for my family. Whatever blood voo-doo the famous four founders did, it linked their powers to the bloodline, so each one of us in the coven had the potential to instantly become an expert of the trades. Sage was called the “truth of age”, a seer, who retained her youth; Chrysanthemum, the spell weaver, and master of words had no need for lengthy incantations to do impossible things, it took her a single word, and at most, maybe a sentence; her twin Arcadia, “the one whom wonder calls”, was the most renowned herb-witch and beast tamer of any era; and the oldest of those sisters was Verity, the “truth of mind”, she didn't *read* thoughts, she *saw* them, like you would a movie on fast forward, some say she could even taste an intention from a mile away.

Mom hung the old photo in the hall at the top of the stair case so you'd see going up the stairs. When I was younger I liked to try and guess what they were thinking as the photo had been taken, as time passed I started to hear the whispers behind my back "The old woman was right, she's the spitting image...", "... never thought I'd live to see a true reincarnate" ... "now I see why her mother named her Vanity, it's like she's a mirror, of course, Mirror wouldn't have much sounded like a name, it's fortunate she such a pretty little thing...". A house full of women, clucking like hens, all suffering from varying degrees of pretentious self-righteousness. I hated that photograph, every time I crossed it's path I felt like it was mocking me *can't you tell, girl, do you not see your own face?* As hard as I tried, I honestly couldn't. I didn't see myself in any of them. I saw dark eyes and dark hair on a fair skinned face, but that didn't exactly qualify as a reflection.

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Hmmph. Patience. She thought because she was eldest she could preach virtues to us like we were still children. I'd come for the photo. I didn't have to stay. I didn't have to suffer through mother coddling her perfect twins and addressing Verity like she was already head of house. I was tired of being the coven's late bloomer. I knew what they really thought. They believed I wasn't even a witch. Ridiculous. Such things don't happen. They just couldn't... Doubtful thoughts were never far. I could feel it closing in on me, my head started pounding, and I knew I was going to cry. I ran for my old room. I didn't have to stay. I didn't need to be here. So why wasn't I leaving?

I tried to slip through the door quietly, but the hinges creaked. Traitorous hinges. I collapsed on the made bed. The room was well kept, and for that I felt just a little better. I didn't know if my mother had had things tidied in regard for me, for her reputation, or because of her innate

hatred of filth. The tears came rather violently and I was grateful then, for thick walls on every side. I had never once shown propensity for any form of magic, yet I could feel the pull of expectation still. I felt so very tired, trying to feel significant in this place was like racing with leaden legs. So, as the suppressed sobs racked my body I fell asleep.

Unfortunately, when I slept I dreamed. And always when I awoke, the dreams drifted away like smoke, but this time was different. I'd seen a girl with hate filled eyes staring at a photograph of, well, me and my sisters, and very suddenly I was in the photograph meeting her gaze. The images were abrupt and confusing I felt the push and pull of forward and backward movement. And I remembered each detail. When I opened my eyes, I was not alone. Awake I saw the girl, but the hate was gone from her eyes. My mother sat at the foot of the bed, flipping idly a leather-bound book with worn, tattered pages. My lids were crusted from salty tears.

"Mama?" My voice sounded deep and scratchy from sleep and sorrow.

"Patience truly pays, doesn't it my lovely? Patience is the truth of age."

I was confused, my mind a muddled mess from all I had felt that day, but still I murmured, "I was dreaming mama, it was a strange dream."

Mama chuckled, "Does strangeness make something less real? Visions are always strange, and often terrible. You would come crying nearly every night from nightmares."

One word had struck me, "Visions?"

"Darling, I have been telling you, all of you, since the days you were born, that you are special. After all, you're my daughters, and not one of my gifts will go to waste, not one of my children would be denied their proper inheritance. I have strange dreams too my child, and it is

such a dream that compelled me to lift you from that life among mortals you'd built for yourself. I know you were happy darling, but you needed to be home for this."

Things were gaining almost poignant clarity, "I'm a seer. I'm a seer... like you!" I felt ecstatic bubbles of joy and relief wash through me. So many years had passed, I'd had to endure so long before my flighty escape to the city. The hope of belonging, of being able to claim that mantle was intoxicating. I was abruptly plagued with suspicion and distrust. There was something she wasn't telling me... "There's a cost to this, I know it." It was only a whisper, and her wizened ears were keenly able of hearing. A surprise really.

*"Lovely, I've never been **just** a seer." I thought back to the private lessons mother had given when the others were younger, I had thought it for supervision more than anything, but my senses were better with me now.*

"All of them?" it was an impossible thing, this much I knew from my learnings in witchcraft. Then I understood. "Blood magic, you were born with blood magic." I was horrified, and I finally understood why she'd called me home. The photograph was a pretense. "you're going to die, aren't you?" my voice was broken to my ears.

"It's only one death child, I will live on through you, my lovely daughters, and I will live again in more than memory. It is simply the way of things. Impossible has always had a price."

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I'd been standing in front of the photograph longer than I thought. Mom had come to stand behind me. I sighed, "I don't understand what they're all talking about."

"Oh Vanity, did no one tell you about their mother?"

