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The Vourah's Price

Pearl elbow-crutched through the pruned territory guarded with sky-high varnished stone walls, knee cemented in plaster cast, soles of her feet crunched the dewed turf strewn with half-eaten pomegranates. Fireflies danced along the hymns of the gentle draft, the expansive ground bathed in moonlight. Forsythia and Dogwood pillared in parallel lines. She trespassed for a reason. Flynn's scent: a blend of oak moss and amber infiltrated the wind; amplified as she gravitated toward the center. His aroma sparked a belief, "Flynn's finally awake!" Pearl's hope soared as she peddled in quick paces. She neared a clearing that had a mirror rooted on the lawn, rippled when her fingertips skimmed the surface—a silver pond. Never had she encountered a pool that reflected everything in a pristine image. It captured the shrubs, the fireflies, the moon, and even herself in a clear snapshot.



Caught in a reverie of admiring the upside-down view of the natural world, Pearl's gaze fell on a figure imprinted within the pond's frame. Behind her there he was, Flynn! White shirt tucked in beige harem, gold bracelets dangled on his wrists. His unkempt charcoal black hair grazed his shoulders as the wind teased the countless strands. Though, there was something eerie about him. His eyes sunken in dark holes, pupils glimmered gold—an entity who stole Flynn's face.

"You came looking for him." The creature read her mind. Flynn being mentioned in third person chipped off her hope. "He's to be put down in a few days, isn't he? The accident wouldn't have happened if ..." It knew about the accident, the nasty argument prior to the brutal car wreck.

"What are you? Why do you look like him?" Pearl asked, eyes glistened with tears.

"Cause his return is your deepest desire. You want him back." It enunciated, tuned into Pearl's well-of-pain.

"How does he know?" She thought, perplexed.

"It's the job for a Vourah to know." It replied truthfully, a curious creature eager to suck in details of the mortal species.

"Vourah ..." she repeated, faintly recalling the urban legend of Vourah, a shapeshifter who granted wishes for a price, lived in "The Garden of Oblivion", a fictional land concocted in fairytales which only a rare few believed in. No one could pinpoint the mystical place on a map, rather that it manifested on a barren stretch during full moon. Though the enchanted charm of the garden eclipsed a sinister agenda. The few who believed the tale vehemently advised, "never step a foot on that land, or else you'll never find a way out!" Was it where she was now? Cold sweat dripped from her pores, shell-shocked in terror.

"Don't fear me child, I am not what they say" The Vourah attempted to calm her. "You can see him again."

"That's not possible." Flynn neared the expiry of his life support. The medics were adamant on pulling the plug.

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"This garden manifests for those who desire hope in their darkest hours," the entity waved its hand gesturing his territory. "One dunk, and both shall reunite." A reassuring smile smeared across its lips.

"What's your price?" She asked, intrigued.

"Happy endings! They are a rare occurrence." It chimed its reason. "Doesn't have to be a persistent life of agony till you grow frail and gray." The Vourah compassion-ed for her loss.

"It really didn't." She thought, willing to take the risk for the sake of the slightest miracle.

Hobbling half the circumference of the pond Pearl choose an edge that had not been barred with thickets. She dipped one toe in the ice cold water, her body shivered, goosebumps sprouted. As she exhaled, a strange fog clouded in the looming warm summer air. The creature eyed the silver water—an indication for her to plunge. She stepped forth (dropping her crutches on the grass) to sink into the surface with a big splash. Her head bobbed, the water textured glycerine. As the Vourah's slimy fingertips stroked her shoulder blades, she was startled to find it floating mere inches away. Their gazes locked until a sudden jerk downward dragged Pearl underneath, her lungs on the verge of suffocation with the dense liquid. The creature submerged itself along with her, mouthed the word "breathe" and she could. The Vourah blessed her with gills. Her eyes widened in horror when she saw that the entity no longer had legs but countless scaled tentacles, slithering around her limbs, coiling her throat. Pearl's muscles loosened.

In a whirlpool of blur gray and flashing lights, pouring rain pattered on the windshield, the wipers squeaked and swiped the interrupting raindrops. A muffled protest cleared every ticking second, "I do everything you ask. What else do you want!?" Flynn bellowed, side-glared his traveling companion, deaf to the echoing horns of a tractor-trailer racing toward their SUV.

"How can you turn into a stone cold bitch just cause I had a few drinks!?" He banged the steering, rage corrupted his focus. Mere inches away from the destined fatal crash, Pearl veered the hand wheel. Their four-wheeler made a sharp swerve away from the truck, tires screeched on the concrete road. Her heart drummed, relieved seeing not a scratch inflicted on him. Flynn's anger simmered, transformed into concern for Pearl's safety, "are you hurt?" She shook her head. The bickering went extinct, not their lives.



"Sweet dreams, my child." The Vourah whispered, releasing its arms from Pearl's unconscious body. As the creature swam away, it glanced back at its deed: its victim's pupils rolled back in her eye sockets, mouth gaped open, weightlessly floated underneath the mirror pond—its surface resealed—imprisoned in limbo for an eternity. Whilst building a fabricated reality for Pearl, the creature swarmed in agony as it absorbed the pounding sorrow she had carried for several months. Anguish painted on the Vourah's face as its heart mourned for the loss of a loved one.

"Just another misfortunate." The Vourah consoled itself.