

Precious Metal: An Oxidizing Love Story

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The early morning drizzle fell slightly sideways, saturating the mossy forest floor already mushy from the night before. He stood rooted in place. Warm droplets seeped into every tin crevasse, making it harder and harder to move with each passing second. The fingers of his left hand formed a permanent fist around the wooden handle of his raised axe as his arm rested at a perfect right angle.

So this is what rust feels like.

Perched somewhere in the tops of the fragrant pines, a bird serenaded him with a mellifluous tone — the sweet sound of freedom. He followed the song upwards with his eyes, hoping to catch a glimpse of anything but the underside of his furrowed brow. But the bird remained safely tucked away out of sight. Off to the side sat the half-empty oil can, a cruel arm's length away, on a knotty pine stump — his last victim before the paralyzing rain enveloped the forest. He was now a prisoner in the woods where he'd spent his entire life chopping wood for the people of Oz. He yearned for oil. A few squirts is all it would take.

Instead, the rain fell harder. It pelted his smooth, metallic face giving the illusion of tears. But crying had been a human luxury, like blinking or speaking or laughing. Funny. He still felt human although his joints begged to differ. Nothing human of him remained. No arms. No legs. No head. No brain. No heart. It was taken by a few swings of his own axe, cursed by jealousy, hatred, and fear. All that was left standing was a rusted, hollow heap of metal in the shape of the man he once was. A man made entirely out of tin.

A tin man.

The wind swirled in from the north, kicking up tiny leaves and dirt in his eyes, rusted open and bone-dry. He missed the sanctuary of darkness. It was the only time he could see her

face. Every curve, every line was seared in his mind. Her alabaster skin against her raven hair that cascaded past her delicate shoulders. Eyes as deep and green as freshly unearthed malachite. The shape of her petit frame as he held her in his arms for the last time. But the memories were fading along with the last vestige of the very essence that made him human — love. Her name. Whatever you do, don't forget her name, he told himself. Her name was all he had left of her. Isabel, he repeated, trying to close his eyes one last time.

Her name was Isabel.

“Isabel!” The woman screamed in the distance. The beautiful girl stood on the banks of the river gazing nervously westward as she collected the evening's supply of firewood. There was an unusual shiftlessness to Eastern Oz when the sun went down. Even the shadows, draped haphazardly across the mountains, couldn't decide where to settle. She glanced once more towards setting sun. He was unusually late.

“Isabel!” The woman screamed again, a few octaves louder. Her shrill voice echoed loudly and bounced off the mountains.

Isabel ignored the bellowing. The cart she had commandeered from her favorite castle hand, Taj, a Munchkin, was practically empty, except for a few twigs for kindling. Isabel shuttered. Now she had to think of an excuse for the failed firewood excursion: a menacing band of firewood thieves appeared out of nowhere and robbed her blind. Or, she turned her back for a split second to pick up a log and the wood magically disappeared. No. Not magic. She hated anything to do with magic.

Isabel bit her lip like she always did when she was nervous. Neither excuse sounded particularly plausible but it was better than nothing. Besides, if he made it before dark she wouldn't have to lie at all. He would give her plenty of wood. But she decided to go with the menacing band of firewood thieves which sounded most believable.

She was about to walk back to the castle when a loud rustle came from a nearby thicket. Isabel stumbled backwards as a stout little man with thick eye glasses and a wide-brimmed hat emerged from the bush carrying a dimly lit oil lamp. He removed his hat and rubbed his bald head vigorously back and forth to get the blood circulating.

“Taj! Don't sneak up on me. You scared me to death,” said Isabel.

“I do apologize, Miss Isabel, but your mother is looking for you.”

Isabel rolled her eyes. “Tell her you can't find me. Tell her that you searched the grounds from top to bottom and there was no trace of me, anywhere.”

“I can't do that. She threatened to turn me into a sloth and drop me in the middle of the Great Desert if I didn't return with you. Now, shall we —”

Isabel ignored him. “Go home, Taj.” She squinted towards the other side of the river. He had never been this late before even when he helped clear trees for the Yellow Brick Road.

Taj gave a weak smile. “Please, Miss Isabel. I don't find sloths to be particularly attractive animals, and I certainly wouldn't survive the desert. Besides, don't you remember what happened the last time your mother found out you were with the Woodsman? Don't make her angry. I'm still repairing gaping holes in the castle walls.”

Isabel frowned. “His name is Eoin, not “the Woodsman”, and I haven't forgotten anything. That's why we meet out here, away from the castle and out of her sight. The only way

she would find out about us is if you told her. In that case, I'd turn you into a sloth myself. Now go home, Taj. Please."

Taj pushed his glasses up higher on his nose and turned to leave just as a tall, dark figure appeared on the river bank. He carried a large axe in one hand and satchel loaded with firewood in the other. "Those are empty threats, Taj," he said. "She really is a very nice witch."

Isabel smiled and sprinted towards him, throwing her arms around his thick neck. "I am a witch, but who said anything about being nice? You're late," she said and kissed him firmly on the lips before he could answer. She put her hand on his chest. "I can feel your heart beating fast."

He pulled away just enough to look at her exquisite face. "I was held up in the Southlands. The situation there is worse than we thought. There's talk of civil war in every town from here to the Emerald City."

Isabel narrowed her eyes. "What does that have to do with you?"

"Isabel —"

"You promised me you wouldn't get involved, Eoin. Remember? We're staying out of it."

Darkness fell as the sun disappeared behind the mountains. The flame from Taj's lamp cast a soft, yellow glow across the river bank as the three sat on the cold, damp shore. Eoin's gaze met Isabel's, who turned her head and looked off into the distance. The light from the castle's torches grew brighter. Before long her mother's entire army would be out looking for her.

“Izzy. As long as the people of Oz are oppressed and living under these archaic laws, we can never be free to be together. You know that as well as anyone.”

“So let’s run away! Disappear, like we talked about before. Across the desert to the Other World where people are free to be with whomever they’d like. It’s true. Tell him, Taj…”

Taj lowered his eyes. “Miss Isabel…”

Eoin’s massive hands clasped Isabel’s. “They’d find us, Izzy. If not your mother, then your aunt or someone else. Humans and witches are not supposed to be together. Until the laws change, we’ll never be free.”

Off to the distance the sound of voices filled the air. The soldiers of the Eastern Army headed towards them. Eoin, Isabel and Taj scrambled to their feet as the voices grew louder. Eoin grabbed his axe and ran up a nearby hill as Izzy and Taj loaded the firewood in her cart.

“About ten or so. They’re coming this way, they’re carrying torches,” he said. “Go home. I’ll lead them away from you into the woods.” Before Isabel could stop him, Eoin ran screaming towards the battalion of soldiers. Isabel gasped in horror and tried to follow him, but Taj stopped her.

“Don’t, Miss. If anyone can out smart them, it’s the Woodsman. He knows the woods like the back of his hand. He’ll be fine. We really must go.” The soldiers’ voices faded as Isabel took one final glance in the darkness before she and Taj wheeled the cart back to the castle.

“Mother!” Isabel flew through the heavy double doors of the castle’s front entrance. She ran up the stairs to her mother’s bedroom.

Sitting at a small dressing table was a pale woman with delicate features, brushing the same thick, raven-colored hair as Isabel's. She wore a flowing red robe with silver piping that cinched at the waste, accentuating her petite frame. She set the brush down and glanced up at Isabel who was directly over her.

"Hello, darling," she said. "Something wrong?" Then she faced the mirror and continued brushing her hair.

"Call them off, Mother! Here I am. I'm home. You can call off your goons."

The woman stood up slowly and opened the window, peering out into the darkness. The evening air was quiet and still and filled with the sweet smell of wildflowers. "I was told there was a trespasser on the grounds. Someone who doesn't belong here, among us witches. I sent a few soldiers to take care of the problem." She smiled sweetly at her daughter.

Isabel scowled. "They'll kill him if they find him. You know that."

"Better him than you. What you're doing is illegal. Really, Isabel, consorting with humans? I don't make the laws but we do have to follow them."

"You're the High Witch! You control the entire Eastern territory and you sit on the Governor's Council. You could change the laws in Oz if you wanted to."

"I think you're overestimating my political influence not to mention my desire for change. The laws are in place for a reason, to keep peace and harmony throughout Oz. Besides, you need to be with your own kind. Humans are dirty, physically unappealing, intellectually inferior, and rude. I can't imagine why you want to be with one of those creatures."

"You're wrong. There's talk of civil war, Mother. Among all the factions, not just the humans. Soon Oz will be in chaos. If you won't help me, I'll go to Effie and ask her."

The woman laughed. “My sister won’t help you. She’s too busy training her army of flying monkeys to search for these...” She pulled out a box from underneath her bed and opened the lid. Lying on a bed of white silk were a pair of delicate shoes, the most brilliant color of red Isabel had ever seen.

“What’s this?” said Isabel, removing one of the shoes to inspect it.

“This, my darling daughter, is the key to controlling all of Oz.”

“I...I don’t understand? What are you talking about?”

“I’m talking about magic. The kind of magic that will have whole universe at your feet.”

“My feet?” Isabel looked down at the ruby red shoes that were now securely on her feet.

“Mother, what have you done?”

Eoin plastered himself against the trunk of a large tree, out of sight from the soldiers. The glow from the torches flooded the Eastern forest with long, slender shadows as they searched for the Woodsman who now was considered a dangerous criminal.

But all of his thoughts were fixed on Isabel.

He peered out from behind the tree then quickly recoiled. Several of the soldiers rapidly approached, flanking him on both sides. His only option was to run straight ahead towards the bluff. He wasn’t sure how far it was, fifty yards or so, but he was willing to take the chance. He picked up a heavy stone and threw it behind him creating a distraction. As the soldiers investigated the noise, Eoin took off running. He was a good twenty yards ahead when suddenly the earth opened up under his feet and swallowed him whole.

Eoin landed on something soft and squishy. He scrambled to his feet, squinting at the unidentified object that broke his fall but it was too dark to tell what it was. He felt around for his axe which was scattered in pieces on the ground. Slivers of moonlight seeped in through the narrow opening at the top giving off barely enough light to search for a way out. The soldiers' voices faded in the distance as they ran past the gaping hole. He'd spent his entire life in the forest first with his father, then as woodsman himself, but he didn't remember any giant sink holes. This hole was new, and from the looks of it, it was dug on purpose.

The dense, earthy walls were fifteen feet from top to bottom and covered with a twisted helix of massive tree roots. Eoin grabbed one of the roots and hoisted himself up, scaling the wall like a stealth spider. He was halfway to the top when the root gave way under his foot causing him to tumble backwards. He laid still on his back when suddenly a pair of bright yellow eyes emerged from the darkness. Standing at Eoin's feet, holding a torch in one hand and a sharp metal spear in the other, was a tiny creature, half-man, half-beast, with a pig-like snout and stubby meaty arms that were covered in coarse fur like the surface of a ripe peach. Eoin stood up and the creature stumbled backwards still pointing the spear in Eoin's face.

"Are you a good witch or a bad witch?" the creature said.

Eoin swiped at the spear knocking it out of the way. "Hey! Watch where you're pointing that thing."

The creature inched closer using his large snout to smell Eoin. "Mogg asked you a question. Are you a good witch or a bad witch?"

"I'm not a witch, you little twerp. I'm human. What is that?" He said pointing to the soft mound that started to give off a foul unrecognizable odor.

The creature stared at Eoin with wide-eyes then moved the torch over a massive mangled heap of black fur. Laying on the ground was something that looked like a giant mole with sharp claws and two giant front teeth. Eoin cringed.

“You must be a good witch,” said the creature. “You fell from the heavens and killed the Hole Dweller. You saved Mogg’s life. Mogg is now your humble servant.” He put down his spear and bowed at Eoin’s feet.

“Stand up. I told you I’m not a witch. I’m a human,” said Eoin. “Now would you please tell me how to get out of here? I have to get back to the castle of the High Witch of the East.”

Mogg stood up and picked up his spear. “First you must come to Ganymede. Mogg owes you his life. Mogg will make you a new axe and give you food and water.”

Eoin shrugged his shoulders. “What’s Ganymede?”

“What’s Ganymede?” The creature shook his head. “Oberon was right. Humans aren’t very smart. Ganymede is the City of Metal Makers. Mogg’s home. Come. Come this way.” He gestured for Eoin to follow him.

Eoin let out a long sigh. He knew the one chance he had to escape the Eastern soldiers and find Isabel was if he cooperated with the tiny stranger. “Fine. If it will get me out of here, then lead the way.”

Mogg lead Eoin through a small fissure in the wall that led to labyrinth of dark tunnels below the surface of the Eastern forest; tunnels he never knew existed. By the soft glow of the torch, they followed the tunnels for what seemed like an eternity until it came to a dead end. At the end of the tunnel was a shaft with a wooden platform attached to thick ropes on a pulley.

Eoin helped Mogg climb on the platform then pulled on the ropes until they were above ground and standing in the middle of a miniature village.

Tiny houses with thatched roofs and beautiful, bountiful gardens lined the hilltops as hundreds of identical creatures filled the busy marketplace in the town's square. In the center of the square sat a large sculpture of a Mogg-like creature carrying oversized tongs and a mallet made almost entirely of tin and other precious metal. The town's lively antics suddenly became a hushed collective hum as Eoin followed Mogg down the main thoroughfare.

"Why is everyone staring?" Eoin said out of the corner of his mouth.

"No one in Ganymede has ever seen a human before," Mogg said.

Several younger creatures ran up to Eoin pulling at his shirt but Mogg shoed them away. They stopped in front of wooden structure and Mogg pounded on the large metal doors. The doors opened to an elaborate factory made up of blacksmiths pouring scalding red liquid into molds and pounding them into swords, spears and other weapons. Eoin turned to Mogg with big eyes and an open mouth.

"Ganymede," Mogg said.

"I..I don't understand? What is this place?" said Eoin.

Before Mogg could answer, an elderly creature approached them and took Mogg by the arm. "You fool! What have you done, bringing a human to Ganymede."

Mogg lowered his head. "Father, the human saved Mogg from the Hole Dweller."

Eoin stepped in between the two. "It wasn't his fault. I asked to come here. I need a new axe and help finding my way through the tunnels to the castle of the High Witch of the East. There's going to be civil war. Will you help me stop it?"

Oberon's eyes darted between Mogg and Eoin. "For centuries, the people of Ganymede have made metal for the rest of Oz. Tools, weapons, doors, even utensils. We are peaceful. For saving my son, I will make you a new axe with the strongest metal in Oz but Ganymede is neutral and will remain so. We do not get involved in political matters, especially between humans and witches."

"I understand," said Eoin.

An hour later Oberon returned with a shiny new axe and a satchel filled with bread and fruit for Eoin. "Food for your journey. Mogg will lead you underground as far as the entrance to the Eastern forest. After that, you must go alone."

"Thank you," said Eoin. He turned and followed Mogg back to the platform in the town square.

"Be careful, Woodsman," Oberon called after him. "The axe is sharp. It will cut through anything."

Eoin gave him a half smile and continued walking.

"They're stuck, Miss." Taj tugged at one of the ruby red shoes on Isabel's foot as she sat on her bed.

"No. There's has to be a way to get them off. Pull harder, Taj." Isabel held on to her bedpost as Taj pulled with all his strength but the shoes were glued to her feet. She let out a long sigh and fell back on her bed. "I have to get to Eoin. Who knows what my mother has planned for him, and for the rest of us. I should have never come back here."

“I’m sure Master Eoin is safe, Miss. Try not to worry. Here, eat something.” Taj handed Isabel a steaming bowl of soup.

“I can’t eat.” Isabel pushed the soup away from her. “There’s only one thing I can do now. I have to go to my aunt. I’ll bargain with her, make a trade — the shoes for Eoin’s life.”

“Oh, I can’t let you do that, Miss Isabel. The High Witch of the West is even worse than your mother. She’ll kill Eoin and you because it will give her something to do.”

“I’m not afraid of her, Taj. Besides there’s only one thing my aunt wants more than to hurt my mother, and I’m wearing them.” Isabel pointed to her feet. “Now, we have to figure out how to get me out of the castle without my mother knowing.” Isabel walked over to the fireplace and threw a log on the fire. The embers scattered in the air then fell to the ground.

Taj paused then smiled. “I think I have an idea.”

Taj wheeled the firewood cart with a tarp draped over the top across the bridge to the far entrance of the castle. Two soldiers were at their post talking and laughing as he walked past. He was just about in the clear when one of the soldiers stopped him.

“Where do you think you’re going, Munchkin? No one is allowed to leave the grounds.”

“Her Highness needs more firewood,” said Taj. “She sent me to collect some.”

“Well no one told me,” the soldier said. “Get back inside.” The soldier pushed Taj who lost his footing and fell to the ground.

Taj stood up and brushed the dirt off the elbows of his coat. “Her Highness is preparing for a possible war. She needs a great deal of wood for a protective spell. I don’t think you want me to tell her you prevented me from giving it to her. That wouldn’t make her very happy. Do you know what happens when she’s unhappy with someone?”

“What?” said the soldier.

Taj pointed to a stone sculpture of a hawk with huge talons sitting at the entrance. “That used to be her cook. She didn’t like what he made her for breakfast.”

The soldier looked at Taj then bit his bottom lip. “Fine. You can go but make it quick.”

Taj nodded then wheeled the cart down the path. Isabel lifted up a small section of the tarp and watched as the soldiers grew smaller and smaller in the distance.

A few miles down the path Taj stopped as Isabel climbed out and picked up a few logs placing them in the cart. “Go back to the castle, Taj. I need to do this alone.”

“Miss Isa —”

“My aunt is very powerful and cunning. Who knows what she’ll do when I get there. I have to have my wits about me and can’t be worrying about your safety. I’ll be fine. Just keep my mother occupied and whatever you do, don’t tell her where I’m going.”

Before Taj could respond, Isabel was gone.

The rising sun was to her back as she headed west towards the High Witch’s castle. She felt a nervous twitch in the pit of stomach. Growing up her mother rarely spoke of Effie. She’d only met her aunt once before when she was young, before the feud between the two sisters split Oz in two. But Isabel’s love for Eoin was stronger than any fear she had for either of the High Witches.

The winds grew stronger as Isabel approached her aunt’s fortress, avoiding the surrounding poppy fields which she knew caused problems for unsuspecting guests. She raised the hood of her cloak to cover her entire face so she was unrecognizable to the naked eye. She looked for her aunt’s army of winged monkeys — nasty little beasts who were just as mean and

cunning as Effie. There was usually one or two out on patrol, but at the moment it was eerily quiet which made Isabel even more uneasy.

She ran around the back castle and slipped through the iron gates. The inside was even colder and more unfriendly than the outside. Large stone sculptures lined the entryway and iron bars covered all the windows. Isabel pulled up her cloak. She felt her arms explode in goosebumps.

She walked quietly up the winding staircase to the second level listening for any signs of life. A soft light flickered from a half-open door at the end of the corridor. Isabel tip toed towards it, muffling the clicking sound of the shoes' heels against the stone floor. She pushed the door open slightly and gasped. Standing near an open window was a woman who looked exactly like her mother only slightly taller. On the floor next to her was a small cage with metal bars and a padlock on the door. Isabel's heart sank as she stared at the tiny occupant crouched down on the bottom - Taj.

"Hello, Isabel," said the woman. "I've been expecting you."

"Hello, Effie. It's been a long time." Isabel shuddered and closed the door behind her.

"I'm sorry Miss Isabel," said Taj. "I tried to out run them but the monkeys were too fast."

"You have a lot of nerve coming here to face me," Effie smiled. "I like that. You're not afraid. A witch should never show fear even when facing her imminent death or the death of a loved one." Effie glanced over at Taj. "Still, it doesn't make up for your abounding stupidity and ignorance. What were you thinking, choosing a man over the power of your birthright?"

Isabel inhaled suddenly. Effie already knew about Eoin.

“Oh, you mother didn’t tell you?” Effie said shaking her head. “It figures. Leave it to my sister to leave out the crucial details. You are the first born grandchild, and therefore, the rightful owner of the shoes and all their magic. You now have the power to control everyone and everything in Oz. You lucky girl.”

Isabel’s mouth turned up at the corners as she snickered slightly. “My mother told me everything. Why do you think I’m here? It’s not to bargain with you. I could care less about a Munchkin or a human. I’m taking the West, Aunt.”

Effie cocked her head and laughed. “Really? You and what army?”

“I don’t need an army, remember? I have these…” Isabel raised her leg and waived her foot back and forth.”

Effie paused, her crystal blue eyes fixed on Isabel’s. “It’s a shame you don’t know how to use them.”

Isabel’s smile faded. She closed her eyes attempting to remember the spell that went with the shoes. Her mind drew a blank. “Let him go, Effie,” she pleaded. “This is between you and I. The Munchkin has nothing to do with it.”

Just then a monkey with large, black bird-like wings flew in through an open window, waddled over to Effie and whispered in her ear. “Excellent,” she said patting him on the head. “Our other guests should be arriving soon.”

Eoin and Mogg emerged from the tunnels just as the sun hit midway in the sky. They walked side by side through the dense forest.

“Why is the Woodsman in such a hurry to get to the castle of the High Witch of the East?”

“I need to find someone. Someone I care about a great deal.”

“Ah, the Woodsman is in love,” Mogg said with a sly grin.

Eoin smiled. “Very much in love. I need to find her before Oz is destroyed by war. I’ve decided to go with her to the Other World where we can get married and finally live in peace.”

Mogg’s smile faded as he stopped suddenly to sniff the air. “Something is not right. The Woodsman is in danger. We must get underground now.” Before Eoin could ask why, a battalion of winged monkeys descended on the two.

“Get behind me!” Eoin yelled to Mogg who stood with his back to the Woodsman’s. Together they fought off the monkeys using their axe and spear but there were too many. They surrounded Eoin, lifting him by the arms and legs. Mogg stood in horror as he watched the monkeys carry his friend back in the direction from which they came — West.

The monkeys dropped Eoin on the ground in the castle courtyard. He landed on his arm causing searing pain that ran up the left side of his body. He was sure it was broken. Several soldiers got him to his feet and led him upstairs to the witch.

They opened the door to Effie’s room and shoved Eoin inside. He collapsed on the floor at her feet. Isabel ran over to him collecting his head in her lap. “What have you done to him!”

Effie rolled her eyes at her niece. “He’s fine. Just a little banged up from the trip.”

Isabel helped Eoin to his feet. “Why are you doing this?” She looked around the room for something to bind his broken arm.

“Oh, Izzy,” Effie picked up the cage that held Taj and dangled it out the window. “Why does anyone in Oz do anything? Power, greed, spite, hate... The list goes on and on.”

“Effie, no!” Isabel ran over to her aunt. “I’ll do whatever you want. You can have the shoes. Just let them go.”

Effie paused. “No. If I let them go and word gets out, my reputation will be damaged. However, if I let you and the Woodsman escape, it will anger my sister to no end. And that would give me great pleasure. Here’s what I’ll do: you give me the shoes and you can leave with your boyfriend. I’m keeping the Munchkin as my servant. Consider it reparations for all the trouble you’ve caused me.”

“You can’t ask me to leave Taj. He’s my friend. Please Aunt, take the shoes. Let us all go.”

Just then a familiar voice echoed from behind. “She has no intention of letting any of you go.” Standing in the doorway was the High Witch of the East.

“Mother!” Isabel was filled with dread. She didn’t know what was worse - the Witch of the West or the Witch of the East.

“Adela!” said Effie. “Oooh. Time has not been kind to you, sister. Perhaps a vacation would do you some good. I hear the air is quite nice in the north this time of year.”

“I would love it if you came with me, Effie. There’s excellent swimming in the north. A lot of water.”

Effie narrowed her eyes. “I’m taking those shoes, Adela. Even if I have to remove her feet first.”

Adela kept her eyes fixed on Effie. “Isabel. Take Taj and the Woodsman and get out of here. I have some unfinished business with my sister.”

“Mother, no! I won’t leave you.”

Before Adela could answer, Effie reached for her wand and pointed it at Isabel. “Get them off of her Adela or I’ll swear, I’ll kill her.”

Adela removed her own wand from the pocket of her robe and pointed it at her sister. “Izzy, run!” Effie shot at Isabel with her wand.

Eoin grabbed Isabel and shoved her out of the way then lunged for Taj. He raised his axe above his head. Just as he was about to strike the lock, the magic from Effie’s wand hit the axe causing it to come down through his chest and lodge itself in his heart.

Isabel screamed and dropped to her knees next to him. She cradled him in her arms, sobbing. Eoin touched her face one last time before closing his eyes.

Overcome with grief, Isabel stood up raising both hands over her head. She closed her eyes and murmured the shoe’s spell under her breath. Suddenly a forceful wind with streaks of blinding light blew through the room like a cyclone and carried both High Witches out the window and across the sky. Then she pointed her hand at Taj and the cage opened.

They carried Eoin back to the place he loved most in Oz, the forest. Taj collected beautiful stones and fragrant, colorful wildflowers, placing them around his body as Isabel laid down on the ground next to him to say goodbye one last time. Then she and Taj returned to the castle to collect a few things before heading towards the Emerald City. She had heard of a Wizard who could help the two of them get to the Other World. She took one last look around her room leaving the ruby red shoes behind on her bed.

Night enveloped the forest as Eoin laid peaceful and untouched, cradling his axe on his chest. Mogg emerged from beneath the ground, letting out tiny painful cries at the sight of his dead friend. He removed his overcoat and placed Eoin in the center, dragging him to the platform and down to the tunnels towards Ganymede.

Oberon and his metal makers worked through the night making parts to create a new body for Eoin. A body made out of tin. Mogg carried him in pieces back to the forest where he assembled him until he could stand on his own. He gave him a new axe and a full can of oil, and left him to start his new life. By morning Eoin was no longer known as the Woodsman but the Tinman.

The rain finally stopped and he was completely rusted. The bird who had been so elusive perched himself on the top of his head singing his sweet love song. Thoughts of Isabel ran in a continuous loop in his mind. If he had his heart back, it would be broken in a thousand pieces.

Just as he thought all hope was lost, voices echoed in the forest and headed straight for him. Off in the distance, three shadowy figures weaved in and out of the dense conifers engaged in conversation and walked right past him. The Tinman grunted loudly as the three stopped and backtracked to him. The Tinman grunted again and moved his eyes towards the oil can, mouthing the word “oil” through his clenched jaw. Standing before him with a collective look of disbelief was a young girl, a little black dog, and a man made out of straw.

Most people called him Scarecrow.

