

Jessica

They sat alone in the beautiful house. The large room was dimly lit, but the candle's glow flickered across the walls with warmth. Jessica gazed out the window, focused intensely on the moon's pale light and how it sparkled on the tiny blades of grass, which were beaded with dew.

Although it was a warm night, she could see the leaves of the trees rustling in a tender breeze. Inside, the music flowed softly from the corner of the room. Everything felt different here. Lorenzo smiled and spoke poetry. She responded with the like. Regrets were farthest from her mind. But there *was* something... something that marred her happiness only slightly, ruffling the surface of her calm.

Maybe it was purely nostalgia. She had always complained about her former life, shut up inside that stuffy crowded house, but it was all she had ever known. It wasn't home- not really, but it was as close to home as she had experienced and she couldn't forget it all so quickly.

Back there, bright objects gleamed from each corner and crevice. Every empty space was filled with the glistening gold. At first, Jessica had been delighted by the treasure. As a little girl, she would feel the cold hard coins and let them sift through her fingers. She would laugh and listen to the music they made as they connected with the tiles of the floor.

She did this when her father was away. He only touched the money when he counted. To him, it was not a toy. When she was younger, Jessica could never understand this. What was the point of the treasure if it couldn't be played with? What was it worth if it just sat there? She still wasn't quite sure of the answer. And yet, she had taken it all. She had filled the brown sacks until they were burgeoning with coins, and then she had handed them over to Lorenzo.

She had taken the thing he loved most. For herself, for Lorenzo, or for something else?

She was cruel.

It was hard not to imagine the way he had reacted upon discovery of their absence. There was a side of herself she was almost afraid of, a side which wanted to see him suffer. There was another side as well: a side that churned at the thought of his agony and couldn't bear to think of his tears and the way he must have knelt alone in the empty house. He was alone still.

Despite her resentment, she couldn't quite pretend he hadn't cared. There were memories of his patient eyes and proud glances at her progress; of his careful advice and stiff embrace. Although he was quiet, she heard him hum often in the quiet house. She had

gathered the music gratefully in her arms and held onto it closely. These memories were enough to convince her, even though she tried to deny them to assuage the persistent hum of guilt.

He had lost his treasure. But he had also lost a daughter. She spared a thought to think that *she* had been his treasure. Perhaps, after all, she had been the greatest treasure he had ever possessed.

She wasn't his anymore. Jessica's eyes flitted from the past into Lorenzo's kindly gaze. He didn't care about the money, not really. But she had given it to him anyways. She wanted to give something, as though alone she might not be enough.

"Sit, Jessica," he told her, and she moved from the window to the table. "Listen to the music."

The song swelled in grandeur and Jessica's heart felt both heavy and full. "I am never happy when I hear sweet music," she said.