Oh, to be Young Again!
by Margot Mohan

There once was a woman who had three daughters, all of whom were very beautiful. The youngest, however, far exceeded her sisters in looks. In fact she was so beautiful, so gracious, so condescending that people came from far and wide just to gaze upon her loveliness and bask in her benevolent condescension.

As the years passed, people's admiration for her only grew, outdone only by her admiration for herself. Admiration grew and grew until one day the girl—nay woman, for girl she was no longer—found two of the most horrible and odious things known to man: a wrinkle and a gray hair. Stricken with horror and grief she fell gracefully on her silken couch in a death-like swoon. Upon awaking she wept for hours and was utterly inconsolable—that is, until it was brought to her attention how poorly swollen eyes and noses ruin the effect of beautiful complexions like hers. This realization sobered her up immediately. Once she had regained her composure, her mind began to race. How was it to be borne? It was all very well for an ugly peasant woman to age, but she? She who had always been so rich and beautiful? It was insupportable. After much contemplation she came to the obvious conclusion that the best course of action would be to seek out an enchantress to rejuvenate her.

So the next morning she arose early and set out on foot to find an enchantress, two things she rarely did. After a highly inconvenient walk through a dark forest our heroine chanced upon an old wise woman. The old woman looked at her curiously and said, "I know not what you seek, nor for what purpose, but this I do know: you shall find it, but it shall not succeed." The girl, however, never heard this warning, for upon seeing the ugly old woman, having a strong abhorrence for both of those traits, she fled and was already out of earshot before the first word had been uttered.

A little further on she came to a great cave, in which dwelled a marvelous enchantress. Suspecting as much the girl waited by the mouth of the cave and rang the little doorbell there vigorously. After about seven and a half minutes of incessant ringing a stately woman appeared at the entrance and indicated for the girl to follow her. The woman led her through so many twisting passageways and winding staircases that the girl soon lost any sense of direction and began to feel quite fatigued. Just as she was contemplating whether now would be a good time to fall into a faint, or whether she should wait for a more picturesque place, her guide led her into an echoing cavern with a deep pool of effervescent water in the center. The enchantress stood over the pool murmuring strange incantations causing the water to bubble and simmer by turn. Without raising her eyes the enchantress addressed the girl, "I have been expecting you for quite some time. I

suppose it would be too much to hope to dissuade you from your purpose?" "Absolutely fruitless," the girl said, tossing her head. "Ah well, I suppose it was too much to hope for," sighed the enchantress. "Well, best get it over with." The girl stood waiting expectantly as the enchantress came towards her. The latter stood scrutinizing the girl's face for a few minutes, then, without taking her eyes from the girl's face she said, "I'm sorry, but I seem to be at a loss as to what you want me to do. Everything seems to be perfectly in order and as it should be."

"Just as it should be?! Can you not see the blinding silver strand or the sagging wrinkle? Do you not realize my life is over? I cannot live with those."

"Thank you for coming to enlighten me; without you I would never have been aware that my life had ended," the enchantress said wryly.

The girl blushed, but stood firm. "Aging is all very well for normal people, but-but, well you see . . . . Well a normal person like myself clearly can't understand the delicate nuances of your *abnormal* life, so I won't waste my time trying." After a pause the girl said, "Well? Can you fix it?"

To which the enchantress replied, "Of course I can fix it, my dear—not that anything needs fixing—, but I must warn you that whatever is done cannot be taken back so you must be absolutely certain that you truly desire this."

"Yes, without a doubt yes."

"Very well, since you want it so badly," and the enchantress waved her wand over the girl's face.

But what was this? Instead of returning to her former state, the girl felt her skin tighten grotesquely around her face. One could now no longer tell if she was smiling or frowning, laughing or angry; her face was frozen in place. And her hair, her beautiful hair, began to grow thick and coarse about her, so heavy that it became cumbersome and caused her to stoop. She screamed in horror and shrieked at the enchantress, "What have you done?! My beautiful face, my silken hair, *What have you done*?!" The enchantress merely looked at her knowingly, then turned around shaking her head.