

## Grimhilde

by Cheryl Byrne

Grimhilde looked into the gold framed mirror mounted on the wall and needlessly smoothed her deep purple dress over her hips, before leaning in to check that her blood red lipstick wasn't smudged. Her nearly black eyes flickered to look at their reflection, searching for the faint lines she knew would appear all too soon. Satisfied, she turned her back on herself, picked up her phone and sat at the dark wood table opposite the mirror. She set about taking the perfect selfie, careful to include the steaming plate of poached eggs on the table and a section of the movie poster on the wall behind. The one next to the mirror, showing a slightly younger Grimhilde in a bikini, stretched out on a beach, Fairest Of Them All emblazoned in large red letters across the sky.

- Big day today equals big breakfast! #fuelforlife #lovinglife

She waited to watch the love rack up.

- Looking good!
- Is anyone more beautiful than Grimhilde?

Behind her, the walls either side of the mirror were lined with posters and magazine covers, her face staring out of them all. She was a movie darling. A RomCom queen. Everyone had watched her fall in love with an unlikely suitor a hundred times and would a hundred times more.

She tore herself away from the devoted and stood, leaving the cold eggs, to go out on to the balcony. She listened to the "ping-ping-ping" which signalled that her followers remained hers, even when she wasn't looking. The sun had moved on, leaving a remnant of its warmth in the shade that remained. It was almost silent in the garden, only the occasional bird-song, just a few bars every now and then, until the sharp and rhythmic clipping of Collette's heels broke through.

Collette Hunter emerged through the doors behind her, diary in hand and open, reminders and appointments scattered across its pages. She had her blonde hair in a tight business-like bun at the nape of her neck and wore an immaculate deep blue pencil skirt with a spotless white fitted blouse.

"Good Morning Ms. Hunter," Grimhilde said, gesturing to the seat across from her.

"Good Morning," she replied, before launching into the day's rundown. "Faraway studio will call at eleven and you have the meeting with a publicist this afternoon." She enjoyed this rundown of the days events and appointments and so Grimhilde let her list the various commitments without interruption, knowing that Collette would usher her to where she needed to be with un-matched efficiency. "And we finish off the day with a visit from your potion-master" she concluded with a wry smile.

"Good. I'm nearly out of the whale cream, and I'm sure that I have a wrinkle forming here," Grimhilde leaned forward and opened her eyes very wide, tilted her head and pulled the skin at the corner of her eye down a little to display the offending crease.

"I can't see anything. Anyway, you'll be young forever, you are still the most beautiful woman in all the land." Grimhilde smiled as she stood to retrieve her phone and absorb more adoration whilst Collette set up the call with the studio.

After some preliminary pleasantries, they launched into the pitch, “So, we’re excited about this project and want to offer you one of the leading roles. It’s a comedy, a mother and daughter who fall in love with the same man and try to compete for his attention while sabotaging each other.”

“Sounds interesting,” Collette did all the talking in these meetings to begin with. Grimhilde leaned forward on the table slightly and pressed her thumbnail into her forefinger, a small pain to brace herself against what she worried was to come.

“We have Snow White in mind for the daughter. We think their chemistry on screen could be amazing.”

The air pressed in on Grimhilde’s eardrums, bringing a rushing sound as though their words had taken her speeding through a tunnel. She’d seen this Snow White around. She had broken through with a small movie that was far more successful than it should have been, about a little orphan girl whose rich father had fumbled the inheritance. She was a simpering fool on and off set. And she must be about twenty-two. How could they think it believable that Grimhilde play her mother at only fifteen years her senior? She would like to reject this project outright if her contract would have allowed. Who were they to cast her as an aging cougar against such a girl!

The following weeks Collette dealt with the studio negotiations whilst Grimhilde was engaged in publicity for her last movie. The blurred train of interviews and TV shows sped on and Grimhilde smiled and laughed and joked with late night hosts and radio presenters.

“We hear you’re partnering up with Snow White for your next movie.” A plastic man on a plastic TV set said, before telling his plastic audience about Snow’s career so far. Grimhilde strained to keep her face naturally happy, knowing one flicker could result in mocking memes and gifs that would follow her forever. But lava was bubbling and heating her skin under the surface of smiles and make-up.

“How did he find out?” she hissed at Collette after the interview through her perfect white teeth and painted lips.

“I don’t know,” they stepped quickly into Grimhilde’s dressing room, Collette already looking through her contacts.

Grimhilde half listened to Collette’s side of the conversation and took her own phone out to sooth herself with the devoted’s reaction to the interview.

- Stunning! That dress was made for her!
- Grimhilde must be the most effortlessly beautiful woman on the planet!

She continued down the list and considering the perfect response, a casual photo of her in the dressing room, comments striking a balance between humble and grateful, but then she saw it. Her thumb, ready to take her to the next comment stopped almost without input from her mind, poised over the screen mid-swipe. The rest of her froze a moment later, the thump of her heart an off-beat accompaniment to the betrayal painted across the screen.

- This movie sounds like the Dream! If anyone is more beautiful than Grimhilde it’s Snow White!

Grimhilde waited until they returned home to scream her anguish and rage and throw the nearest cup across the room. She noted the slight alleviation to her distress caused by the smashing of the

cup. So, she picked up a vase and aimed it at the opposite wall. Collette ran to shelter on the balcony, holding her organiser over her head before closing the doors behind her. She stood shivering, staring through the doors at the ferocity of Grimhilde's anger. By the time she was finished, assorted crockery and glassware lay in pieces all around, Grimhilde in the centre panting and sweating, an ugly, malicious look on her face aging her more than a wrinkle in the corner of her eye ever could.

"Collette!" she shouted, "get in here."

Collette cautiously opened the glass door and delicately stepped over a broken bowl. Her heels tapped mutedly as she made her way across the carnage. She stayed quiet, standing slightly behind Grimhilde and waited for her to explain the summons.

"I want her destroyed! It's time for you to use the Poison Apple."

Collette's smile crept over her face as she realised what was being asked. "As you command."

The Poison Apple was a certain way in which Collette used her i-phone. She spent the following days hunting out Snow White's past. Searching for her secrets, that one seed that would grow into a destructive virus and take Snow down. It came to her from one of her contacts in Snow's agency, Ebony Rose. A photograph of Snow, taken before her breakthrough movie. There were a number of other people and they were clearly at a party. They had their arms around one another, posing for the camera with tongues poked out and eyes wide, drinks in hand. But that wasn't the interesting part. Through a gap between Snow's torso and the next person, the coffee table behind them could be seen. As could the several lines of cocaine neatly arranged one next to the other on its surface. The studio wouldn't like this. Their girl next door, the sweet and unassuming Snow, the star of their next movie, doing drugs? Grimhilde laughed her delight into the ceiling then gave the order to release the photo. "Bring her career to me on a plate."

Headlines such as "Snow's problem with snow," appeared to feed cravings for scandalous stories far and wide. The studio called to tell Grimhilde that the project would be postponed indefinitely after they dropped Snow like the corrupted princess she'd become. Such an actress could never be affiliated with Faraway Studio's or their work. They would keep Grimhilde in mind for the next project, they were waiting on a script from Florian Prince which would be perfect for her.

And so, Grimhilde settled into her happily ever after. She attended parties and posed for her devoted and nourished herself with their adoration.

A few weeks later, after the commotion had died down and Snow was nothing more than a punchline for second rate comedians, Grimhilde lounged back in her favourite cushioned chair with a glass of Ever-Young Solution. The skin on her face tingled after a facial of natural hair exfoliation and carbonated snail extract. Her potion-master had been that day, bringing an array of new and customised creams and tonics. She would be the first to admit that they were often distasteful and uncomfortable, but the results were undeniable.

- This picture is a joy! Grimhilde glows, her beauty beyond question.
- What is your secret to looking so good?

If only they knew!

- She looks amazing for her age. I wonder if the movie with Snow White will ever come out now?

The comment hit her in the throat. Her age? And Snow was a thing of the past. But the post had a link to a news article that she couldn't help but open with a red taloned finger.

The Redemption of Snow White, read the headline, how Snow has turned herself around. Grimhilde scanned the article, an interview with Snow where it was explained how keenly she felt she had let her fans down. "I truly wasn't expecting fame of any sort and now that I have it, I want to show how much I appreciate the people who got me here." The article went on to explain that Snow had been staying at Doc's Residential Retreat. A space for self-examination through hard labour and reflection. As well as mining the depths of one's soul with treatments such as Sleep therapy, Bashful Aversion and Grump banishment, Snow would have been expected to clean and cook and take care of the vegetable garden and really get back to the basics in life. It all sounded a bit dopey to Grimhilde, but the article insisted that it had changed Snow's outlook on life. When asked about the Faraway Studio's project, Snow was quoted, "I would have relished working with Grimhilde, she's such an icon! I would have loved to play her daughter, and wouldn't she be the perfect Mother? I hope we have the opportunity to work together some day."

Iced fury stabbed at Grimhilde's temples. The glass in her hand cracked and dropped to the red carpeted floor, a pain unfelt and small drops of blood mingled with its contents. The sharp staccato of stilettos signalled Collette's swift approach. Grimhilde was unmoving and stiff in her chair when she entered the room.

"Grimhilde?" she asked quietly into the jagged stillness.

"You have failed," she said in a whisper. Before she stood and raised her voice, "How could you let this happen?"

"I'm sorry, we'll find something..."

"No!" the sharp command stopped Collette. She did not look directly at Grimhilde. She had seen her like this once before, and the results had been deadly.

Grimhilde stepped purposefully toward an ornate wooden cabinet, her purple lined black robe trailing on the floor behind her, a whisper of malice in her shadow. She opened both doors simultaneously, the sleeves on her outstretched arms giving her silhouette wings. She pushed aside the creams and ointments and opened a hidden compartment at the back to reveal vials of deadly and illicit concoctions. Her hand hovered elegantly over them, choosing carefully. She selected a small blue glass bottle, extracting it with her middle finger and thumb, then turned to face Collette, her perfectly plucked eyebrow arched.

"I'll take care of this myself."