

## Felixity

By: *Tanith Lee*

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The name sounds a little like “felicity,” or happiness, and a little like “felix,” or luck. Felixity, the quintessential poor little rich girl, seems to be neither happy nor lucky. In any fairy story, such a girl would have compensations of brain or talent and marry a handsome prince. Felixity can’t even do good watercolors. And when she chooses a husband—don’t even ask.

Let Tanith Lee tell you in this ironic and elegantly decadent story. I could compare “Felixity” to the works of Oscar Wilde or Angela Carter—but I think I’ll say that this is Tanith Lee at the top of her form, and leave it at that.

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Felixity’s parents were so beautiful that everywhere they went they were attended by a low murmuring, like that of a beehive. Even when pregnant with her child, Felixity’s mother was lovely, an ormolu madonna. But when Felixity was born, her mother died.

Among the riches of her father, then, in a succession of elaborate houses, surrounded by gardens which sometimes led to a cobalt sea, Felixity grew up, motherless. Her father watched her grow—he must have— although nannies tended her, servants waited on her, and tutors gave her lessons. Sometimes in the evening, when the heat of the day had settled and the stars had come out, Felixity’s father would interview his daughter on the lamplit terrace above the philodendrons.

“Now tell me what you learned today.”

But Felixity, confronted by her beautiful and elegant father burnished on the dark with pale electricity, was tongue-tied. She twisted her single plait around her finger and hunched her knees. She was an ugly child, ungraceful and gauche, with muddy skin and thin unshining hair. She had no energy, and even when put out to play, wandered slowly about the garden walks, or tried tiredly to skip, giving up after five or six heavy jumps. She was slow at her studies, worried over them, and suffered headaches. She was meek. Her teeth were always needing fillings, and she bore this unpleasantness with resignation.

“Surely there must have been something of note in your day?”

“I went to the dentist, Papa.”

“Your mother,” said Felixity’s father, “had only one tiny filling in her entire head. It was the size of a pin’s point. It was gold.” He said this without cruelty, more in wonder. “You must have some more dresses,” he added presently.

Felixity hated it when clothes were bought for her. She looked so awful in anything attractive or pretty, but they had never given up. Glamorously dressed, she resembled a chrysalis clad in the butterfly. When she could, she put on her drabest, most nondescript clothes.

After half an hour or so of his daughter's unstimulating company, Felixity's father sent her away. He was tactful, but Felixity was under no illusions. Beneath the dentist's numbing cocaine, she was aware her teeth were being drilled to the nerve, and that shortly, when the anesthetic wore off, they would hurt her.

Inevitably, as time passed, Felixity grew up and became a woman. Her body changed, but it did not improve. If anyone had been hoping for some magical transformation, they were disappointed. When she was sixteen, Felixity was, nevertheless, launched into society. Not a ripple attended the event, although she wore a red dress and a most lifelike wig fashioned by a famous coiffeur. Following this beginning, Felixity was often on the edges of social activities, where she was never noticed, gave neither offense nor inspiration, and before some of which she was physically sick several times from neurasthenia. As the years went by, however, her terror gradually left her. She no longer expected anything momentous with which she would not be able to cope.

Felixity's father aged marvelously. He remained slim and limber, was scarcely lined and that only in a way to make him more interesting. His hair and teeth were like a boy's.

"How that color suited your mother," he remarked to Felixity, as she crossed the room in a gown of translucent lemon silk, which made her look like an uncooked tuber. "I remember three such dresses, and a long fringed scarf. She was so partial to it." Again, he was not being cruel. Perhaps he was entitled to be perplexed. They had anticipated an exquisite child, the best of both of them. But then, they had also expected to live out their lives together.

When she was thirty-three, Felixity stopped moving in society, and attended only those functions she could not, from politeness, avoid. Her father did not remonstrate with her, indeed he only saw her now once a week, at a rite he referred to as "Dining with my Daughter." Although his first vision of her was always a slight shock, he did not disenjoy these dinners, which lasted two hours exactly, and at which he was able to reminisce at great length about his beautiful wife. If anyone had asked him, he would have said he did this for Felixity's sake. Otherwise, he assumed she was quite happy. She read books, and occasionally painted rather poor watercolors. Her teeth, which had of necessity been overfilled, had begun to break at regular intervals, but aside from this her life was tranquil, and passed in luxury. There was nothing more that could be done for her.

One evening, as Felixity was being driven home to one of her father's city houses, a young man ran from a side street out across the boulevard, in front of the car. The chauffeur put on his brakes at once. But the large silver vehicle lightly

touched the young man's side, and he fell in front of it. A crowd gathered instantly, at the periphery of which three dark-clad men might be seen looking on. But these soon after went away.

The chauffeur came to Felixity's door to tell her that the young man was apparently unhurt, but shaken. The crowd began to adopt factions, some saying that the young man was to blame for the accident, others that the car had been driven too fast. In the midst of this, the young man himself appeared at Felixity's door. In years he was about twenty-six, smartly if showily dressed in an ice-cream white suit now somewhat dusty from the road. His blue-black hair curled thickly on his neck; he was extremely handsome. He stared at the woman in the car with *amontillado* eyes. He said, "No, no, it was not your fault." And then he collapsed on the ground.

The crowd ascended into uproar. The young man must be taken immediately to the hospital.

Felixity was flustered, and it may have been this which caused her to open her door, and to instruct the chauffeur and a bystander to assist the young man into the car. As it was done, the young man revived a little.

"Put him here, beside me," said Felixity, although her voice trembled with alarm.

The car door was closed again, and the chauffeur told to proceed to a hospital. The crowd made loud sounds as they drove off.

To Felixity's relief, and faint fright, the young man now completely revived. He assured her that it was not essential to go to the hospital, but that if she were kind enough to allow him to rest a moment in her house, and maybe swallow a glass of water, he would be well enough to continue on his way. He had been hurrying, he explained, because he had arranged to see his aunt, and was late. Felixity was afraid that the drive to her house would prolong this lateness, but the young man, who said his name was Roland, admitted that he was often tardy on visits to his aunt, and she would forgive him.

Felixity, knowing no better, therefore permitted Roland to be driven with her to the house. Its electric gates and ectomorphic pillars did not seem to antagonize him, and ten minutes later, he was seated in the blond, eighteenth-century drawing room, drinking bottled carbonated water with slices of lime. Felixity asked him whether she should call her father's doctor, who was in residence. But Roland said again that he had no need of medical attention. Felixity believed him. He had all the hallmarks of strength, elasticity, and vitality she had noted in others. She was both glad and strangely sorry when he rose springingly up again, thanked her, and said that now he would be leaving.

When he had left, she found that she shook all over, sweat beaded her forehead, and she felt quite sick. That night she could not sleep, and the next morning, at breakfast, she broke another tooth on a roll.

Two days after, a bouquet of pink roses, from a fashionable florist, arrived for Felixity. That very afternoon Roland came to the gates and inquired if he might see her. The servants, the guards at the gate, were so unused to anyone seeking Felixity—indeed, it was unique—that they conveyed the message to her without question. And, of course, Felixity, wan with nauseous amazement and a hammering heart, invited Roland in.

“I’ve been unable to stop thinking about you,” said Roland. “I’ve never before met with a woman so gracious and so kind.”

Roland said many things, more or less in this vein, as they walked about the garden among the imported catalpas and the orchids. He confessed to Felixity that his aunt was dead; it was her grave he had been going to visit; he had no one in the world.

Felixity did not know what she felt, but never before had she felt anything like it. In the dim past of her childhood, when some vague attempts had been made to prepare or alter her, she had been given to understand that she might, when she gained them, entertain her friends in her father’s houses, and that her suitors would be formally welcomed. Neither friend nor suitor had ever crossed the thresholds of the houses, but now Felixity fell into a kind of delayed response, and in a while she had offered Roland wine on the terrace.

As they sat sipping it, her sick elation faded and a mute sweetness possessed her.

It was not that she thought herself lovable; she thought herself nothing. It was that one had come to her who had made her the center of the day. The monumental trees and exotic flowers had become a backdrop, the heat, the house, the servants who brought them things. She had met before people like Roland, the gorgeous magicians, who never saw her. But Roland did see her. He had fixed on her. He spoke to her of his sad beleaguered life, how his father had gambled away a fortune, how he had been sadistically misled on his chances of film stardom. He wanted her to know him. He gazed into her eyes, and saw in her, it was plain, vast continents of possibility.

He stayed with her until the dinner hour, and begged that he might be able to return. He had not told her she was beautiful, or any lie of that nature. He had said she was good, and luminously kind, and that never before had he met these qualities in a young woman, and that she must not shut him out as he could not bear it.

On his second visit, under a palm tree, Felixity was taken by compunction. “Six of my teeth are crowned,” she said. “And this—is a wig!” And she snatched it off to reveal her thin cropped hair.

Roland gave a gentle smile. “How you honor me,” he said. “I’m so happy that you trust me. But what does any of this matter? Throw the silly wig away. You are yourself. There has never been anyone like you. Not in the whole world.”

When Felixity and Roland had been meeting for a month, Felixity received a summons from her incredible father.

Felixity went to see him with a new type of courage. Some of her awe had lessened, although she would not have put this into words. She had been with a creature of fires. It seemed she knew her father a little better.

“I’m afraid,” said Felixity’s father, “that it is my grim task to disillusion you. The young man you’ve made your companion is a deceiver.”

“Oh,” said Felixity. She looked blank.

“Yes, my child. I don’t know what he has told you, but I’ve had him investigated. He is the bastard son of a prostitute, and has lived so far by dealings with thieves and shady organizations. He was in flight from one of these when he ran in front of your car. Obviously now he is in pursuit of your money, both your own finances and those which you’ll inherit on my death.”

Felixity did not say she would not hear ill of Roland. She thought about what her father had told her, and slowly she nodded. Then, from the patois of her curtailed emotions, she translated her heart into normal human emotional terms. “But I love him.”

Felixity’s father looked down at her with crucial pity. It was a fact, he did not truly think of her as his daughter, for his daughter would have been lovely. He accepted her as a pathetic dependent, until now always needing him, a jest of God upon a flawless delight which had been rent away.

“If you love him, Felixity,” he said, “you must send him to me.”

Felixity nodded again. Beings of fire communicated with each other. She had no fears.

The next day she waited on the terrace, and eventually Roland came out of the house into the sunlight. He seemed a little pale, but he spoke to her brightly. “What a man he is. We are to marry, my beloved. That is, if you’ll have me. I’m to care for you. What a golden future lies before us!” Roland did not detail his conversation with Felixity’s father. He did not relate, for example, that Felixity’s father had courteously touched on Roland’s career as crook and gigolo. Or that Felixity’s father had informed Roland that he grasped perfectly his aims, but that those aims were to be gratified, for Felixity’s sake. “She has had little enough,” said Felixity’s father. “Providing you are kind to her, a model husband, and don’t enlighten her in the matter of your real feelings, I am prepared to let you live at her expense.” Roland had protested feebly that he adored Felixity, her tenderness had won his heart. Roland did not recount to Felixity either that her father had greeted this effusion with the words: “You will not, please, try your formula on me.”

In the days which succeeded Roland’s dialogue with Felixity’s father, the

now-betrothed couple were blissful, each for their own reasons.

Then Felixity's father flew to another city on a business venture, the engine of his plane malfunctioned, and it crashed into the forests. Before the month was up, his remarkable but dead body had been recovered, woven with lianas and chewed by jaguars. Felixity became the heiress to his fortune.

During this time of tragedy, Roland supported Felixity with unswerving attention. Felixity was bewildered at her loss, for she could not properly persuade herself she had lost anything.

The funeral took place with extreme pomp, and soon after the lovers sought a quiet civil wedding. Felixity had chosen her own dress, which was a swampy brown. The groom wore vanilla and scarlet. When the legalities were completed, Roland drove Felixity away in his new white car, toward a sixty-roomed villa on the coast.

As she was driven, a little too fast, along the dusty road, Felixity was saturated by an incoherent but intense nervousness.

She had never had any female friends, but she had read a number of books, and she guessed that her unease sprang from sexual apprehension. Never, in all their courtship, had Roland done more than press her hands or her lips lightly with his own. She had valued this decorum in him, even though disappointment sometimes chilled her. At the impress of his flesh, however light, her pulses raced. She was actually very passionate, and had never before had the chance of realizing it. Nevertheless, Roland had told her that, along with her kindness, he worshiped her purity. She knew she must wait for their wedding night to learn of the demons of love.

Now it seemed she was afraid. But what was there to dread? Her reading, which if not salacious, had at least been comprehensive, had given her the gist of the nuptial act. She was prepared to suffer the natural pain of deflowerment in order to offer joy to her partner. She imagined that Roland would be as grave and gentle in lovemaking as he had always been in all their dealings. Therefore, why her unease?

Along the road the copper-green pyramids of coffee trees spun past, and on the horizon's edge, the forests kept pace with the car.

By midnight, Felixity thought, I shall be different.

They arrived before sunset at the villa, where Felixity had spent some of her childhood. Felixity was surprised to find that no servants came out to greet them. Her bafflement grew when, on entering the house, she found the rooms polished and vacant.

"Don't concern yourself with that," said Roland. "Come with me. I want to show you something."

Felixity went obediently. Roland had somehow given her to understand that,

along with kindness and purity, he liked docility. They moved up the grand stairway, along corridors, and so into the upper regions of the house, which were reached by narrow twining flights of steps. Up here, somewhere, Roland unlocked and opened a door.

They went into a bare whitewashed room. A few utilitarian pieces of furniture were in it, a chair or two, a slender bed, a round mirror. In one wall a door gave on a bathroom closet. There was a window, but it was caged in a complex if ornamental grill.

“Here we are,” said Roland.

Felixity looked at him, confused.

“Where?” she asked.

“Your apartment.”

Felixity considered this must be a joke, and laughed falsely, as she had sometimes done in her society days.

“I have you at a disadvantage,” said Roland. “Let me explain.”

He did so. This room was where Felixity was to live. If there was anything else she wanted—he knew she was fond of books—it could be supplied. Food would be put in through that flap, there, near the bottom of the door. She should return her empty trays via the same aperture. She would find the bathroom stocked with clean towels, soap, and toothpaste. These would be replaced at proper intervals. Whatever else she required, she should list—see the notepad and pencil on the table—and these things too would be delivered. She could have a radio, if she liked. And perhaps a gramophone.

“But—” said Felixity, “but—”

“Oh, surely you didn’t think I would ever *cohabit* with you?” asked Roland reasonably. “I admit, I might have had to awhile, if your father had survived, but maybe not even then. He was so glad to be rid of you, a letter from you every six months, dictated by me, would have sufficed. No, you will live up here. And I shall live in the house and do as I want. Now and then I’ll ask you to sign the odd document, in order to assist my access to your money. But otherwise I won’t trouble you at all. And so, dear Felixity, thank you, and au revoir. I wish you a pleasant evening.”

And having said this, Roland went out, before Felixity could shift hand or limb, and she heard the key turning in the lock. And then a raucous silence.

At first she did not credit what had happened. She ran about like a trapped insect, to the door, to the window. But both were closed fast and the window looked out on a desolate plain that stretched away beyond the house to the

mountains. The sun was going down, and the sky was indelibly hot and merciless.

Roland would come back, of course. This was some game, to tease her.

But darkness came, and Roland did not. And much later a tray of bread and chicken and coffee was put through the door. Felixity ran to the door again, shrieking for help. But whoever had brought the tray took no notice.

Felixity sat through her wedding night on a hard chair, shivering with terror and incipient madness, by the light of the one electric lamp she had found on the table.

In the villa, far off, she thought she heard music, but it might only have been the rhythm of the sea.

Near dawn, she came to accept what had occurred. It was only what she should have expected. She wept for half an hour, and then lay down on the mean bed to sleep.

For weeks, and probably months, Felixity existed in the whitewashed room with the grilled window.

Every few days books were put through her door, along with the trays of meals. The food was generally simple or meager, and always cold; still it punctually arrived. A radio appeared, too, a few days after Felixity's internment. It seemed able to receive only one station, which put out endless light music and melodramatic serials, but even so Felixity came to have it on more and more. At midnight the station closed down. Then it was replaced by a claustrophobic loud silence.

Other supplies were promptly presented through the door on her written request. Clean towels, new soap, shampoo, toothpaste and toothbrushes, Felixity's brand of analgesics for her headaches, and her preferred form of sanitary protection.

There was no clock or calendar in the room, but the radio station repeatedly gave the day and hour. At first Felixity noticed the progress of time, until eventually she recognized that she was counting it up like a prisoner, as if, when she had served her sentence, she would be released. But, of course, her freedom would never come. Felixity ceased to attend to the progress of time.

In the beginning, too, she went on with her normal routines of cleanliness and order. In her father's houses, her bathrooms had been spectacular, and she had liked using them, experimenting there with soaps and foams, and with preparations which claimed they might make her hair thicker, although they did not. With only the functional white bathroom at her disposal, Felixity lost interest in hygiene, and several days would sometimes elapse before she bathed. She had also to clean the bathroom herself, which initially had proved challenging, but soon it became a chore she did not bother with. Besides, she found the less she used the bathroom, the less cleaning it needed.

Felixity would sit most of the day, listening with unfixed open eyes to the radio. Now and then she would read part of a book. Occasionally she would wander to the window and look out. But the view never changed, and the glare of the distant mountains tired her eyes. Often she found it very hard to focus on the printed word, and would read the same phrase in a novel over and over, trying to make sense of it.

After perhaps three months had gone by, an afternoon came when she heard the key turn in the lock of her door.

She was now too apathetic to be startled. Yet when Roland, gleaming in his ice-cream clothes, came into the room, she knew a moment of shame. But then she acknowledged it did not matter if he saw her unwashed in her robe, her thin hair and unpowdered face greasy, for he had never cared what she looked like; she was nothing to him.

And Roland approached with his usual charm, smiling at her, and holding out some papers.

“Here I am,” he said, “I won’t keep you a minute. If you’d just be kind enough to sign these.”

Felixity did not get up at once only because she was lethargic. But she said softly, “What if I refuse?”

Roland continued to smile. “I should be forced to take away your radio and books, and to starve you.”

Felixity believed him. After all, if he starved her to death, he would inherit everything. It was really quite good of him to allow her to live.

She went to the table and signed the papers.

“Thank you so much,” said Roland.

“Won’t you let me out?” said Felixity.

“Obviously I can’t.” He added logically, “It’s much better if you stay here. Or you might be tempted to run away and divorce me. Or if you didn’t do that, you’d be horribly in my way.”

Roland had, prior to their drive to the villa, sacked the original servants and installed a second set, all of whom were bribed to his will, served him unquestioningly, and held their tongues. Roland now lived the life which ideally suited him, answerable to no one. He lay in bed until noon, breakfasted extravagantly, spent the day lazily, and in the evening drove to the nearest city to gamble and to drink. Frequently he would return to the villa in the small hours with beautiful women, to whom, in a great scrolled bed, he made ferocious love, casting them out again at dawn, in their spangled dresses, like the rinds of eaten fruits.

“But,” said Felixity, “you see I’m afraid—if I have to stay here—I may lose my mind.”

“Oh, don’t worry about that,” said Roland. “The servants already think I locked you up because you were insane.”

Then he left her, and Felixity went to gaze from her window. The mountains looked like the demarcation line at the end of the world. Felixity turned on her radio.

That night, as she ate a piece of hard sausage, she broke a tooth.

She felt curiously humiliated by this, yet she had no choice but to set the fact down on a page of the notepad, and append a request for a dentist. This she slipped out through the flap in the door with a pallid misgiving. She did not suppose for an instant Roland would permit her to leave the house and what kind of mechanic would he send in to her?

For nine days, during which the broken tooth tore at her mouth and finally made it bleed, Felixity awaited Roland’s response. On the tenth day she came to see he would not trouble to respond at all. He had spared her what suffering he could, under the circumstances, but to put himself out over her teeth was too much to ask of him.

This, then, was where she had sunk to.

Four hours passed, and Felixity sat in her chair listening to a serial about a sensational girl who could not choose between her lovers. Behind her the window became feverish, then cool; and darkness slid into the room.

Suddenly something strange happened. Felixity sprang to her feet as if she had been electrically shocked. She rushed toward the cheap mirror on the wall, and stared at herself in the fading crepuscule. She did not need light, for she knew it all. She reached up and rent at her thin hair and a scream burst out of her, lacerating her mouth freshly on the sharp edge of broken enamel.

“Nonononono!” screamed Felixity.

She was denying only herself.

She jumped up and down before the mirror, shrieking, galvanized by a scalding white thread inside her.

Only when this huge energy had left her, which took several minutes, did she crawl back to the chair and collapse in it, weeping. She cried for hours out of the well of pain. Her sobs were strong and violent, and the room seemed to shake at them.

At midnight, the radio station closed down and the shattering silence bounded into the room. Felixity looked up. Everything was in blackness, the lamp unlit, and

yet it seemed there had been a flash of brilliance. Perhaps there was a storm above the mountains. Or, incredibly, perhaps some human life went over the plain, a car driving on the dirt tracks of it with headlights blazing.

Felixity moved to the window. Night covered the plain, and the mountains were like dead coals. Above, the stars winked artificially, as they had done in the planetarium where once she had been taken as a child.

The whip of light cracked, again. It was not out on the plain but inside the room.

Felixity was still too stunned for ordinary fear.

She walked back slowly to her chair, and as she did so, she saw her reflection in the round mirror on the wall.

Felixity stopped, and her reflection stopped, inevitably. Felixity raised her right arm, let it fall. Her left arm, let it fall. The reflection did the same. Felixity began to walk forward again, toward the mirror. She walked directly up to it, and halted close enough to touch.

Earlier, in the twilight, the mirror had reflected Felixity only too faithfully. It had shown the apex of her ungainly figure, her drab, oily complexion, her ugly features and wispy hair. Now the mirror contained something else. It was illuminated as if a lamp shone on it out of the dark room. In the mirror, Felixity's reflection was no longer Felixity.

Instead, a woman stood in the mirror, copying exactly every gesture that Felixity made.

This woman, to judge from her upper torso, was slender, with deeply indented breasts. Her skin, which was visible in the low-cut bodice, at the throat, and the lower part of the face, was the mildest gold, like dilute honey. Her tightly fitting gown was a flame. On her upper face, across her forehead and eyes, she wore a mask like yellow jade, from which long sprays of sparkling feathers curved away. And above the mask and beneath ran thickly coiling gilded hair, like golden snakes poured from a jar.

Felixity put both her hands up over her mouth. And the woman in the mirror did as Felixity did. She wore long gloves the color of topaz, streaked with scintillants.

The flash of brilliance snapped again. It was up in the black air above the woman. A lyre of sparks came all unstrung: A firework. As it faded, an entire scene was there at the woman's back.

It was a city of steps and arches, plazas and tall buildings, through which a brimstone river curled its way. But over the river, slim bridges ran that were fruited with lamps of orange amber, and on the facades all about roared torches of lava red.

All these lights burned in the river, too, wreathing it with fires.

Figures went across the levels of the city, in scarlet, brass, and embers. Some led oxblood dogs, or carried incandescent parrots on their wrists. A bronze alligator surfaced from the river, glittered like jewelry, and was gone.

Felixity saw a large red star hung in the sky.

Within the woman's mask, two eyes glimmered. She lowered her hands from her mouth, and Felixity found that she had lowered her hands. But then the woman turned from the mirror and walked away.

Felixity watched the woman walk to the end of a torchlit pier, and there she waited in her gown of flame, until a flaming boat came by and she stepped into it and was borne off under the bridges of lamps.

After this the scene melted, all its fires and colors spilling together downward, and out by some nonexistent gutter at the mirror's base.

Felixity took two or three paces back. In sheer darkness now she went and lay on her bed. But the afterimages of the lights stayed on her retinas for some while, in flickering floating patches. The mirror remained black, and in it she could dimly see the room reflecting. Felixity closed her eyes, and beheld the alligator surfacing in a gold garland of ripples, and as it slipped under again, she slept.

In the morning, when she woke, Felixity did not think she had been dreaming. It did occur to her that perhaps Roland had played some kind of trick on her, but then she quickly dismissed this idea, for Roland had no interest in her; why should he waste effort on such a thing? Had she then suffered an hallucination? Was this the onset of madness? Felixity discovered that she did not thrill with horror. She felt curiously calm, almost complacent. She took a bath and shampooed her hair, ate the meals that were shunted through the door, ignoring as best she could the difficulty with the broken tooth, and listened to the radio. She was waiting for the darkness to come back. And when it did so, she switched off the radio and sat in her chair, watching the mirror.

Hours passed, and the mirror kept up its blackness, faintly reflecting the room. Once Felixity thought there was a spark of light, but it was only some spasm in her eyes.

Eventually Felixity put on the radio again. It was midnight, and the station was closing down. Felixity became alert, for it was at this moment on the previous night that the mirror had come alive. However, the station went off the air and that was all. Felixity watched the mirror from her bed until sleep overcame her.

Somewhere in the markerless black of early morning, she awakened, and over the mirror was flowing a ribbon of fire.

Felixity leapt from the bed and dashed to the mirror, but already the fire had

vanished, leaving no trace.

Felixity set herself to sleep by day and watch by night. This was quite easy for her, for, rather like a caged animal, she had become able to slumber almost at will. In the darkness she would sit, without the lamp, sometimes not looking directly at the mirror. She let the radio play softly in the background, and when the closedown came, she would tense. But nothing happened.

Seven nights went by.

Felixity continued her bat-like existence.

Only one magical thing had ever taken place in her life before, her betrothal to Roland; and that had been proved to be a sham. The magic of the mirror she recognized, as sometimes a piece of music, never heard before, may seem familiar. This music was for her.

On the eighth night, just after the radio had announced it was eleven o'clock, the mirror turned to a coin of gold.

Without a sound, Felixity got up, went to the mirror, and stared in.

It was a golden ballroom lit by bizarre chandeliers like the rosy clustered hearts of pomegranates. There on the floor of obsidian a man and woman danced in an austere yet sensual fashion. His were sophisticated carnival clothes of black and blood, and he was masked in jet. She was Felixity's reflection, and now she wore a dress of sulfur beaded by magma rain. There was a tango playing on the radio, and it seemed they moved in time to it.

Felixity felt herself dancing, although she did not stir, and the man's arm around her.

In a tall window was a sort of day, a sky that was coral pink and a huge red sun or planet lying low.

The tango quivered to its end.

The man and woman separated, and all the colors pooled together and sluiced down the mirror. Felixity made a wild motion, as if to catch them as they flushed through the bottom of the glass. But, of course, nothing ran out.

In the blackness of her room then, Felixity solemnly danced a tango alone. She was stiff and unwieldy, and sometimes bumped into the flimsy furniture. She knew now a raw craving and yearning, a nostalgia as if for an idyllic childhood. She had come to understand who the woman was. She was Felixity, in another world. Felixity's brain had made the intellectual and spiritual jump swiftly and completely. Here she was a lump, unloved, unliked even, so insignificant she could be made a prisoner forever. But there, she was a being of fire.

Oh, to go through the mirror. Oh, to be one with her true self.

And at last she touched the mirror, which was very warm against her hand, as if the sun had just shone on it. But otherwise it gave no clue to its remarkable properties. And certainly no hint of a way in.

After the vision at eleven o'clock on the eighth night, a month elapsed, and the mirror never altered by night or day.

Felixity grew very sad. Although she had been thrown into an abyss, idly tossed there, her reaction had been mostly passivity rather than despair, for she was used to ill-treatment in one form or another. But the images in the mirror had raised her up to a savage height, to a plateau of lights she had never before achieved. That she grasped almost at once their implication demonstrated how profoundly she had been affected. And now she was left with the nothing which had always encompassed her and which Roland had driven in beside her, into her cage.

She ceased to eat the scanty meals and only sipped the coffee or water. In order to hide what she did— she was incoherently afraid of force-feeding—she dropped the portions of food into the lavatory. Felixity became extremely feeble, dizzy, and sick. Her head ached constantly, and she could not keep down the painkillers. She lay on the bed all day, sinking in and out of sleep. She could hardly hear the radio for the singing in her ears. At night she tried to stay conscious, but the mirror was like a black void that sucked her in. Her head whirled and spots of light burst over her eyes, deceiving her, for there was nothing there. She cried softly, without passion. She hoped she would die soon. Then she could sleep indefinitely.

On the first morning of the new month, before sunrise, Felixity raised her gluey lids and saw the woman who was herself standing up against the inside of the mirror in her mask of yellow jade, a dress like naphtha and the glinting vipers of her golden hair.

Felixity's heart palpitated. She tried to get up, but she was too weak.

Behind the woman who was the real Felixity, there was, as at the start, only blackness. But now the mirror-Felixity lifted her ruby glove, and she held in her fingers a single long coppery feather, the plume of some extraordinary bird.

If she would only take off her mask, Felixity thought, I'd see that she is me. It would be my face, and it would be beautiful.

But the woman did not remove the mask of yellow jade. Instead she turned her head toward the feather, and she blew gently on it.

The breath that came out of her mouth was bloomed with a soft lightning. It enveloped the tip of the feather, which at once caught fire.

Felixity watched, dazzled, until the flame went out and the woman dissolved abruptly into glowing snow, and the mirror was only a mirror again. Then Felixity

turned on her side and fell asleep.

When it was light, she woke refreshed, and going into the bathroom, bathed and washed her hair. Presently when the tray of food came, she ate it. Her stomach hurt for some while after, but she did not pay any attention. She put on the radio and hummed along with the melodies, most of which she now knew by heart.

In the afternoon, after the lunch tray, from which she ate everything, the door was unlocked and Roland entered the room.

Felixity stood up. She had not realized he would arrive so quickly.

“Here I am,” he said, “I won’t detain you a moment. Just some more of these dull papers to sign.”

Felixity smiled, and Roland was surprised. He expected acquiescence, but not happiness.

“Naturally I’ll sign them,” said Felixity. “But first, you must kiss me.”

Roland now looked concerned.

“It seems inappropriate.”

“Not at all,” said Felixity. “I’m your wife.”

And at this, the gigolo must have triumphed over the thief, for Roland approached Felixity and gravely bowed his head. Indeed, at the press of her flesh on his, after the libidinous life he had been leading, his lips parted from force of habit, and Felixity blew into his mouth.

Roland sprang away. His face appeared congested and astonished. He went on, stumbling backward, until he reached the door, and then he turned as if to rush out of it.

So Felixity saw from the back of him, the tailored suit and blue-black hair, and two jets of white flame which spouted suddenly from his ears.

Roland spun on the spot, and now she saw his face, with yellow flames gouting from his nose and purple gases from his mouth. And then he went up in a noiseless scream of fire, like petrol, or a torch.

The doorway was burning, and she could not get out of it. Flames were darting around the room, consuming the sticks of furniture as they went. The bed erupted like an opening rose. The mirror was gold again, and red.

How cold the flames were. Felixity felt them eating her and gave herself eagerly, glad to be rid of it, the vileness of her treacherous body. The last thing she saw was half the burning floor give way and crash down into the lower regions of the house, and the mirror flying after it like a bubble of the sun.

The servants escaped the blazing villa, and stood in the gardens of the house above the sea, wailing and exclaiming. It was generally concluded that their employer, Roland, and his mad invalid wife, had perished in the inferno. With amazing rapidity, the house collapsed, sending up a pillar of red smoke that could be seen for miles.

Unseen by anyone, however, Felixity emerged out of the rubble.

She had not a mark or a smut upon her. She had instead the body of a goddess and the face of an angel.

Her skin was like honey and her hair like a cascade of golden serpents and in her mouth were the white and flawless teeth of a healthy predator.

Somehow she had had burned on to her, also, a lemon dress and amber shoes.

She went among the philodendrons, Felixity, out of sight. And so down toward the road, without a backward glance.