

Pool of Reflection

"Ye look simply stunning, my lady Princess." The young duke gave a low bow and held out his hand. "Give me the honour of having the last dance with ye before supper."

"So ye can take me into supper?" the Princess smiled, and took his hand.

"Me thinks that ye are, with no doubt, ye are the most beautiful woman in the world," the duke told her, leading her back on to the dance floor. "Ye are so stunning in silver and diamonds."

The Princess had diamonds through her rippled, golden hair, and wore a gleaming, delicate silver diadem studded with diamonds on her head. Her dress was cloth of shimmering silver; around her neck hung a four strand necklace of diamonds and on her slender wrists glittered diamond silver bracelets. In the great hall of hundreds dancers, she shone like a glistening star above them all.

In the middle of the dance a sudden scream split the jovial air. A servant ran into the room, her face white with fear and she was shaking all over.

"Ware! Ware! The army!" she kept shrieking then collapsed on the stone floor in a dead faint.

Two guards, in their gleaming suits of armour, dashed into the room with cross bows in their hands.

"A great army approaches! It is on the brink of the hill!" one of them shouted. "We can not possible combat them: they have numbers too great!"

Panic grabbed the room. Women screamed, men yelled, wineglasses and jewelled goblets fell to the floor smashing and spilling their contents. Dogs yelped, and the minstrels in the gallery above leapt up creating more confusion to the commotion. More guards ran into the room, crying out to the King of the advancing enemy.

The Princess was staring around in terrified fear, unable to move. Her dancing partner had fallen to the ground, hit his head, and lost consciousness. Suddenly someone grabbed the Princess's hand.

"Shamaralessia!"

The Princess turned. "Oh, mother!"

The Queen tightly grasped her daughter's hand. "Shamaralessia, come at once with me!"

Princess Shamaralessia held tightly to her mother's hand as she was pulled through the chaotic crowd of frenzied guests out of the room, and into a dark, cold corridor lit by flickering torches on the stone walls.

"My daughter," the Queen said, taking Shamaralessia's pale face in her hands. "My daughter, ye must escape. With this sudden attack, we are not prepared, not shalt we triumph over our enemies. Nay, I fear we shall fall but ye must flee while there still is time. Ye have time to mount a horse, and ride away. If thou are alone, per chance ye will not be seen."

"Mother, I cannot! I cannot leave ye and father!" the Princess threw her arms around the Queen's shoulders. "If thou fall under the hand of our foes, then I desire to fall with thee."

The Queen gave her a shake. "Shamaralessia, lose not thou head in this calamity! Let not me down!"

Princess Shamaralessia wiped her eyes and drew back. Her mother took her hand firmly, and ran along corridors, passages, through rooms, and down many stair cases till they reached the bottom floor near the entrance. The Queen picked up a brown cloak hanging on a rusted nail by a the door, flung it over her daughter's shoulders then turned and ran into a nearby room. She returned a moment later leading out a tall chestnut mare.

"Here, my dearest! Make haste!" the Queen threw a leather saddle over the horse's back, then helped the Princess mount.

"Mother, shall I next see thee?" Shamaralessia cried, gripping the reins in her shaking hands.

"I know not! But thou has no time more to waste! Ride toward the woods and make fast for the Great River. Cross it, and ride to Duchess Amillri's castle where thou can take refuge."

"But mother—"

"Nay, ye have no time to waste! Good bye, dearest!" the Queen gave the horse a slap and it galloped off, out of the palace, across the drawbridge and onto the road.

Shamaralessia glanced over her shoulder; over the far hill approached thousands of soldieries, banners flying in the autumn breeze. The sunlight glistened and flashed on the helmets, swords, and armour of the enemies. The Princess urged her horse on at neck breaking speed to the cover of the leafy woods ahead. For a while she galloped then slowed her pace for fear or tiring her horse. As she trotted along, a sudden thought entered her head: the villages ahead would recognise who she was: for safe guard she had to rid her jewels and adornments. She halted her panting horse, slipped down to the thick, grassy ground and began hurriedly taking off the sparkling diamonds in her hair, the diadem, her bracelets, and the many other priceless jewels she wore. Finally all was taken off and it all lay in a dazzling pile in the lap of her dress.

"Now where shalt I hide them?" the desperate Princess glanced around then saw a small pool of water at the end of a little trickling stream. She ran over and gazed into it. The water was only a foot or so deep. The pool was edged in moss-covered rocks and small ferns. Shamaralessia dropped the fortune of precious, gleaming jewels in the water, turned, leapt back on her horse, and galloped off again through the trees.



The carriage rolled along the bumpy, oak lined drive to a sandstone and brick mansion with a red tile roof. Carefully tended roses surrounded the great house. Large semicircular sandstones stairs led up to a grand wooden door with a big brass knocker in the shape of a lions head. The carriage drew to a halt in front of the stairs. The driver got off his

seat, went to the shiny black door in the side of the carriage and opened it.

"Here we are, Miss. Rose," the driver announced.

A young brunette girl with a white lacy dress and kid gloves stepped down, holding a small, beaded, maroon handbag. She was about eleven years of age.

"Finally! I thought the trip would never end!" the girl laughed, smoothing down her brown ringlets.

"Yes, Miss. Rose. We're finally here." the driver took the girl's valise out of the carriage, shut the door and walked her up the stairs to the front door, and sounded the heavy, brass door knocked.

A moment of silence, then the great door swung slowly open to behold a butler in a white shirt, striped waist coat and black trousers.

"Miss. Rose, come in." The butler gave a slight bow, and took Rose's valise from the carriage driver. The driver touched his cap politely, turned and walked back down to the carriage. The butler stepped aside to let Rose pass through, then shut the great door and led her down a marble floor hallway lined with painted portrait in gold frames, to a drawing room.

"Miss. Rose is here, Madame. Chapernowe," the butler announced with another slight bow.

In the corner of the room, on a white settee sat an elderly lady in a ruffled silk black and green gown. She stood up, delight on her aged face. "Rose, my dear!"

"Grandmother!" Rose ran forward and the lady embraced her.

"My darling! How wonderful to see you again!" Madame. Chapernowe kissed her and turned to the butler in the doorway. "You may put Miss. Rose's things in her room upstairs."

The butler walked smartly off. Madame. Chapernowe took Rose's hand and led her to the settee. "How did your eleventh birthday go?"

"Splendid, thankyou! My three cousins came to celebrate, then afterwards I went to the theatre with my brother and his wife. Oh, I also got the beautiful brooch and handkerchief you sent in the mail!" Rose smiled, happily.

"Good! And I'm so pleased you finally are able to see me and the new house I live in."

"It is very beautiful . . . and big. I hope I don't get lost!"

"You won't, because it's not so big as it looks. But come and have tea. You must be famished after your journey! Your grandfather will be back from town in time for dessert." Madame. Chapernowe stood up and led Rose down the rest of the hallway, down a corridor, through a fancy, grand lounge room and into an airy, light dining room. On a round table sat a platter of chicken, bread, salad, and other delicious things. A large bay window looked out to beautiful gardens, and a low brick wall covered in trailing vines. Beyond the wall was a short field, then a large forest.

"May I go walking around here?" Rose asked, wiping her fingers on a dainty white napkin. "It's lovely land for walks."

"Yes, you may. Only you are *not* to go near that forest." Madame. Chapernowe took a sip of cordial from her tall glass.

A curious, surprised look entered Rose's face. "Why, Grandmother?"

"Because it is dangerous. In those woods lies a small pond. It has been the death of many. It is a danger to all who go near it. So I ask you very seriously not to go near those woods."

"What do you mean? Are there pixies, and elves in the woods or something?!"

"No, but folks are superstitious and wary of it as though there were." The lady took a bite of chicken and shook her head. "It's a queer place and bad. People do not step inside it."

Rose frowned. "Why? What is wrong with the pond?"

"Because there is magic in it. Bad magic!"

"What kind?" Rose stared at the woods then back at her grandmother.

"Anyone who looks into the pool is blinded. However, only when the sun or moon is shining, or a light is shone into the water. In darkness there is no need to fear the pool and there is nothing there but merely an ordinary little pond of water at the end of a trickling creek." The lady pushed aside her plate, and signalled to a maid. "We're finished our meal. You may clear it away and bring dessert. Master. Chapernowe should be home any moment," Rose's grandmother said.

"Yes, ma'am." The maid ducked a curtsy and began piling the tea things on a pewter tray.

Rose turned to her grandmother in excited curiosity. "Is the creek dangerous?"

"No, just the pool of water at the end." Madame. Chapernowe shook her gray head and glanced out the window at the dark green woods. "No one understands why. Several times people have tried to uncover the secret behind the water of that pool and each time their eyes were blinded. No, it is a place to fear."

Footsteps in the door made them turn. An elderly man in a black suit and dark cape stood there.

"Grandfather!" Rose cried.

Master. Chapernowe hung up his cape and walked over. He kissed Rose and took a seat just as the maid returned to the table carrying dessert on a tray.

"My dear, you look lovely! How are you, Rose?" the man beamed.

"Wonderful! I'm so glad I'm able to spend the next fortnight with you and Grandmother!" Rose beamed. She took a spoonful of whipped cream and strawberry sauce in her mouth then turned back to her grandmother. "What is believed to be the reason of blindness in this pond?"

"Huh? What's all this?" Master. Chapernowe cut in. Her turned to his wife. "Telling her of the pool in the woods?"

"Yes. I forbid her to go into the woods in case she lays eyes upon that water," Madame. Chapernowe replied.

“What is with the pool?” asked Rose, keenly.

Her grandfather took a taste of his dessert then leant back and crossed his arms relaxedly. “Some say the pool is cursed. Some say that when you look into it you see visions. Still more, stories tell about a nix that inhabits it who refuses to be seen.”

“But those are all superstitions, myths and rumour, aren’t they?” Rose said.

“Mmm . . . possibly. The legends and stories have built up over hundreds of years. But the water is obviously magical and rightly to be feared.” Master. Chapernowe looked sternly at his granddaughter. “You are NOT to go near it.”

“I will be sensible and not let my curiosity kill me,” replied Rose with a little laugh. “But I can’t understand why a bit of water would have such a mystery to it and danger.”

She went to bed early that night because she was tired after her long journey. The next day she spent the morning with her grandparents, then after lunch her grandmother took Rose to town. When they returned, they had tea, dessert then it was time for bed. But Rose wasn’t tired. She stood at her bedroom gazing outside. Not far from the garden wall lay the woods. The moon was only a crescent in the sky but it still threw enough light over the land for the woods to be visible to Rose’s eyes.

I want to find out the secret behind that mysterious water!

Rose stared out into the night, then turned and ran to her wardrobe. She pulled out her nightgown, then put on a warm coat over it. She slipped on her shoes, put on her night cap and walked softly out of her room, down stairs and tiptoed along the hall. The great house was in complete silence. Rose went to the back door, opened it slowly, and walked out into the garden. The night air was a little chilly, but not unpleasantly cold.

I hope I’m not seen! Rose stopped and looked up at the house.

The tall, narrow windows glinted in the moonlight, but no one was at the glass watching. Rose gave a sigh of relief, walked through the garden, jumped over the low wall and ran over the short field to the woods. When she got there she stopped and gazed up at the trees. Their leaves rustled softly in the night breeze. On a nearby branch an owl sat, huddled up, staring at Rose silently.

“I wonder if you can tell me the secret behind the water?” Rose said, with a little laugh. “Don’t glare so at me; I’m getting nervous!”

She entered the woods and gazed around. There was no water anywhere. Just trees, grass, ferns and shrubs. For awhile she walked then a sound made her stop and her heart skipped a beat. Trickling water came to her ears.

Where is it? Rose gazed round then saw a little creek rippling along.

She slowly walked over to it and followed it. For awhile she walked beside the stream then she saw a strange glow. She stopped short.

So that’s it! The water that everyone fears without knowing its secret! Rose took a step forward and stared in silence.

The gleam was dull but it made Rose afraid. She gazed a long time, then turned and went back to her grandparents house. The next morning she awoke to find the sky clouded over. She ran downstairs.

“Good morning, dear.” Madame. Chapernowe pulled out a chair at the breakfast table beside her for Rose.

“Had a good sleep?” smiled Master. Chapernowe.

Rose smiled, and took a bite of her bacon and eggs. “Yes, thank you. What will we be doing today?”

“I think that this morning I’d like to hear you play piano. You play that well, don’t you? You can give us a recital!” Rose’s grandmother said, smiling. “Afterwards, we’ll plan some other things to do.”

“Yes, that would be fun. I practiced extra hard this week, because I knew you would like to hear me.” Rose ran her hand over her brown curls then added, “Have you ever seen that strange pool of water in the woods?”

“Gracious, no! I’d never want to!” Master. Chapernowe looked out the window, towards the woods. “I don’t wish to lose my sight. It’s a terrible place and no one goes near it!”

“I wish I knew the reason why it blinds people whenever light is shone onto it.” Rose took a sip of orange juice with a sigh. “I wish I knew.”

“You are too curious,” Madame. Chapernowe said. “If you aren’t careful, curiosity can be dangerous and lead to trouble.”

Rose gave a little laugh, and changed the subject.

The day went quickly and Rose went to bed after reading a book with her grandfather. As she got ready for bed, her curiosity returned. She stared outside but the clouds had covered up the moon; it was too dark to see anything. Rose sat down restlessly on her bed then got an idea.

I have to know what is the secret behind that water! I’ll die from wondering and never knowing! I must find out!

Rose jumped up and went to the dresser by her bed. In a draw lay a hair net. She picked it up, took two long pencils and a hair ribbon. Carefully she tied the hair net to the pencils, then tied the pencils together.

A net! I’ll poke it about in the water. Rose got up, put on her coat and shoes, then picked up the little lamp on her desk. She took the “net” and softly slipped out of her bedroom, down to the back door and outside. The night was dark and cold, but the lantern gave light enough to see where she was treading. When she got to the woods, her heartbeat quickened.

Still, there won't be anything, Rose told herself, trying to calm her excitement. *There is no moon to shine on the water and I certainly won't shine my lantern on the water.*

When she came to the creek, she followed it till it stopped at the pool of water. Rose cautiously walked forward, hiding the lantern behind her back. She stopped at the water's edge. Mossy rocks stood the little pool. The pool of water wasn't much bigger than her bed. Rose set her lantern down on the grass a few steps away, then knelt down by the water's edge and gazed in. She could see nothing below the surface. Slowly, she dipped in the net she had made. It wasn't long enough. Rose rolled up her sleeve, and lowered her arm in, holding the net firmly. The water was nippy cold. Rose scraped her net around the bottom of the pond then felt it suddenly get heavier.

I've got something! Rose drew out the net and placed it dripping wet on the dew covered grass. She put her hand into the net and took out something small and smooth. She turned to the lantern and held the object in the light.

A bright flash shone into her eyes. Rose stared then gave a gasp and stared, struck still. In the palm of her hand lay a glistening, gleaming large diamond in the shape of a teardrop.

"A diamond!" Rose's words split the silence of the night air. "Of all things!"

Startled, she clutched the gemstone tightly in her fist and gazed back at the pool of water.

What else is in there?! Maybe some of those stories are true: something lives in there and this is his treasure trove! Rose sat up and frowned, bewildered. *I never did believe in fairytale creatures but . . .*

Curiosity, again, got the better of her and she dipped her net in. After a long moment she felt it jerk, and she drew it out. In the thin strands of the hair-net was something thin and round. Holding to the dim glow of the lantern, a sudden flash of light hurt her eyes. She dropped the net in terror: was she about to go blind?!

Slowly she leaned over and stared. In the grass lay a sparkling, brilliant bracelet made of silver and set with shining diamonds. In awe, the girl gaped at it, then picked it up and put it on her wrist. It was much too big and slipped back off.

This is crazy! Am I dreaming?!

Rose perplexedly picked up the net and dipped it in again. She drew it out and found six large diamond hair adornments in the net. They glittered so bright in the dim lantern light that it hurt her eyes a little. Rose returned the net to the water and dipped in her arm to the cold water. After a moment she pulled it out and found it full of three more bracelets, identical to the first one she had found.

"I think I'm losing my marbles! This is bizarre!" Rose said out loud, her eyes like saucers.

She placed her net down, took off her coat, leant right over the water, and reached in, half soaking her nightgown. Her hand touched something large, sharp and smooth. She drew her dripping wet, and cold arm out. She laid the object on the grass by the lantern beam and her jaw dropped open. On the grass lay a glittering, dazzling diadem. It was delicately made and the most exquisite thing Rose had ever laid her eyes on. It glistened so bright in the light that it seemed to be lighted up from within. Awestruck and mesmerized with wonder, she picked it up and examined it. It was made of silver, and studded with diamonds.

This is too much! I have to be going mad! Rose, trembling, put the diadem down and leant back into the water.

For a while she felt about, then finally touched something. Her hand closed on a slippery, smooth, evenly bumpy rope of something. She sat up, and laid her find on the grass. It was a string of diamonds; a necklace. Three strands with a golden clasp on one end.

How can this be?! Rose fell back on the dewy grass in shock. She stared at the pile of glistening jewels in wonder. They shone so bright, her eyes ached.

She reached back into the pool, felt about the icy water and a minute later pulled out a handful of seven glistening diamonds, just the same as the first one she first found. She returned her arm to the water and found four more. Dumbfounded she laid them on the grass next to the others and stared in silent shock at the treasure pile. Slowly, like in a dream, she rose to her feet, gathered the tiara, diamonds, bracelets, and necklace into her dress, picked up her lantern and walked back out of the woods, across the field and back to the house. She lay the jewels on the dining room table and stared at them. Even in the dim little light of her lantern they shone so dazzling that her eyes hurt. She spread them over the table so the effect wasn't so great, and ran her hands over them.

I'll wake grandmother and grandfather. Rose turned, and fled upstairs to her grandparents room. She knocked at the door.

No answer.

Rose opened the door, and peered around. Her grandparents were sleeping soundly. She ran to them, and jumped on the end of the bed.

"Wake up! I've got something to show you!"

Master, and Madame, Chapernowe awoke with a jump. They stared at Rose, startled.

"What are you doing?" Madame, Chapernowe demanded through a yawn. "Rose, what is—"

"Listen!" Rose leant over her grandparents her eyes sparkling in excitement. "I know the secret of the water in the woods!"

Her grandparents gaped at her, goggle eyed. Rose went on.

"I went there and —"

"ROSE!" exclaimed Master, Chapernowe, and the colour drained from his face in horror.

Rose shook her head, her words tumbling over in exhilaration. "No, I'm not hurt or blind! Listen! I found it full of diamonds and silver. There was so much there that when I put it all on the table, it makes my eyes ache, they're so dazzling bright! Oh, come and see!"

"Rose! You're sleeping!" Madame. Chapernowe sat up, her face concerned.

"NO! I'm not! Come and see!" Rose bounced up and down on the bed. "It's true. Come and see! Come and see!"

She ran out of the room, her sleepy, dazed grandparents following. She led them to the dining table and held up her lantern so they could see. Both her grandparents stopped short in their steps and their mouths dropped open.

"I know the secret of the water! All this was piled onto the bottom of the pool and when light was shone onto it, the reflected light was so dazzling it blinded people. The water maybe exaggerated the effect!"

Slowly Master. Chapernowe stepped forward and picked up a diamond hair adornment. He held it up the light, in shaking hands. After a long moment he turned to his granddaughter. "You disobeyed us, Rose."

Rose's eyes dropped to the marble floor. "I'm sorry, sir. I . . . I am sorry but I was just so curious."

"Oh, leave the scolding," interrupted Rose's grandmother, finally waking up from her shock. "She's discovered the secret of the water. Oh, to think that all those superstitions and stories have left everyone in the dark and all this has remained unknown for such a long time!"

"It's moonshine! It'll all disappear," Master. Chapernowe stated.

"It won't! I took it all out of the water and it's real!" Rose insisted. "But there remains one more mystery: why are all these jewels in that little pool of water?"

Trembling, her grandfather sat down. "There used to be a castle on the hill, behind the house. It long ago was destroyed. That was hundreds of years ago. A long, long, *long* time ago. Why these jewels ended up in the pool in the woods, I know not. But these jewels must have belonged to the Queen or a princess."

"So who will get to own them?" asked Rose, softly.

"Well . . . our family has owned this land for decades and decades. It's been in the family for a long time." Master. Chapernowe stroked his chin thoughtfully. "It's hard to say. We'd have to take them to the authorities."

"I wonder why the princess or queen put them into the water?" Rose stared at the tiara, sparkling in the lantern light.

The next morning her grandparents took the jewels carefully wrapped up, to town. Rose was left at home. She put on her hat, scarf, shoes and walked through the garden, over the field and into the woods. She followed the gurgling, little stream to the small pool of water at the end. In the sunshine, it didn't glow the slightest bit. She took a deep breath and stepped forward to look in. There was nothing on the bottom of the shallow pool; all that looked back at her was her reflection.

As Rose gazed in, her imagination began to drift and looking back at her, wasn't her own reflection but that of a shining, golden haired princess in a silver gown.

The End