

GALLOPING GANGRENE!

Wiping the rusty blade on her gardening mulch, Fleurette mumbled, “At least I’m walking out of here alive. Sorry, Dad.” If the goo coagulating on her cotton gardening glove was like thick blood, Fleurette dismissed it by commenting, “What a mess. It looks like a murder scene!”

Pearl-sized spots resembling candy hearts covered two long planks that Emile Franchon used as his workbench. The “Laboratorium,” the scientist’s secret greenhouse, was hidden so deep in the forest its location was indicated only by the trunks of six oak trees surrounding the site. The boards stretched across two battered sawhorses. Fleurette had pretended they were real horses during childhood. Their shaky legs now supported countless clay pots of denuded flower stalks.

The daughter of the *theurgical magician* spent her life here, so it served as both nursery and family hermitage from which she was planning to escape. She now murmured, “I’m not like you, Father. My thumb’s not green. See. . .” She dropped her shears and removed her gloves.

One thumb was missing. She stared at the raw stump. “Gotta find it! Fast! Get it sewed back on!” A sawhorse crumpled, splintering Fleurette’s right shin bone. She stumbled. Plasma spurted from the digit’s amputation site, spraying Fleurette’s eyes. “OMG! I’ve pruned myself!” she screamed as she landed on the floor.

Fleurette’s hand blindly swept velvet green clippings as memories of Professor Franchon’s intentional suicide flooded her memory. The world’s last *horticultural alchemist*, who had deliberately remained a lifelong bachelor, was attempting to reverse the process by which he claimed to have transmuted a geranium plant into human protoplasm. Fleurette, the scientist’s only child and private assistant, was created by splicing genes from a red *pelargonium* with his own DNA.

Fleurette's role in the reverse hybridization was to cultivate the crop of red potted geraniums after her father's genes had been implanted in their stalks. Finally, at ninety-three, Professor Franchon announced, "Little Flower, we succeeded. One of the *Pelargoniums* contains the essence of my reincarnation. . . "

"Meaning what?"

"I have mastered the secret to immortality. . . I intend to prove it."

"By transmuting plant to animal?"

"And vice versa. . . You are entrusted with the nurturing of my perpetuity."

"But... there are hundreds of pots of flowerlets. Which one will become you, Father?"

"You'll know by this sign." He handed her a small square box tied with a satin ribbon, then wiggled his famous green thumb and grinned.

"Please explain. . . "

The old alchemist laughed. "You're smart. You'll figure it out." And he died as Fleurette tore the ribbon from the box. It was empty.

Now Fleurette quivered amidst the leaves and petals from which she finally recovered her missing thumb. One hand held the dying thumb; the other was causing her to bleed to death. She scraped goo from her eyes and stared at the amputated appendage. It was changing color from green to gray to black in a sweeping swirl.

"OMG," she gasped, "it's galloping gangrene!" She dropped it in the box and shut the lid. "Father, Daddy, stop playing games. Where are you? I can't wait. I need medical help! NOWwww. . . "

Fleurette's words faded as a male voice possessed her vocal cords. Laughing, it said, "Sorry, Daughter. At least I'm walking out of here alive. . . Now stand up and move!"

Velvet green

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