

When Dreams Come True

by Cerrid Wynn

This is my story. Perhaps it is not the most catching or interesting way to begin, but it is the truth. University turned out to be rather dull for me. It was not the grand adventure my parents and teachers had promised. My time was filled with books, classes, and when I could manage my precious joy of painting. The time I spent with other people was empty. Most of my peers knew me as likeable, outgoing, and quick to laugh. None of them knew much beyond that. None of them knew the emptiness my bravado covered. I moved through life a pale shadow of a being. In the mornings I was afraid when I went into the bathroom to gaze into the mirror I would find no reflection staring back at me, that I had finally become as transparent and invisible as I felt.

The only joy I felt was when I painted. I painted creatures, fantastical land-scapes, people... Acquaintances who saw my paintings told me I should sell them, that I would make a great deal of money with my talent, but I couldn't. Each painting was a piece of my soul, a small piece that filled the void within me, and where I did not mind giving my work away as gifts, somehow the thought of selling them seemed like the worst and lowest form of prostitution imaginable. I always graciously smiled at the compliments but I could not fathom selling those paintings. Every landscape was a pivotal place, every creature, every person I painted had their own story, their own history, and they were more real to me than the people who surrounded me in every day life. The world I created in my paintings was more real than the one I walked and moved through. I often went to bed at night after a little time in my make-shift studio wondering if I was crazy, or if I had simply been born into the wrong life, that somehow some great cosmic practical joke was being played on me and I would awake to find myself in a place that I really belonged. I was fearfully hopeful that I would go through my life unknown and insignificant.

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One day I finished a class early, and a group of people I sometimes went to the cafe with invited me for a cup of cappuccino. I laughed about how busy I was, and made excuses for the amount of work I had to do. The truth was my work was caught up, but it was my studio I longed for. It had become a drug, an addiction. One of my closer friends from the group, Leigha, made her excuses as well and I found myself walking side by side with her even though my dorm was in the opposite direction of hers. I was irritated at the intrusion, but said nothing.

After we got a good distance from the crowd she finally spoke. "Charlotte, I found something yesterday that I think you might be interested in. There's an antique shop that opened up and they have an old fashioned easle. It would be great for your studio. The owner is looking to commission a painting. I thought maybe you could make a trade." Her brunette curls bounced over her shoulders as we walked and her green eyes looked over at my face hopefully. "I know you don't like the idea of 'selling' your work, but..." she trailed off.

I knit my eyebrows in a frown. No I didn't like the idea, but the little table easle I was using was getting rather annoying. A full size stand-up easle would make things much easier for me. Perhaps a commissioned painting for some supplies wouldn't be a bad idea, depending on the type of subject matter the woman wanted. "Where's it at?" I asked.

"Just around the corner," Leigha replied. "I'll show you."

She led the way to the dusty shop. It was new having just opened up, but it didn't look like it at first glance. The building itself looked and felt like an antique. The dust that seemed inches thick on the wares there added to the feel of the place. An old copper bell chimed above our heads as we entered the shop, and dust motes floated lazily in the sunlight that slanted in the dusty windows. A surprisingly young

and collected looking woman ducked out from some old western style swinging saloon doors.

"Hello Liegha," she said crisply. "Is this the friend you were telling me about?"

"Yeah," Liegha said letting her jade gaze drop to the floor to study the patterns in the dust her shuffling feet made.

The woman looked over me, and I felt like shrinking back into a corner. "You're just as Liegha described. Though I can't remember what she said your name was."

"Charlotte," I replied weekly. I estimated the woman's age to be somewhere in her late 20's. She had golden blonde hair done up in a bun, a smart black business jacket and skirt, and a white blouse. Her feet were covered with sensible black pumps and a pair of black rimmed glasses perched on the tip of her nose giving her the appearance of a school marm made before her time. It was strange how much she resembled an older version of myself. Anyone could have guessed her to be a cousin of mine and I would have trouble disagreeing that they might be right.

"Charlotte," the woman repeated letting my name roll off her tongue like a newly acquired foreign word. "That's right. I'm Chayna. This is my shop. Liegha said you might be interested in the easle, perhaps some of my older Marten Sable brushes. I would usually charge a pretty penny for those items. Those types of antiques are difficult to come by, but I need a piece of work, and I need it done soon. I would be willing to part with the brushes, the easle, and whatever other supplies you might think necessary to finish the piece that I require. Is that acceptable?"

I caught Liegha slinking towards the door out of the corner of my eye. "See ya' later Liegha," I called to her to let her know I didn't

mind her leaving.

"Yeah catch ya' later," she called back and dove towards the door. I frowned wondering what warranted her strange behavior. I turned my attention back to Chayna. "I suppose that depends on the subject matter you want me to paint. I usually paint fantasy type land-scapes and characters. If you're needing a serious portrait I'm probably not the person for the job."

"Honest. Good, then come with me. I like someone with a business attitude who is not so desperate to acquire something they would claim to do something they might not be able to."

She turned and walked as she talked back towards the old swinging saloon doors. I followed her through them and was confronted with a very modern looking, clean office. Everything was meticulously clean and organized in contrast to the cluttered dusty store-front. Chayna must have noticed my surprise. "The clutter out front adds a bit of ambience. Most people expect antique stores to be in a bit of disarray and to feel old."

I noticed the easle in the corner immediately. It was indeed old, probably a good 40 or so years old, but still seemed functional. A small can of old wooden handle paint brushes and marten bristles sat on the corner of her desk. My hands longed to reach out and feel each one of them in my hand, to run my fingers through the delicate bristles. A small smile played at the corner of Chayna's pink lips as she watched me. Her blue eyes pierced like daggers of ice. She opened one of the black metal drawers on her desk and pulled out a photograph. I tensed, afraid that I would be asked to paint a modern day portrait. I hated commissioned works. They made me feel so limited and contrived.

When she passed the photograph to me I was stunned. "This painting was destroyed in a fire several years ago," she explained as

I looked at the photo. It was of a strikingly handsome man. The old cliché of tall, dark, and handsome came to mind. He was staring into a mirror right back at the person who had done the portrait. As I looked I felt a familiarity there... I knew this man... I knew him intimately. He had crawled into my heart and soul long before I had ever laid eyes on him and he lingered there simply waiting to be recognized.

"Striking isn't it?" Chayna's voice cut across my thoughts.

"Yes," I muttered in an almost unintelligible response. I scrutinized the photo of the painting further to look at the gilding on the edge of the mirror. "This mirror isn't like any I've ever seen," I said.

"Mmm... yes that is the one thing oddly that did survive the fire. It's made of a heavy lead glass. Rumor has it that the reflective surface is actually created from silver, but I've not taken the time to confirm that or have it appraised. I seriously doubt it though. The mirror is considerably light to stand up to most of the rumors about it..."

"Rumors?" I interjected.

"Yes... rumors that the thing is gilded in real gold, the mirrored part is silver, and it's haunted, or cursed, or some other such whimsical nonsense. I can show it to you. I'd even be willing to give it to you if you think you'll need it to duplicate the painting. I don't mind. No one's been interested in purchasing it."

"Yes I think I'd like to see it," I replied.

She exited the saloon doors again and I followed her, secretly wondering if those were for sale also. As we approached the mirror I gasped. It was utterly lovely. I traced the roses and vines that ran along the edges lovingly. So much artistry and attention to detail had gone into just the frame. Each rose and vine stood out in relief down

to the tiny little thorns up close to the blooms. It looked as if someone had woven live rose vines together and dipped them in the gilding. I looked down at the photograph in my hand at the man again, dressed smartly in a black uniform of some kind... his gaze... his gaze was a living thing itself. It made me frightened and secure all at the same time. "I'll do it," I whispered.

Chayna smiled to herself, and released a relieved sigh. "Thank you," she said. "I was hoping you would. Feel free to browse the store and see if there are any other supplies you might need. I'll have the mirror, the easle, and the brushes delivered to your dorm if you'll give me the address."

I gave Chayna the necessary information and hurried home with the photograph in my hand. I rushed to my studio to make room for the easle, and to find a place to hang the mirror on the wall. I could not wait to begin working.

The phone rang and I went to see who it was. "'Llo Charlotte," Leigha said on the other end. "Are you going to do the painting for her?"

"Yes," I replied excitedly. I felt as exuberant for once, as I was acting. "Thank you Liegha."

She sighed. "Thank me later," she replied and hung up.

I could not figure out her odd behavior.

I eagerly worked on my studio. I cleared a space for the large easle and set up my small table easle with a smaller canvas. I thought to make a small copy of the painting for myself as well. I cleared a spot on my gallery wall so that each and every one of my other paintings would circle about it, and the beautiful antique mirror would hang on the opposite wall to reflect them back. I studied the photograph

impatiently, planning out the palette and the brushes necessary, each stroke, each blending technique. I longed for it... and it almost seemed the man in the painting was smiling in anticipation as well.

Finally a knock sounded on the door, and I hurried the delivery boy in and out of my dorm room with the precious packages, breathing a small prayer of thanks that my room was only on the second floor. I quickly tipped him, and worked to unwrap packages and set up. The large easle was easy to manage, and I quickly got a large canvas set up on it. I pulled out my palette and made ready my chosen colors. I spilled out the can of antique brushes, feeling their texture, but deciding to use my own modern and familiar brushes. They had become as intimate to me as family and I was not about to abandon them for collector's items. Something on the carpet beneath where I dumped out the can of brushes glistened. I picked it up to examine it, and found a small gold engraved pocket watch. It had intricate scroll work on the case, and upon opening it the inscription read "My love for you is timeless." 'How terribly romantic,' I thought. It was only upon a closer look at the photograph that I noticed something in the right hand of the reflection of the man, and I was not surprised to find out it was the self same pocket watch I held.

I chose not to hang the mirror, instead using it to study as I painted both Chayna's portrait and my own copy. As I painted both paintings I made the man real in my mind, imagining his story, and even going so far as to delve into childish fatasies of the knight in shining armor that would come to take me away from this void I called a life. It was very late as I finished, exhausted and ready for bed... I left both paintings to dry, and slipped into a quiet four hour coma. It was the most restful sleep I had in some time.

The next morning when I awoke I dressed and went to my studio. I hung the smaller of the two paintings on the wall... satisfied at the way it blended in with the fantastical world I had created in my

mind. He may have been a real person at one point in time, but he fit so well with the general theme of my paintings. The only subject matter was the man and the mirror, and the way it had been painted it almost seemed to draw the person viewing it in as the third corner of the triangle... making the viewer part of the subject matter as well. I only wished that I could take credit for the creative license used in the original creation. I must have magnified and scanned the photo numerous times, but a signature was nowhere to be found anywhere on the portrait. I thought that odd. Instead of putting any credit to myself on the front of either portrait copy I had instead decided to put an inscription on the back that simply read, "Duplicated by Charlotte Hanson".

Chayna's painting I wrapped up in parchment, tied with twine and made ready to deliver to her. I left the mirror lying on the table, unable to take the time to hang it on the opposite wall from my paintings. I took it directly to her shop and walked in. AS the copper bell chimed above my head she appeared. looking much the same as she had the day before.

"You've finished already?!" She asked shocked.

I nodded in excitement. "I think you'll be quite pleased. I was able to get everything down to the slightest detail, including the pocket watch he's holding. The only thing I was confused by is the lack of a signature on the painting."

Chayna shook her head and motioned for me to follow her to her office. As she headed that way with me in tow she said, "No one knows who did the original painting. Some speculate the original artist may have been Rembrandt, but no one really knows for sure. Unfortunately the original was destroyed before it could be authenticated or dated. So tragic."

I stopped suddenly, hugging the portrait to me. "Why did you want

me to replicate it? This isn't going to be passed off as a forgery is it?" Ideas began swirling around my head about being caught up in an international painting forgery ring.

"No of course not. The insurance claim has already determined that the original painting was destroyed, it would be widely known that anything else would have to be a replica. No I want the painting for my own personal collection. It was always one of my favorites, and I was heart broken when it was destroyed." We ducked through the swinging saloon doors and I laid the wrapped portrait on her desk. She unwrapped it slowly with trembling fingers, looking hopeful and fearful at the same time. The photograph fell out onto the floor. I'd forgotten I'd put it in the package with the painting. As the parchment paper came away from the freshly painted canvas she gasped.

"Oh, Charlotte! It's wonderful! How can I ever thank you?"

"No need," I replied. "The easle, the brushes, and the mirror are thanks enough. I have to be going to class if you're pleased with the painting then."

"I am. Thank you so very much. I plan to hang it above my desk."

I left the shop feeling very good. I breezed through my classes, looking out the window and daydreaming. I could not wait to be home, though I had no plans to paint at all that evening. I wanted to hang the mirror and just gaze upon my work, before continuing with the onslaught of homework I'd received from my classes that day.

Finally at home I set my things down carelessly on the couch and rushed into my studio, digging through my small tool box for a hammer and a nail. I went to work locating a stud and driving the nail. The mirror seemed light as a feather as I lifted it into place. I stood back to look at the mirror and the portrait behind me caught

my eye. The man's smile seemed satisfied, and as I turned around to look at the portrait something strange caught my eye. The mirror... the mirror in the painting was reflecting back the mirror behind me. I had not painted the portrait with any kind of reflective material... but there it was... clear as day... the infinite tunnel of two mirrors reflecting each other back. The world faded out at the edges, focusing in on the vibrant world that my gallery of paintings comprised and then fading into the darkness surrounding the man standing in front of the mirror before me... standing on legs that I never painted... and tucking a pocket watch into an interior breast pocket that I had not known was in his jacket.

"Hello Charlotte," he said to me as naturally as if he had known me my whole life... as if everything I had ever done, every breath I had ever drawn had led me to this meeting with him.

I stood and stared at him, at the mirror and the darkness around me. A small candle burned behind me where it would not reflect in the mirror. My world was here, the world that I existed in, was gone. All that was left was him, the mirror, myself... as it had seemed in the painting. Three corners of a triangle complete... the mirror being the apex that brought the rest together. I stood transfixed, unable to speak. I had often wondered if I would wake to find myself in the life to which I belonged and it seemed I finally had.

"Are you quite all right, Charlotte?" the man asked seeming concerned. "I know this transition may seem a bit of a shock to you, but I have been waiting for an artist of your talent to open my world back up once again. I thought for sure the fire had destroyed any hope of ever merging these two planes of existence once more.

"I'm fine," I replied... quite startled with how natural I sounded given the circumstances. "Who are you again?"

"I suppose Chayna didn't tell you my name. Silly girl. She always

was a bit jealous, which is why the transition never worked for her. My name is Desmond Delacroix... but Desmond will do fine. Now... shall we go out and experience the wonderful places you have created?"

I was an avid fantasy/sci-fi reader... and I knew by all rights I should be resisting the reality of this situation, questioning whether or not I was dreaming and all of that normal, logical programming that human nature often dictates. Strangely though... this... this fluke of events seemed more real to me than anything that had ever happened in my life, and it seemed simply natural to take it in stride. "I would love nothing more," I replied. He offered his arm and I took it.

I spent days with Desmond. We rode out and saw the silver spires, the ice fields, the deserts, the mountains... all of the wild creatures, that until this point I had only had window to view through my paintings and sheer imagination. They were magnificent. The unicorns and gryphons, dragons and other fantastical creatures that were unrivaled by mankind's normal myths and legends. And the nights... oh the nights. My nights were spent in ballrooms and at feasts... and afterwards in Desmond's arms. The memory still leaves a tingle on my skin, and the thought still stirs the memory of the scent of the exotic flowers that drifted in the air.

Desmond was a kind and gentle host, eager to laugh, eager to evoke a smile from me. But the old adage that nothing good lasts forever is not without it's basis.

One afternoon after riding about in my favorite field of wildflowers, Desmond and I sat upon a hill overlooking a stream. Since I had been here the urge to pant was almost forgotten, but it began tickling at the back of my brain, and soon raised a cacophony within my spirit that could not be ignored. I asked Desmond casually how I

might return.

"Why would you want to return, Charlotte?" he asked looking puzzled.

I sat weaving daisy chains as we spoke, "I want so much to paint. I have so many new ideas, so many fresh things that long to be put down on canvas."

"You can't go back," he replied flatly.

My fingers stopped, I looked up and studied him closely. "What do you mean I can't go back?"

"I believe there's very little room for misunderstanding there. I can not allow you to go back."

"Why in the world not?"

"My dear, sweet, Charlotte aren't you happy here?"

"Yes, but I can't stay here forever. I have responsibilities... a life..."

"If you call that a life. Here you have everything you dreamed of. How else should you possibly want things to be?"

I felt like a blind person that was working dilligently to weave a net, and now found themselves caught in it. "I have to return Desmond. I can't stay here."

"I never explained much about the transition to you did I?"

I was suspicious of the sudden shift in conversation, but decided to play along simply to see where it would lead. "No... you haven't."

"The transition is a funny thing. I suppose you've determined that my painting, and the mirror are elements that facilitate it... but the catalyst Charlotte, is the viewer... you. You're dreams and desires, they way you perceived me when you saw the photograph to begin with began weaving itself into the transition. Often if the transition can't be completed it manifests in simple dreams, rather than becoming a a real occurrence such as you have experienced. I am a living breathing being with my own individuality, but it is the viewer that gives me purpose in this existence. While you painted the replica of the original painting, your desires, your longings became that much more ingrained into the transition with every single brush stroke. The environment to help me fulfill those longings and desires for you is something you already created in the work you so valiantly displayed around the painting that you did of me."

We sat in silence for a moment, I waited for him to continue, but he did not. "And the relevance that has to me staying or leaving is?"

"Oh Charlotte, you are playing coy. You wanted me to take you away from your hollow existence, to a place you felt more real. You purposed me to be your knight in shining armor... or so the thought went as you painted. I have done that. That is my purpose. Allowing you to return would be contradictory to that."

I felt the blood drain from my face. I had unwittingly created for myself a prison, and my warden was someone pleasant, dark, and mysterious... but I knew... I remembered my original impression of the photo as well. Something tingled at the back of my mind... for as much as I felt I knew this man intimately when I first saw the photograph there were warning alarms that had rung with me too... but they had been quite obscured by my fascination. "Desmond keeping me here forever will make me no happier than I was with my other existence either."

"A man can become quite volatile if deprived of his purpose." The

tone of his voice was casual, and he studied a flower at his feet as he said it... but I did not miss the warning there.

"Are you threatening me?"

"Charlotte, don't be silly. Of course not. I'm simply making an observation"

"I think I'd like to go back to the keep now."

We rode back and I sat deep in thought the entire way. It was a fine pickle I'd found myself in... and I wondered how I would get myself back out. I knew what I had to do if I did, and it would be no easy thing.

After all was dark, the feasting and the dancing were done... after I was almost certain that Desmond must be asleep... I began my long trek through marble halls searching for that small dark room that contained the mirror. It took me hours to find. I opened the door quietly and stepped inside. There hung the mirror, seemingly floating in nothingness, and a single candle burned in a sconce on the wall behind me. I was not certain how I would be able to get back. I simply knew I had to. I heard footsteps beyond the door and my breath caught. They paused, and the sound of the door latch raked across my eardrums as if it had been played through a megaphone. I became desperate. I gazed at the mirror longing in my mind to see the reflection of my studio. faintly in the mirror that infinite tunnel of two mirrors reflecting one another formed. The door latch finished lifting and the door started swinging inwards. Desmond stood in the entry... a sword in hand... an angry and hurt cast to his gorgeous eyes. He stepped into the room and the reflection in the mirror grew stronger. "Charlotte, No! You can not leave!"

But he was too late. I found myself standing in my studio staring at a

miniature version of the mirror in the painting. Desmond looked as he did during the transition back, with sword in hand, and my eyes were amazed to think that it seemed he moved in two dimensional form on the canvas. I turned around and quickly removed the mirror from the wall and turned it around. As I looked over my shoulder I was relieved to see that Desmond was as I had painted him... the same smile... pocket watch in hand... but it was the look in his eyes... as I looked one moment they seemed pleading, the next hurt and angry. I walked away. I knew what I had to do.

I walked to my computer and grabbed my digital camera and began photographing each one of my paintings. I worked long into the morning on the e-bay postings, putting each one up for auction. Interestingly enough my phone rang half way through the process.

"Hello, Charlotte," Leigha said on the other end of the line sounding frightened and weary. "How've you been?"

"You don't sound so good," I replied ignoring her question.

"Have you had anything wierd happen lately?" She asked sounding a bit nervous.

"A few things, yes. Why do you ask?"

"Ever since I saw that photo... I've been having these dreams... The man in the photo... he chases me. It's so very frightening. Belinda saw the photo too and she says she's been having dreams... but... hers are... romantic and pleasant. I just wondered if maybe... well I know it sounds really dumb... but what about you?"

"I've had my share of strange dreams too." It was simple enough. It had been very real to me. I know what had happened was as real as everything around me... but I had no problems letting others believe that it was nothing more than dreams... because real occurence or

not... that was exactly what it had been... a compilation of my dreams.

"I think the photo must have some kind of curse or something on it. I don't usually believe in that nonsense," Leigha said sounding skeptical, "but I don't know how else to explain it. Anyway. I've got to go. Call me if you need to talk would you?"

"I'll call you tomorrow evening." I knew her request was more because she needed to talk, and nothing to do with whether or not I needed to. I finished posting all of my paintings up for auction around three in the morning, including the painting of Desmond.

It was the first to sell. It was odd selling my work off. At first it felt unnatural, and wrong... but I began wonderful new paintings... and the money I was making bought me nicer supplies. It was as if by releasing the old... I made room for my creative font to flow more freely... as if I had removed my stagnation... and life became more real to me. The people around me... seemed to have more depth.

I found out soon after the painting of Desmond sold that Chayna's antique shop caught fire. Both her painting and the photograph were destroyed, a fact that she lamented to me on the phone. I never told her of the second painting, or that it had been sold.

I still often have dreams of Desmond. In some he is angry with me... in others he is the gracious host and love I came to know. I kept the mirror, since I did not want to chance it coming into the company of the painting again, and occasionally I catch a glimpse of a guttering candle or the hint of grey eyes over my shoulder, and I smile to myself. Desmond watches over me in my dreams... and I remember him as I move about in my life. It is a fair compromise... some dreams aren't meant to come true.

