



Azrafael

John Henry Carrozza

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By John Henry Carrozza

In the Kingdom of Dancing Flowers, across the great ocean Deep, there was once a castle of carven onyx, its twin towers hewn from the same titanic rock, where ruled over the lordship of Cyr'l Lin a benevolent man who was born when the Aerth was young in the province of Dellius, and who married a woman whose descent is not known, but who rumours claim was sculpted by the fingers of gods out of the fine clay from the banks of the River of Life which flows down from the sky beyond the Crystal Mountains in a place unseen by mortal men. The man was Lord Djon, his wife the Lady Sol Ny'a, and upon the eve of their one hundredth year of marriage the lady gave birth to a daughter, upon whom they bestowed the name Azrafael, for her beauty even at birth marvelled that of the fabulous Island of Azra, where it is told fell the nectar from the Holy Fruit of Ba'al when it was split by the primal god Az'ton to signify the beginning of time. Soon the child became a young lady, and her beauty only evolved with each passing day until, by her twentieth birthday, her visage was so resplendent and so ravishing that her father was forced to fit for her a mask, lest any man who gazed upon her face would go mad by virtue of his overpowering desire for the beauty which could only have been wrested from his deepest, most satyric dreams; it is said that a man's libido would be shattered as by a lascivious bolt and strewn upon the fabric of his mind so that his own primal desires would infiltrate his every thought and every waking moment, hanging his soul by whatever cord of essence remained. Soon it became apparent that even the mask was not sufficient to disguise the pulchritude of young Azrafael, and Lord Djon was forced to seclude her to a windowless room atop one of the castle's twin towers, hoping to find a way to allow his beloved daughter to once again walk among the mortals of Aerth, for it had been concluded that she must surely have been the direct descendent of the gods who roam the heavens beyond the Crystal Mountains through which foothills the River of Life runs lovely and soft past banks of white clay from which the lovely Lady Sol Ny'a is rumoured to have been sculpted by the hands of the same powerful gods.

Long and far Lord Djon travelled, across the great ocean Deep, beyond the fabled Isles of Azra and Sharon, through the ivory forests of

By'lath Twil, over the mountains of sand at the edge of the Endless Desert of the East, past the peaks of Kryl and the Valley of Barok Well; far he travelled to the distant lands of Eidon and Syllaby, whose sages are renowned and seers proclaimed throughout the world; long he wandered the great bazaar at Pharanon in the land of Emeralia; oft he prowled the ports of Selenais and Osis in search of sailors who could promise safe passage to the cursed lands of Dark Spires and Arkanon beyond the Gates of Silence. He spoke to mystics from the most sacred of orders and conversed with the Unnamed Scribe who lives alone in an ageless monastery atop the legendary high cliffs overlooking the Gulf of Time; he sought advice from the witches who dwell in the woods of perpetual darkness in a land better left unmentioned; he journeyed to the rarely beheld Library of Lost Souls to consult the fabled *Book of Pages*. Every avenue he searched; every stone he overturned; but ne'er did he receive any answer to his prayers. So, he returned disillusioned to his home in the Kingdom of Dancing Flowers, to the great castle carven of onyx in his own lordship of Cyr'l Lin, where he sat upon his throne and pondered with his wife by his side to console him and to dry his tears with the cloth upon her own resplendent breast.

As the years passed, the Lady Azrafael grew bored of her confinement - of the games and puzzles she would solve and resolve, of the blindfolded dancers who were sent to entertain her, of the great meals she was delivered on trays of etched silver, even of the songs she would sing to herself about places from her dreams where she could walk the streets unadored, her beauty no more uncommon than a flower in springtime; her face no more sublime than the spangled night sky; her eyes no more deep than the wells of ink upon the desks of poets; her skin no more fragile than the wings of a dragonfly; her hair no more flowing than the River of Life; her life no more a prison than Aerth itself.

One day Azrafael requested a certain number of spools of the finest yarn from the fleece of the multi-colored sheep from the Azure Hills of Chalcery, and needles with which to knit. Her request was honored, and so it was that she began to knit her tapestry. Although she had never before sewn or pulled a shuttle, she at once held mastery of the craft, and her tapestry became the talk of the castle. Those who witnessed its progression were said to have wept at its beauty, and the lord of the castle was for the first time able to smile, for his daughter had found a pastime which made her noticeably happy and which was a part of her that could be shared by all

people without fear of madness. Diligently she worked upon the masterpiece, and by the end of a year, she was nearly finished. As she approached the end of her work, however, her servants began to notice a change in her demeanor. She seemed more tense than before, although still quite cheerful, and she spoke of certain dream lands and fantastic realms more beautiful than any place on Aerth. She was heard to make allusions to a vague 'journey' and how she would hope to return someday to be with the people she loved. Although her babbling was dismissed as delusion, there was still a sense of concern among those who knew her and frequented her room - for although blindfolded and unable to ever see her face, her voice was more lovely than any sound upon the air surrounding Aerth, and she was very kind and always full of humility, for she longed to be of mortal beauty so she could dine and play games with the servants of the castle, whom, other than her mother and father, were the only people she had ever known.

One evening she summoned her father to her room, and he came with a basket of sweet fruit and nectar. She told him of the fantastic places which she dreamed about and how she would soon be there. As it was late, he knew this to be true, for she would soon be asleep, and her dreams would become her reality for the night. He was glad that she could have such a place to visit, if only in her dreams, so that she could have some experience of living like other people, conversing unmasked with mortals like those from which she was born. As he kissed her and wished her pleasant dreaming, he noticed that the tapestry was only threads from completion, and he hoped to see it in the morning when it would surely be ready for public showing. He had planned a gala festival for the unveiling of the design, which would hang above the fountains and gardens of the main hall at the entrance to the castle, and would be certainly the quest of those from lands throughout Aerth, for its beauty was unrivaled except by his daughter herself. For the mortal world, this would be her gift - the gift of beauty, which would bring a smile of love and compassion to the faces of all who viewed it, and would bring together all people and all kingdoms with its simple universal power. She whispered to him as he left her room, and although he knew she had said "goodnight," it sounded to him for an instant like "goodbye."

The following morning Lord Djon climbed the steps to his daughter's room, anxious to view the masterpiece in its completion. When

he opened the door, he saw the tapestry hanging upon the wall, completed as he had hoped. Azrafael, however, was not to be found. Frantically, he summoned her servants to the tower, and called to them to search the castle for his daughter. Nevertheless, he was unable to avert his gaze from the woven scene which adorned the onyx wall before him. Within the scene he beheld a landscape of indescribable beauty, the gently rolling hills reaching out to a fabulous sky of a color unlike any other, touched by the outlines of trees which defied Aearthly description, yet which seemed to weep even as did he. Upon the hypnotic moors there arose a castle which could have easily held the seat of the gods which must have created it. Ivory columns sprouted from the soft grass and easily supported a massive structure of glass and colored stone which formed at a certain point two towers which only vaguely resembled those of which one he was currently inside. A tear welled in the depths of his soul and poured itself onto his trembling cheek as he gazed upon the open window atop one of the majestic spires. There in the window, overlooking the fantastic landscape of an innocent dream, he beheld the face of his own daughter, unmasked and resplendent, and for the first time in all of his life he was able to stare with admiration and wonder upon the face of pure beauty which no man had ever before been able to gaze upon and still retain his soul. He beheld in the window the face of a mortal - the most sublime mortal visage ever to grace the Aearth; and unless the water in his eyes deceived him, she turned her gaze to meet his own *and smiled at her father.*