

Excerpted from
The Silver Seed

Charles Collins

Creative Impulse

Omaha, Nebraska

www.creativeimpulse.BIZ

Copyright ©2008 Charles A. Collins

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be copied, reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means mechanical, electronic, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the express written consent of the author.

With a deep, cleansing sigh she sat down beside the fire and spread her sewing across her lap, only to realize that her cloak was nearly finished. She wanted to crow with delight, then in her next breath wondered why she should be so excited about a rude garment that would pale in comparison to the least of the finery she had worn at her father's court. The answer, she finally realized, was that this cloak was hers in a way that none of that clothing had ever been. She had made this one with her own hands.

She could hardly contain her excitement as the last few stitches fell into place. Mouse helped her to tie the knots that would hold all of her hard work in place, and she sprang to her feet, the dance in her step nearly matching the one in her eyes.

The others watched her swirl the cloak about her shoulders with approving smiles, then Durgan stepped forward with the boots he had fashioned. They still needed some stitching, but Aileen was amazed at the softness of the fur he had used to line the insides. She ran her hands over the soft rabbit-skin, luxuriating in its feel. Indeed, the boots almost seemed too fine for riding. Aileen hugged herself tightly; the night was better than any Midwinter's Eve, and she did not want it to end.

As she leaned back against a fallen tree, she noticed that the others had fallen silent. Glancing up she saw that Mouse was standing stiffly before her.

"You'll need a broach for your fine, new cloak," he said, clearing his throat. He held out his hand, and Aileen gasped at what he held there. The broach had been wrought from white gold, in the shape of a bird in flight, its wings swept back proudly. Between those wings, as though resting on its back, was a large diamond, glinting brightly with reflected fire and starlight.

For an instant the world held its breath.

"I have never seen that piece," said Nestor softly.

Mouse glanced down at the broach in his hand, his eyes seeming to lose their focus. "It belonged to my mother," he said, his voice no more than a whisper. "And I have never had the courage to wear it myself."

"You have never spoken of your mother before," Nestor answered.

The young man sighed heavily, turning his head upward to look at the night sky. His eyes sparkled in the starlight.

A small face, slick with tears, buried itself in her breast. Unable to speak, her throat sealed by the pain in her own heart, she stroked the child's hair and rocked him back and forth. The falling sickness had claimed his father, her husband.

“There, Dael,” she whispered, finally able to force words past the throbbing pain. “There child.”

Her son was inconsolable, and for a time she was grateful for the chance to lose herself in comforting him. The need to be strong for his sake was all that kept her from shattering under the strain.

“I don’t wanna be sad,” the child said when he could shape words once again.

“I know, Dael,” she answered softly, continuing to hold him tightly. “But sad times must come because otherwise there would be no happy times. We would not be sad now if we had not loved Daddy so much, but I am glad that we loved Daddy, and I would love him all over again even if it meant that I had to be sad. In fact, I am going to try to love as many people as I can, even though I know that will make me sad sometimes.”

“Me too,” Dael answered staunchly, with the conviction that only a child can muster. She knew, though, through some second sight given to mothers, that he meant those words, and that he would hold himself to that promise.

“My mother was very beautiful,” he whispered, “and very wise. She taught me that sorrow is life just as joy is, and that to hide from either is to die.”

The young man fell silent for a moment, then brought his gaze to rest on Aileen, his eyes piercingly clear. “Please, wear this with the honor it deserves.”

Aileen could only stare back at him. “But this is worth a fortune!”

Mouse shrugged, a half-smile showing through the pain etched on his features. “I haven’t much use for a fortune; they rarely taste very good,” he said. Then his face grew more serious. “Besides, Mother would not want me to keep it any longer. She would want me to live.”