

Fire of Life
Angelic Heroes Trilogy
Special Edition
Volume 1

By

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Black Rose Legend

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Black Rose Series

Angelic Heroes Trilogy

Elemental Angels

The Novels

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Chapter 1

I am Auriel, but the people call me the One. Although I see all, I clearly saw one young girl above others. When night fell, I often found her spirit enmeshed in the same nightmare. She sat out in the dark of the night. Tears streamed down her face, striking her leg with the drops of rain pouring from the sky. She petted a frog gently. Then a voice called her—a silent beacon in the distance. The frog jumped from her lap to the gargling brook. She lifted from the stone, brushing her tears away. She raced through the woods, dodging trees and stones in her path. She slipped in the mud, splattering into her face. Muddy tears caked on her cheeks. She hesitated to step on the stone path. The familiar house seemed cold and distant to her, as she walked slowly up the path. The door swung open and a medicine man walked out. He shook his head to the little girl, and held the door open for her. As if he were an enemy, she pushed away from him and scurried into the house. The house only shone a hint of light when lightning flashed overhead. While she paced down the narrow hallway, she held her heart back from leaping out of her chest. She grabbed her racing heart, when she saw the little room at the end of the hall.

The candle in the window flickered—the only light in the whole house. Her tears dried; all she felt was immense dread for what was to come. She tried to steady her breath, closing into the room, awaiting her. She gulped, forcing her hand onto the doorknob. She reached and turned the knob; the hinges creaked apart. Her father crumpled over on a stool in the midst of a disarrayed room beside an untidy bed. Her feet crept towards the bedside, straining the boards

she walked upon. Her father gripped the hand of her mother tightly, eyes gapping onto her sullen face. So lost in the moment he didn't notice his daughter beside him.

Her mother coughed and squirmed around under the sheet that barely covered her. She reached out her arms, legs, trying to escape her pain, rolling from one side to the other. She took her handkerchief from her mouth and turned to the girl. The candlelight gave its final glow; her mother stopped moving. Suddenly, she grabbed her arm. "Omni," she managed to say before her eyes fell vacant. Her father shivered. He grabbed his daughter's shoulders, trying to force her from the room, but her mother's grip proved too great. The little girl, felt jerked from both ends. Suddenly, a roundish orb floated from the mouth of her mother. The orb circled towards her, then flew in between her gapped lips. The little girl's eyes rolled back, and she fainted into her father's arms.

"Omni, Omni!" A distant voice called stirring her from the dream. She suddenly sprung from her bed, kicking and screaming. She grabbed her arm where her mother grabbed her. She looked up into the gentle eyes of her father then fell back onto the pillow. "Omni, my lass, you still have that ole sweven?" His soothing voice eased her soul. She looked to find the sun halfway into the sky.

"One of mercy, I slept over! I mean I over slept!" She squealed leaping from her bed. She kissed her father on the forehead. While walking on the bed, she tossed off her nightgown and pulled on her dress laid out for her. Next, she tied up her mound of locks that hung to her waist.

"Be not jargogled." Her father said watching her run around her bed. "You shall go without breakfast?"

"To nime. I mean no time!" She waved good-bye. "I must be off!" She fell out backwards from the window; her father leaned out to watch her roll to standing. She waved back at her father, before disappearing into the forest.

“Use the door next time!” He leaned his arm out and tapped on his dial watch. “As usual.” He said, heading for the front door. He opened the door, as the little girl, pulled back her hand from knocking. “Forgetting something?”

“Today be market day.” She dug her foot into the ground. He nodded and handed her the list and a small sac of money. “Many good thanks.”

“Be thoughtful of what you spend this day.” He called after her. “And buy something we both fancy, or should I say, can eat!” He slapped his forehead and shook his head.

She walked through town with a hand woven basket from her mother. More recognizable than her mother’s face, she remembered going to market and staring up at her carrying the lovely woven bag. The face of her mother had been lost to the grave especially at this time before photography. Omni tried to remember her mother’s face. So far her efforts were in vain; no matter what she tried, even the dream with her in it, she could not see her face. Her father always told her of her mother’s beauty, and that would be all that mattered to her anyway.

She found it hard sometimes to shop without father; suspicious eyes of merchants followed a child by herself. She feared heading in the marketplace alone. Unable to know what people thought about her, caused her to be on edge and uncertain. She appreciated a fair deal, and she would even haggle if she suspected someone of giving her an unfair price.

Jewelry, fine fabrics, and pottery from the kingdoms overseas tempted her. She dragged her bag along behind her gawking at the lovely apparel the foreign merchants brought from their lands. A crystal dolphin caught her attention, and she paused in the middle of the dirt road. A potbellied man wearing a decorative robe strolled over to her, and smiled. “Only fifty gold pieces.” He stated in a rich foreign accent.

“Oh, pray pardon, that’s more than what I own. I have to go to market and buy food. Alas, I must be off, I have to buy food or we’ll starve.” She stared, lifting her bag up from the dirty ground. He shrugged and turned to the next customer to reel in. He lowered the price to forty gold pieces to the next person who passed.

The center of town, bustled with life and a town square clock that struck the bell every hour. She ran into the bakery, and waved to the manager. She climbed onto a chair so she could peer down into the glass counter at the breads. "Little Omni, how nice to see you again. Thought you would never be back to buy bread."

"Oh aye, I truly messed up my chances when I bought all the pastries and no real bread. We ate not a sandwich for weeks. Methinks the sugar rotted one of my teeth." She pulled her cheek out to show him her teeth. "Alas, we did have vegetables betwixt meats but that truly works not. He said I could buy a pastry, but no more than twain. Have you any of that long bread?" She pointed to a long roll of wheat. "Could you cut it in half so I can fit it in me bag? Oh, and that round loaf, is that rye?"

"No that's flatbread. Would you like some Rye for your father?"

"Yea, many good thanks." He sliced up the bread, rolled them into a sheet then handed them to Omni. He counted through a couple of coins then pushed back a few. She slid them off the counter, into his hands. "Gramercy, good day."

"Yes, good day to you too." He waved goodbye, and placed his coins into a bag.

She jogged from the bakery to the butcher's shop. As soon as she opened the door, she was hit with a grotesque smell. She watched the butcher and his assistants raced around, bagging up the meat. She held her nose, and saw the meat seemed far pass its expiration time. The butcher walked over to her wiping his reddened gloved hands unto his apron. He took off his hat and frowned at the little girl. "What's going on?"

"Pray pardon, seems as though all the livestock we are accustomed to receiving come not in alive. The meat has already spoiled, and I'm afraid we are fresh out of salt."

"I cry you mercy."

"Nay, nay, tis alright. I shall just have to make sure that my farm brings them here fresh. I also need to make sure I always have enough salt, and spices to sell. Perchance I shall try those new preservatives that bloke keeps trying to sell me."

“I shall give you this.” Omni held up a fist of coins.

“What’s this for?”

“You make not many profits today so I’m going to give you what I was going to pay anyway. Methinks this is all right. I was only going to buy about a pound and a half.” The butcher welcomed the donation, and smiled to the little girl. “Goodbye and good luck.”

“Thank you little miss, your generosity will not be forgotten. I shall give you twice as much next time for the price of one order!” The butcher smiled at his assistant, then ordered him to get back to work.

Omni walked out and into the street. “What to buy now?” She looked over her list then frowned. “Do I truly need cheese?”

“Of course you do, everyone loves cheese!” A tiny little man said; he wore thick glasses and a moustache protruding like whiskers from his upper lip. A large bag on his back looked like it might crush him. “So what can I do you for today, some gorgonzola perchance?”

“Nay, I’d care for some goat and blue cheese.”

“Fromage bleu pour vous, what else can I do for you.”

“Um . . . some Jack.”

“Monetary Jack?”

“Mayhap not, I’d. . .”

“Brie for ye?”

“What?”

“Havarti for Miss Omni?”

“What, no. . .”

“Care for betta Feta, tis a Gouda for you? Get it? Gouda?” Omni stared at him, and he uncomfortably cleared his throat. “Let’s start over again. What cheeses would you like?”

“Alas, perchance. . .” She looked at his saddened face and sighed. “Wellaway, what do you suggest?”

“Glad you asked. The Swiss is simple special, the Provolone is positively perfect, the Dunlop is deliciously decadent, the Limburger is largely lethargic, the cheddar is a charming choice, but the Romano is reasonably right for price.”

“So which one?” He shrugged, and she grabbed her forehead. “Alack, just hand me goat and blue cheese as I’ve requested.”

“What, no cottage or cream?” He held up two bags with loose cheese in them.

Omni held her nose and declined. She handed him her money, snatched away the goat and blue cheeses, and ran down the dirt road to get away from him. She shook the smell of the rotting meat and the spoiled cheese away. She smelled and sampled the cheese she bought. “Mm, delicious as always.”

Omni dusted off her skirt and skipped towards her father’s shop. Most shops closed up at this hour of day, leaving the sagebrush to hustle its way down the dirt path. She swayed as she walked, humming to herself, until she reached a small shop with a wooden hammer and anvil sign. She pace into the shop, looking around at all the fine metal hanging from the walls. She found her father in his usual spot near the flames of the furnace. He hacked away, bent, chiseled then dipped the metal into a bath. The steam rose from the bath, striking his forehead, forming more pellets of sweat down his face. He wiped his chin, then his hair, with his free hand, and pulled the metal from the water. He turned around and smiled at Omni as she bounded up. “Father, you look dirty.”

“Egad, so I am. Tis a pleasure to see that you not dirty.” He smiled warmly. He hung the metal up from a rafter, and grabbed up a towel dirtier than he was. He started to wipe his hands, and walked closer to Omni. “I’m guessing you had a fine time at the market?” he asked. “Have you any trouble? No unnecessary spending, I presume. Taking no wooden nickels?” She shook her head. “That little cheese man bothers you?”

“Nay, no more than usual.”

“Good, that man’s a scoundrel.”

“He’s a loony little man.”

“Aye, he’s strange, but he knows his cheeses and he knows how to make money. The townspeople know him as an entrepreneur, taking cheeses from the farmers and giving them some of the profits. What the dairy farmers fail to understand is they would make the full sum of their profits if they just sold it themselves. He lives very richly while they receive very little.”

“I nary understood much about that.”

“Aye, you shall learn little lassie—not all people are honest and genuine.” He patted her on the head, and sat down on an anvil. She grabbed up some loose paper and began fanning him off. He laughed then sat her on his knee. She wiped the smudge from his nose, and he rubbed his against hers. They both laughed.

The front door swung open and a gentle man in fine clothing strolled in. Behind him scurried a curious little servant. He wondered down the stairs into the pit of the work. He wore a plumed hat with a long feather drifting off the back, a short cape hanging from one shoulder, and shiny boots that appear to never have met the ground. “What can I do you for sir?”

“Are you Liam the renowned blacksmith?”

“Aye sir I be. I’m about to close for today, but I never turn down a customer while I’m here in the shop. What is it that you want of me sir . . .?”

“Count Lakshmi Brahmin you may call me. I have traveled from the kingdom to ask a favor of you. You see my wife always thought it a good idea to be a penny-pincher while you are wealthy. Why you may ask, tis the same thing I wondered. She told me of this blacksmith near to where we reside, said he does good work for a fraction of the cost. More like he does despicable work, for the money he deserves. Nothing! Nary a dime went to that man. He could not perform good metalwork, if it jumped out the fire and did it itself. The nerve of him even asking to fix it for me. I knew better; I told my wife! But no, that woman never listens to me. Why store wealth when you have enough to spend well into the next millennium and beyond. No, though you must save, be a penny-pincher. That may be what gave us this wealth, but it is verily

not what keeps up our appearances . . . I say. . .” He discontinued pacing the floor, and looked at them. They all had their eyes peeled following him around the room, listening to his babble.

“What do you speak of?” Liam asked him.

“Forsooth.” He clapped his hands and turned to his servant. “Alas, why are you just standing thither? Show him it!” He stepped back, and allowed his servant to come forward with a silk pillow covered with a fine cloth. The servant pulled back the veil, displaying a hilt with two silver petal-like edges and a majestic jewel. The platinum pommel spiraled down into another jewel on the tip. Liam found the courage to lift it up and weighed it in his hands. “What do you think? It has been in my family for years. The blade was stolen from us, because twas made of an expensive metal not known to this land. I’ve heard that you have a metal just as strong here.”

“Aye, only the finest for my shop. Fine quality. Give me a while and I should be done. What style? What say a backsword, a cutlass, a saber, a dagger? I have a mold for each.”

“A what...”

“Oh, um, do you want a foible and a forte, or twain fortes?”

“Fortes?”

“Double edge or not?”

“Oh, yes, the sword was originally double-sided.”

“Dagger or saber.”

“Hum?”

“Long or short?”

“Yes, very long prithee.”

“Saber, twain fortes, and would you like a port or baldric to accompany it?”

“I shall let you decide.” The count eyed his servant, and he jumped in behind him. “I leave my treasure in your capable hands, Liam. I know you shall not disappoint me.”

“As you wish my count.” The count bid farewell, and complained to his servant the entire way out of the shop. They slammed the shaky door behind them, and Liam wiped his hair. He

smiled down to Omni, and handed the hilt to her. “You may be the caretaker of this haft for a while. Let’s go at once, love, I’m starting to get extremely hungry. And you know how I am when I’m hungry.” He lifted her up, and carried her to the back rooms, after blowing out the candle. He locked the door, to prevent more customers from coming in. From the window, the sun set in the sky just over the mountains. They watched the rolling purple hills, and found the dewdrop-topped castle of the kingdom. “Know you who dwells thither?” Liam whispered in her ear.

“A smelly old pig?”

“Yea . . . a what?” He laughed. “Alas, afore the ‘smelly old pigs’ conquered, the castle used to be occupied by dear old King Rory III, the rightful ruler of Arcadia. Controlled his land with an iron fist, but he had a heart of gold. This new Nordic king is the reason your old papa complains about the taxes. Blesséd people like the Count Lakshmi keep father in business. Accurséd people like the Nordic king place taxes on everything taking money from the already poor.”

“Should that be against the law?”

“How, when he is the law? You shall not be against yourself, now should you? I would fret not over him; eventually the riots and revolts will collide into a large-scale rebellion against the king. I just hope his oldness will be ready, and he brings not the rest of us upholding citizens down with him.” Liam took one last look at the castle then turned the corner. The mountains faded into the trees, and trees became a dense shaded forest.

Just over the mountains lied the ocean. When she stood on the outskirts of town, she could see the sparkling blue water. Omni leaned up on the windowsill, and could see the sea in the far off distance. The ocean filled Omni’s head with new ideas of life. She sighed, and thought to herself—if only she and her father could leave the oppression by boat. No matter how much she begged, she could never convince her father to sail over the deep blue. Her father loved the simple life as a blacksmith. Sometimes, she wondered if his constantly happy face were a cover for his true feelings. Late at night, she could swear to hear a muffled sound of crying. Her father had nothing to be worried about—certainly nothing to be ashamed. Sure, they were poorer than

the turkey of the poorest farmer in town, but they did not require much to live. They lived as humble, straightforward people. Regardless of their financial standing, Omni would never give up the peaceful life of her father.

“What’s the matter dear?” he asked.

“I want to go sailing.” She continued to stare at the ocean, while he eased her down from the window.

“Omni, you should be happy here on dry land. Who put these fancies into your head?” He strolled to the kitchen door, and held it open for her.

“Someone in town. . .”

“Ah, take not them seriously. Some of those people used to sail when they migrated hither. Some are raised on islands, but you were not.” He walked into the kitchen, and Omni followed close on his heels. She crawled onto a stool, and kept looking out the window dreamily.

“Papa?” She leaned on the wall.

“Aye Omni sweet.” he pulled out a pot, and placed it on the stove, then looked up at her. “What is it now?”

“Alas, I . . .you . . . you’ve never told me of your childhood. Or what you did for a living. You only talk of everything after I was born. I know everything of myself as a babe, but nothing of you as one.”

“Never thought it to matter.” He pulled some wood from a stack, and tossed it into the furnace. He lit a match and tossed it in. He sighed, and looked through the cabinets for the ingredients she bought.

“But why did you never tell me?”

“Tis not important, my love. Where did you put the meat?”

“Oh, I could buy none. The whole stock spoiled.”

“Then is there any money left over.” He held out his hand to her. She pulled out her pockets, but nothing laid in them.

“I gave him a little change for his trouble.”

“Omni, you know that money is scarce around here. You shouldn’t just give it away like that.”

“I know. . .” She bowed her head.

“Tis alright though. At least I know you have a good heart, and that’s how I wanted to raise you.” He smiled then circled back into the kitchen. “Now where did you put the vegetables?”

“In here.” She pulled out a bag of vegetables, and sat them on the counter. She sighed, and watched as her father, took out a clay plate and began chopping a few up. He seemed preoccupied with the chopping and forgot about the conversation completely. She took out some fruits, and the bread, and sat them on the table. She turned slowly to him, and twiddled her fingers. “I’ve been thinking of what you said, you know the taxes and all.”

“Oh, and what is your solution. With a head like that on your shoulders it’d be no surprise if you became the first female chair of the parliament.”

“Alas, what if we escape. To the ocean, I mean. We could sail all the morning and the evening, without a care on Gaia! We could live somewhere else, in the tropics. Or perchance pirates, then we could. . .”

Liam slammed his knife into the counter. He spun around, still holding it. “Nay, never! I would never become a pirate by choice. You should never utter those words again in my house. Do you hear me? It must be those ruffians who recently came to town putting all those ideas into your head. Sailing, at my age? I’m a family man. . . You are too young to go around adventuring. A pirate you say, you couldn’t handle a real pirate if he was as young as you.”

“How know you?” Omni stomped her foot.

“You shall be a flower when you grow up—a very pretty lass, who will land a fine gentleman no doubt. You shall be frail, and need your husband to do the work for you.”

“What? I’m going to get strong like you! Look what you are now. Working as a blacksmith, you gained all that muscle, you didn’t have it naturally.”

“So that’s what this be? Still want to make smith, eh? If anything it would be your husband I shall take in as an apprentice.”

“I heard from one of your friends that you were skinny as a lad! He said—”

“That better be all he said! I have half a mind to go down and tell my old friends to stop filling my daughter’s head with nonsense. Tis hard enough raising you by me self. Now I have to fret over you fleeing off to the ocean with some pirate. That friend of mine . . . he better not have said anything else about me . . . or I shall—”

“What? What are you trying to hide?”

“Nothing. Tis you that’s fretting over something that isn’t important!” For the first time, he raised his voice to a level Omni had never heard before. He turned back to the cucumbers biting his lip. He glanced around the room before looking back down to Omni. “I never meant to shout Omni, I beg forgiveness.” He looked back down to his knife, and his face took a solemn look. “Will you fetch the water from the well?”

“Aye, I shall be right back, just need to take a walk, that’s all.” She mumbled as she exited the kitchen. Liam felt his heart swell. He sighed then returned to chopping.

Omni dragged the bucket along behind her, staring at the ground as she wandered to the well. Slowly, sadly, but surly, she made her way across the damp forest. She played with the frogs, and waded through the creek avoiding the fish. She crawled up the embankment, noticing the ocean off in the distance. “I see not what’s amiss with all the water in the ocean, or in the stream.” The ocean obviously had a high salt content much too powerful for people and even some species of fish to use. The stream water emerged from a lake that the people of the town dumped their waste and byproducts down. This is the same reason her father tells her to never go fishing in that river. However, to Omni all the water seemed the same—cool and refreshing. Finally, at the well, she paused and leaned on the edge. She always wondered how the people of the past had the means of creating such a deep and frightening hole in the ground. She grabbed a small pebble, and dropped it in. She leaned over and waited for it to hit

the water below. She unruffled her dress, prepared the bucket for dipping, and played in her hair all before it struck the water below. After picking up a coin from the ground, she thought for a while, weighing the coin in her hand. "I wish to be a seafarer . . . and for Papa to be happy. . ." She flipped the coin in, and watched it twinkle as it fell down.

"You should be careful what you wish for," a voice said echoing through the trees. Omni looked around, but only saw woodland creatures. A band of crows perching in the treetops cackled down on her. She stomped her foot shooing them away. She watched the bucket twirling as it descended into the dark void. The wooden handle always gave her splinters. She felt the bucket drop into the water. She grabbed hold, and started to pull in the opposite direction. The bucket rose slowly, but it fell down. It raised one twist at a time, until she could see it from the corner of her eye. It came a few inches shy of reaching distance, when a knot in the rope caught in the pulley. The crows returned, scoffing at her mishap. She pretended not to hear them as she reached for the bucket. The bucket she stood on wobbled as she stepped up to the edge of the well. She stretched out her arms; she could feel the bucket with her fingertips. She leaned further in, and felt her hand on the bucket.

Then she tripped. She tumbled down, grappling the edge, but her fingers slipped. The particularly large well gave her enough room to spread out and try to grab on with every limb she had. Her fingertips glided along the slimy, mossy walls, as she plummeted to the bottom. Fear overtook her—her screams muffled by the height of the well. The sensation of flying in the air turned into floating in water. She cracked her eyes open, and could see the opening at the top. Water bubbles slipped from her nose and mouth. She tried to breathe, but she only consumed thick water. Her eyes shut just before seeing a light shining above her. She struggled to open her eyes and when she did, she looked upon the silhouette of a woman reaching out her hands to her. After seizing her tight, Omni fell limp into the woman's arms.

She felt as if they hovered in a cloud. The colors around her inversed—the blue water turned orange and the moss covered walls turned red. Her skin turned light and her hair turned dark. Although she remained in the water, her lungs filled with air.

How can I breathe?

After a while, she realized she had no heartbeat and was not breathing at all. She screamed, but only air bubbles escaped her throat. The woman appeared in front of her again. They took each other's hands and she closed Omni's eyes. The water flushed through her soul like a current. Every drop became one with her body. When she looked at her hands, her hands were crystal and translucent. Her eyes felt wide open for the first time. The golden silhouette of the woman greeted her. Her shimmering aura hid her face from Omni. "With every drop of water that slays thee, may thou use a million more." The golden angel's voice echoed as she grazed her fingertips over Omni's heart. All the colors returned to normal.

A chilling sensation surrounded the girl. Everything rewound. Omni floated feet first from the well, and the bucket leaped into her arms. She coughed up a little water, and landed on the ground in awe. "Yoicks!" She stood up, and glanced into the well. She backed up slowly, and fled from the scene. Her heart raced, but her soul felt at ease. She looked down at herself, expecting to be sloshing with water—not a drop of water on her. *One of mercy.* It felt exhilarating to be alive. She skipped and stumbled a few times, as she leaped for joy. She knew her experience had been more than a dream. *I be just one little soul among many, why do I deserve to live?* The crows in the trees called to her with their obnoxious laughter.

She waddled towards the house with the bucket in both hands. Her father sat on the steps outside with his face in his hands. His shoulders shook as he wiped his hand over his eyes. She wandered up without a sound, and placed the bucket on the bottom step. She snuck up the stairs, and laid her hand on his shoulder. "Papa. . . Pray pardon. . ."

“Oh, Omni, my lass. . .” He reached out and held her in his arms. “I thought I had lost you, too. . .” tears welded in her eyes. She patted him on the back and looked around at the night sky.

“I guess I stayed longer than I thought.”

He pulled her back by the shoulders, and looked her over. “How are you doing, lass?”

“I’m fine Papa. I fetched the water as you said.”

He stared into the bucket then looked back at her. “Where were you? You had me worried sick here. I’ve been waiting all night for you to return. I thought something had happened to you. Devoured by mongrels, kidnaped by thieves . . . fell down the well. . .” She shrugged and gave him a hug. “I’m so happy you are alright. . . I know not what I would do without you. . .”

“Papa.” She patted his head.

“Alas, since you were away I did some thinking. How would you like to help your father in the shop?”

Her eyes lit up. “You mean I—”

“Aye, I want you as my apprentice. Tis about time I started to teach you the skill my father taught me. I certainly need the help. I thought that sword from the gentle man would be the perfect way to start. We can work on it together. Be as it may, I must warn you. This apprenticeship means less play, more work. Also, it means you shall have to spend lots of time with your father, and I’m not all that easy to get along with while I work. Smithing is not a spectator sport, understand?”

“Aye, aye!” She cheered leaping into his strong arms.

“I’m glad you’re pleased, Omni.”

“All I wish is for your happiness father.” She smiled at him.

“Come on, I have lots to tell you, and I still have dinner to fix. Grab the bucket and hurry inside.” He hopped skipped and jumped into the house. Omni laughed as she ran back down the stairs to the bucket. After Omni stumbled over a stone, the water flew from the bucket, but

the water suspended in the air. She walked around it then waved her hand under it. "Omni!" her father said.

"Coming." Before her father could see, she slide the bucket back over the water, and tilted it up right, not a single drop split. She smiled to herself then looked back into the forest. *Marry day*. . . She thought. "Papa! You shall never fathom what a . . .uh . . . sweven I had!"