

# The Nature of Beauty

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This is a story I wrote for my creative writing folio for advanced higher english in my sixth year at school. It is just one of the first drafts so I think there are deffinitely changes I would make. But I though I would submit it anyway and see what people though! Main themes include: jealousy, beauty and the dangers of superficiality and obsession.

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**By Joshua Morrison**

Vanim Forest was once a majestic woodland; however over time, it had become a barren wasteland. The once tall and prosperous trees had rotten and all that remained of them were the bare trunks in which nothing grew from. The soil, once fertile and thriving, was now dead. No flowers grew. Weeds had taken over the forest floor and destroyed the more delicate plants which once were in abundance and provided the forest with an array of beauty.

Vanim Forest was the home of two residents: Rebecca Cassidy and her daughter Gabrielle. As with the forest, Rebecca was once beautiful. In her early twenties, she was a magnificent woman. She had piercing blue eyes, gorgeous blond ringlets; her skin was smooth to the touch. For these qualities she received much attention from the opposite sex. This attention was what she thrived on. She had lived right in the centre of the village of Amaret, next to Vanim Forest and often went out into the town to see how many heads she could turn.

She eventually met a young man named Thomas who, with her father's permission, asked for her hand in marriage. The prospect of having the most glorious wedding the village had witnessed became almost too much for Rebecca and at once she began to make preparations. Of course, her dress reflected herself. It was very large, many layers of white silk floated with her as she wore the dress. She dressed almost like a princess on her wedding day and that, she certainly felt like. The wedding was as flowery as one could be, with every decoration as girly as possible for the very feminine woman. Not long after the marriage, she fell pregnant and gave birth to a daughter, in which her father chose to name Gabrielle. Rebecca however was reluctant to give her daughter such a beautiful name, yet deciding that she would not outshine herself, eventually agreed.

However, Rebecca did not age gracefully. Now, in her late forties, she had lost all the beauty she once possessed. She had evidence of grey hairs now; and her skin was wrinkled and tired. She moved away from the valour of Amaret into the once desolate forest with her young daughter Gabrielle after Thomas had left her. This didn't help matters; once he had left, her fantasies intensified and she was obsessed with regaining the beauty she had once had. She visited the village only once since she had moved, only to find that no one so much as gave her a second glance as she pranced past. This infuriated her and resulted in her refusing to leave the wasteland she now resided in. If she needed something she sent her young daughter Gabrielle to the village for it, as she could not bear to show her face there once more; it brought back too many painful memories when she was once a young and vibrant girl.

Now, Gabrielle was a young woman, in her late teens. She had inherited the beauty which her mother had possessed and was just as dazzling as her mother had once been, if not more so. She too, had spectacular blond ringlets which fell around a small, yet striking face. Her skin was radiant, and her perfect green eyes sparkled like emeralds. Despite the uncanny resemblance she bore to her mother, when she was her age,

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Gabrielle was different in one very significant way â she understood the true nature of beauty. Gabrielle was not a superficial person: she did not judge people by how they looked, but by the strength of their character. And this was something which Rebecca would never understand.

Gabrielle acknowledged her motherâs obsession with beauty and was only too aware that Rebecca despised her. She was insanely jealous of the attention in which she received from males. Only too often, had a perfect red rose been sent to her home. Rebecca watched, silently, as her daughter picked up the rose and added it to the others she received â a mark that she was sought after, something which Rebecca deeply desired; yet something she no longer received. This destroyed Rebecca â she wanted nothing more than to have this beauty back, to be able to make people stare at her in awe whenever she entered a room.

Perhaps this is what had caused Rebecca to transgress. Every day, she would wake up early, and spend hours in front of the mirror. She would start by slowly combing her hair and giggling to herself like a school girl. She then proceeded to tie her hair with a colourful bow. The dresses she wore were almost child-like as they were far too bright and immature for a woman of her age. And yet Rebecca saw nothing wrong with this â she acted as if she was back in her youth, wearing flowery and short dresses, prancing and skipping around her home, giggling to herself the way a child would giggle at the seemingly most pointless of things. Gabrielle did not know what she could do to help her mother. She tried to approach her several times to talk to her, but Rebecca would not talk about such serious issues â instead she moved the subject onto far more superficial things. So Gabrielle refrained from bringing up this issue, and instead began to think about how best she might approach the problem, which appeared to be getting worse. Rebecca appeared to become more and more jealous every day, as her young daughter's beauty only flourished with each passing moment.

One morning, Gabrielle had decided she would go into the Village of Amaret for the day. She got dressed in a stunning, yet simple cream dress. Her hair was pinned up, yet it looked elegant and brought out her striking eyes. As she was leaving she turned to her mother â Is there anything you would like me to get for you mother? While Iâm thereâ. Rebecca turned to her; she pursed her lips. Her face looked livid as though she felt sick at the site of her own daughter. She merely shook her head, and Gabrielle left.

It was about a ten minute walk into the village, in which Gabrielle bounced happily through the forest until she reached the clearing into Amaret. The village was a magnificent site. The buildings, while small, looked fairly modern, and were attractive. In the centre of the village lay a large church, with a large bell tower at the top. The bell was well preserved and glinted in the light of the sun which shone down. Gabrielle enjoyed being here â the forest was a dark place, and she liked being free from it, to enjoy the sun and the wonderful atmosphere of the village.

She waited silently at the clearing until a young man approached her. He looked a little older than her. He had cropped black hair, and rich hazel eyes which glimmered as he saw her. â Gabrielle, you are beautiful as everâ he whispered as he approached. She merely blushed and offered her hand to him, which he took in his own to lead her into the village. They spent the day looking through shops and admiring the merchandise within.

One, in particular had caught Gabrielleâs eye. A small, jewellery shop on the end of the street had beautiful gems laid out carefully in the window. The young man, named Joseph, said â Come on in, and you can have a closer lookâ. She looked alarmed by this prospect â Oh, but I would never be able to afford any of these thingsâ. However, he was already dragging her in. On the inside, the store had an assortment of jewellery, from bracelets, to necklaces and even tiaras â she didnât want to even imagine how much some of these things might cost. She looked around to see Joseph whisper something to the shop assistant who then moved into a back room to fetch something. â Oh, Joseph, what are you doing?!â Her voice

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contained a hint of anger in it. Out came the shop assistant with the most beautiful piece of jewellery Gabrielle had ever laid eyes on. It was a necklace, diamonds glittered the chain of it, and a large emerald lay in the centre of it. "It matches your eyes" he said, almost transfixed by them as he looked at her. He then took the necklace and slowly placed it on her. "Magnificent!" he announced, "I'll take it". Gabrielle opened her mouth in horror "No, Joseph. No! You shall do no such thing. I don't want something like this. Yes, it is a beautiful jewel, but that's not everything. If you insist on buying me something, please, make it something much less grand". It took some careful persuasion but eventually Joseph settled on buying her a small, much less expensive bracelet. It had no glamour to it, and was only simple brown leather which had been arranged into a pretty pattern. Upon leaving the shop, he turned to her "Tell me, when I would have bought you the most beautiful of jewels, why did you insist on something as plain as this" pointing to the bracelet on her wrist. She sighed, her head down, and was silent for a few moments. Eventually she looked up at him and spoke. "You just don't understand, the glamour of the beauty it isn't everything. It may be plain, but it is a gift from you, and in my eyes it is more beautiful than an emerald as you bought it to make me happy. And that, it has done." He looked at her curiously for a few moments before pulling her close to him, in a tight embrace and kissed her passionately. As he pulled away, he spoke three words "I love you".

As they were walking back towards the forest, Gabrielle broke the silence by saying "I'm worried about my mother you know. She just isn't herself, and hasn't been since my father left. I had thought maybe it was just the shock that a man she had been with for years had left her for a younger woman, and that in time she would get better. But she has only gotten worse". She let out a deep sigh. "How so?" asked Joseph. "Her fantasies of regaining her youth have become an obsession! She dresses like a child; prances in the garden as if she doesn't have a care in the world. She's ignoring reality and its destroying her!" Gabrielle was breathing heavily now. "I see the way she looks at me; she hates me!" Joseph tried to comfort her, but there was nothing he could do now but hold her hand and assure her, he would always be there for her. He had walked her well past the clearing of the forest, until her house was nearby. "You had better leave me here. I don't want my mother to see you". He gave her one more final kiss and as he leaving, asked "When will I see you next?" "Soon. I promise" she replied, and walked towards her house.

As Gabrielle approached the front door, she ensured she was quiet, as it was rather late and she did not want to wake her mother if she was already asleep. Yet, she found, as she entered, that her mother was up; and waiting for her to return. "Hello, Gabrielle: have fun?" her mouth twisted into an acidic smile. "Oh, you're up" gasped Gabrielle, getting a fright as she had spoken, "Yes, I did thank you". She kept her head low and tried to move to her room, but Rebecca had thrown herself in front of the doorway to stop her. "Who were you with?" she quizzed "her eyes looked as though they were on the verge of popping out, her nostrils flaring. Yet, a wicked smile had etched across her face. "Oh, no one. I was alone. And I'm tired; I was just going to go to bed". "LIAR!" Rebecca screamed uncontrollably. Gabrielle winced as she screamed. "I saw you with that boy Gabrielle: WHO IS HE?!" "Eh! he's a friend". Her voice was trembling as she spoke. "LIES! And what's this?" her mother demanded, grabbing her wrist to reveal the bracelet she wore. "Did he buy you this?" she demanded. "Well! yes, but" Gabrielle started to speak, however her mother stopped her and violently slapped her across the face. Gabrielle fell to the floor, clutching her cheek and started to sob quietly. "Think you can go off with some boy, do you? And leave me! Like your father did!" Rebecca spat out. "No of course not, mother. I wouldn't leave you, I love you". However she was faced with another hard slap across the same cheek as her mother became even angrier. "YOU DON'T LOVE ME! I KNOW YOU LAUGH AT ME! You think to yourself "Oh what an ugly woman she is, she doesn't possess anything that I do! you think your prettier, well you're not I say! YOUR NOT!" "Please mother, I don't think that! Your being para-" Before she could say anymore, Rebecca had moved forward and grabbed

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her by the hair, pulling her up until she was on her knees. "You are a filthy little liar, you are. Now tell me, who is the boy. WHO IS HE?!"

"I am in love with him" she croaked, sobbing more violently now. She could tell however, this was not what her mother wanted to hear. "Hmmm, in love you say?! We will see about that". Her eyes looked as though she wanted to kill Gabrielle yet she did something so much worse. Before Gabrielle could realise what was happening her mother had picked up her, the hand firmly gripping her hair and dragged her towards the open fireplace. Gabrielle's face suddenly convulsed in fear as she realised what was about to happen. "Mother, please! NO!" She screamed, writhing to get away from her. But Rebecca was in no mood for any kind of resistance and kicked her viciously until she fell to the floor and continued to drag her closer to the fire, until they were right in front of it. She got onto her knees next to Gabrielle who was now on the floor coughing and pleading to her mother. Rebecca let out a shrill laugh and then pushed Gabrielle's face into the open flames of the fire, holding her from the back to protect herself from it. Suddenly, a piercing scream broke out from Gabrielle as the flames began to attack her face. "Let's see if that boy still loves you after this" she spat, her eyes filled with vindictive laughter. The screams continued for about 10 seconds, shrill enough to shatter glass as Gabrielle felt her face become ravaged by the flames.

Rebecca let her go, and Gabrielle pushed away as quick as she could, moving quickly to a basin of water to sink her head into. Her screaming started once more, even as she plunged her face into the basin. Rebecca's eyes glimmered with pleasure as she looked at her daughter her face was red and bloody. Scalded and scarred, she flailed around, screaming helplessly for the pain to stop. The scene around her started to go blank, and Gabrielle passed out the last thing she saw was the wide gleam etched across the face of her mother who watched her like a vulture, almost jubilant at what she had done.

Gabrielle awoke with a start, and attempted to push herself up to view her surroundings. She lay on a small bed in a simple room which had little in it. There was another person sitting in the room, he was wearing a lab coat. She tried to look more closely at the man but her eyes were out of focus. Around her face were what felt like miles worth of bandages. "How do you feel Gabrielle?" the man asked. She mumbled something which was difficult to make out. "How did this happen to you?" his voice appeared more desperate. She considered telling the truth, but despite everything her mother did to her, she knew it was not on purpose. Her obsession to become beautiful had driven her to this, and she needed help. Gabrielle could simply not rat out her mother. She had to lie. "I fell" she mumbled out. The doctor stared at her for a few moments before finally saying "Very well. I shall let your mother into see you now. The damage which is done to your face is irreversible I am afraid. But you can worry about that later. For now, I have given you something for the pain".

Gabrielle still felt very drowsy as her mother walked in, and the doctor left. Rebecca walked right up to Gabrielle, to her ear and began to whisper. "I hear your love tried to see you as soon as he heard of your arrival here. Of course, he has not seen what you have become yet. Don't expect him to wait around for you when he witnesses what you are now" she smiled wickedly, "Your nothing now!" she spat. With that, she stood up and left, leaving Gabrielle to once again fall into a deep sleep.

She woke up again later, however did not know how much time had passed. This time, Joseph stood in front of her. "Gabrielle!" he cried "how are you?" He placed his hand over hers to embrace her. "Tired" she croaked. "Of course you are, but don't worry, I will be here when you are out. And I won't allow you to leave my side!" He spoke more, but Gabrielle did not know what he was saying and instead falling asleep once more.

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Several weeks had passed before she was finally allowed to leave the hospital, and they took the bandages off. Joseph had requested that he be there for this. The doctor came into the room; "Gabrielle, I hope you understand that the damage done is quite extensive, you will never look like you once did again." He spoke gravely. "I understand," she whispered. Carefully he removed the bandages, until finally they were fully taken off; Joseph gasped as this happened, but remained calm. She observed the look of horror on his face, however this changed into a smile and he gripped her hand even tighter. "Joseph?" she said slowly. He simply whispered for her to be quiet and sat down next to her to embrace her; whispering "I love you" into her ear. She later looked at herself in the mirror. However what she saw looking back was not a hideous monster. It was a young woman. A woman full of vibrancy, of kindness, love, compassion and enthusiasm. She did not witness the scars which had stripped her of the beauty which had once made her so appealing to so many men, but saw beyond this. Looking at the reflection of her striking emerald encrusted eyes, she knew she was still beautiful.

Joseph had decided that upon leaving the hospital it was best that Gabrielle go and live with him. She had a suspicion that he knew exactly what had happened to her, however he refrained from saying anything. They moved into Vanim Forest where Gabrielle said she needed to do something first. She did not relish the prospect of coming face to face with her mother again, but she had to tell her something. After a short walk, they approached the house together. However, Gabrielle asked Joseph to wait outside and entered alone.

As she did, her mother looked up from the seat she was in, and gasped dramatically at seeing her daughter look so calm about herself, despite the obvious horror of her face. "Mother, I have come here to tell you two things: the first is that I am leaving this place. Joseph asked me to move in with him, and I have agreed." A look of utter shock was suddenly evident across Rebecca's face as she looked at her daughter in disbelief. "But? I thought—" "You were wrong! He doesn't find me hideous, Joseph loves me for who I am, not what I look like. He doesn't find me any less beautiful than I was before you scarred me. And I don't either. I know you fantasise about being youthful again, about being beautiful; but they aren't the only things that matter in this world." Her mother looked away from her; "LOOK AT ME! Look what I have become! And yet, I am beautiful. You think you turned me into a monster, but you're wrong! You can't make a person ugly by destroying what they have on top, but you don't understand that. You are obsessed with only what is skin deep that you fail to see everything else a person has."

"But as I said, I have something else to tell you." Gabrielle moved in next to her mother, and sank to her knees, taking her hand. "I forgive you," she whispered, "Your obsession nearly killed me, and I don't know if I can help you get over your superficiality, but I want you to know; that I don't blame you for what you did to me. I still think I'm a stunning woman on the inside. And you are too. I only wish you could see that." A single pearl glistened as it fell from Gabrielle's cheek. "I love you."

With that, she stood up and left the room. As she went outside, she took Joseph's hand and together they walked towards the Village of Amaret. They had been walking for only a few minutes before they heard a scream and Rebecca was running towards them. "Gabrielle, PLEASE! Forgive me!" she shrieked, grabbing onto Gabrielle's dress and sinking to the floor sobbing; "My own daughter! I see now, how could I have done this to you!" The rest of what she said was muffled by her shrieks of tears, however Gabrielle remained calm and simply bent down next to her mother. "Please, join us to Amaret" was all she said, holding out her hand for her mother. Together they walked into silence until they came to the clearing, where Rebecca stopped dead. Gabrielle held her hand tighter; "You can do this, I know you can."

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With this, Rebecca Cassidy walked into the Village of Amaret where she had not entered for almost nine years. However the village, instead of bringing back painful memories of her youth, now looked beautiful. It was full of hope for Rebecca. It was now that she realised what she had not understood ever before in her life. Gazing into the eyes of her daughter, Rebecca finally understood the true nature of beauty. Only now, could she accept herself for who she was, and she strode into the village, smiling.

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