

## Skin In the Game

By Whitney Rines

Sable was shocked awake at screams and curses that rocked her cramped space, and slammed against the roof of her prison. It was like thunder when it hit the box, and the whiplash from the cart bucking forward once more jarred her when she slammed headfirst into the roof. They must have made a stop, but she couldn't be sure...their captors remained completely silent for the rest of the night.

*"They don't make dresses for princesses...they make princesses into dresses."*

The memory of the woman's last words haunted her much more than the frustration of their captors had, but it was all she had for company now. She couldn't call for help or even speak after they'd cut her and was horrified at the thought of becoming materials for another princess' dress. The screams and curses broke her miserable musings, and Sable realized that they'd abducted someone else. She sounded like a child almost, but the profanity she spewed, challenged Sable's perception of her being a princess or even the daughter of nobility.

*"And the Blue Butcher sells the meat of orphan children to the nearby village and calls it 'veal'. What's your point? Did you think this was going to have a happy ending and rescue? We deliver to them too."*

The words sickened Sable as she listened to the struggling girl just above her.

"Let me out! I didn't steal anything!" She shrieked, kicking against the same wood that held Sable trapped inside, just as helpless to escape.

"We had two royals. The older one, the queen took her own life. The other one is still alive, but she won't be singing again anytime soon." The voice spoke, the crate opened.

A woman dressed in black, a long red lace draping over her shoulders against her black hair, cold eyes and a grim look on her face, stared into Sable's eyes, and spoke, "Open the other one, Migel. I want to see the body of the queen; this one's so pale that you can see the blood in her lips...not to mention she's thin like she's been living a beggar's life." Her words cut Sable deep, but gave some hope that she might not take her after all.

Turning to the box next to her, Sable watched the men pry the nails from their resting place, and expose the body of the queen. A grotesque and horrifying expression froze her face into a slack-jawed expression with tongue rigor-ed and lightly hanging from her mouth, her eyes bulging from her face.

"She strangled herself with her hair, before we got to her Madame Skin." Migel looked at Madame Skin apologetically, as she reached into the coffin. Sable watched in horror as she forced open the queen's mouth, breaking her jaw, "Hmm. What a smart one she was. She poisoned herself, she only made it look like strangulation. I can't use her for a dress, but I'm sure the butcher wouldn't mind some exotic meats, I've heard that blondes have a distinct taste about them and they fetch a good price at the right market. The skinny girl I'll take...while she won't be making a fine dress, maybe I can eat her or something." Madame Skin cut her eyes at

Sable, and smiled a sharp fanged grin. Laying her hand on the box of the girl screaming and cursing, she spoke with the same smile, "Bring the urchin as well."

Pulling out three spindles thick and heavy with gold spun into thread, from the dark gathers of her dress, Madame Skin dropped them onto the cart and walked away. She entered a large, dark house with a large set of scissors bordering the entrance.

She must have been the tailor the men and the queen spoke of.

"That girl was claimed by the butcher, we can't sell her to you, Madame." Migel said, serious but visibly afraid to talk back.

Madame Skin stopped walking and turned to see Migel and his partner pulling the box Sable was in from the cart, and lifting her to her feet.

True fear took hold of Sable, and she struggled to get out of the box and escape but, found herself running towards the tailor's house instead.

"Foolish girl, all who I buy, go where I want them to. As for you two, I paid for two royals and you only brought me one. I doubt you have another princess for me, and I can't spare the time to make such fine thread with the orders I already have. Unless you want me to use you for materials in the Prince's request for new hunting leathers, you'll leave the urchin, take what I've paid, and be on your way with the corpse." Madame Skin said, making eye contact with Migel's partner this time.

Shaken by the power he saw her have over the princess, he nearly ripped the second box off the cart and tossed it to the ground.

The wooden lid broke and the young woman tumbled out of the prison. "Where am I?" She demanded, looking around and seeing Sable standing and shaking in fear, the two men who abducted her, and a dark woman standing in front of a dark house.

"Are you the Miller's daughter? The one with spindling talents? What is your name?" Madame Skin asked, looking her over. She had red hair, brown eyes, and a slight frame, as though she were between childhood and womanhood.

"Yes, and it's Missy. Who are you? Where are we?" Missy demanded, pushing down fear at the dark woman before her.

"Your father sold you to the butcher, however, I've heard you have talents. So, will you go there and be dinner, or stay here and be a tailor's apprentice?" Madame Skin asked, directing Missy's attention to Sable.

Missy got to her feet, dusted herself off and walked towards the house.

"Should I skin her first, then?" She asked.

Madame Skin looked at Migel, "You can leave now."