The Sleeping Beauty
(as told by the bruja who cast the spell)

IT ALL STARTED at Rosa’s quinceañera.

For weeks, the whole town did nothing but talk about Rosa’s upcoming fifteenth birthday celebration and how she was going to have more than one dozen damas in pretty blue dresses and an equal number of chambelanes to escort them, all handsome and good dancers.

“Everyone was invited,” I told my pet owl, Pluma. “Everyone but me. People don’t think that a witch has feelings. But I have plenty, let me tell you, and they’re hurt. And I’m not ashamed to admit that when a bruja’s feelings are hurt, she can hold a grudge for a long time.”


At my home outside of town, I waited each day for an invitation to the
quinceañera. None came, which didn’t surprise me at all. Rosa and I went to school together. But she and her friends always ignored or laughed at me. I had no parents, my best friend was an owl, and I knew the bruja’s art for making mischief. That made me different. And being different made me lonely.

The day before the birthday party, I went to the big house of Rosa’s padre and madre and peeked in a window at all the preparations. Rosa was trying on her fancy white dress of satin and lace. She was a pretty girl, I had to admit, with great big eyes of brown and skin the color of perfect wood.


“Oh, brother,” I said.

Her mother kissed her cheek. “Yes, you are beautiful. We are all happy, and everyone has been invited, except the old bruja in the desert.”

“Old! I’m not old,” I whispered to my owl. “Rosa and I are the same age. I just didn’t have a mamá and papá to spoil me, because I was an orphan.”

“¿Huérfana? ¿Huérfana? ¿Huérfana?” Pluma replied.

“Rosa,” her mother said, “maybe we should invite her after all. Brujas have tempers.”

“No, I don’t want her to come. She’s weird,” Rosa said, brushing her thick hair. “I don’t want anything to spoil my quinceañera. I deserve the best of everything.”
When they left the room, I climbed through the window and lifted a few strands of Rosa’s hair off her brush. In case I wanted to cast a spell on Rosa, I needed a little piece of her.

The day of the quinceañera arrived and still no invitation. I headed to town. Rosa’s house was filled with laughter and music. I hated music because it reminded me of people having fun. No one believed that a witch should have any fun. It’s not that brujas want to be mean; it’s just that people don’t give us a chance. Certainly, Rosa’s family didn’t give me the chance to show that I can laugh, dance, and be nice.

“Stop feeling sorry for yourself,” I scolded myself.

Self-pity was replaced by anger when the three meddlesome madrinas, who had a little magic of their own, showed up at the party.

“They asked those godmothers but not me. Now I’m really mad,” I told my owl.

“¿Uno, dos, tres?” Pluma asked.

Inside, Rosa and the guests danced, boys circling her. I covered my ears. The music made my head hurt.

The food came out and I covered my nose. At last, it was time for the gifts. Rosa received a pile of them—rosaries, rings, dresses. The whole place hushed when the madrinas presented their gifts, because everyone knew they were going to be pretty good.

“I wish for mi ahijada Rosa a long life and happiness,” said Madrina Sopita.
“Ahhhhh,” the crowd said.

“Bahhhh,” I said.

“St, st, st,” my owl said.

“And I wish for mi ahijada to have a handsome man to be her husband,” said Madrina Vivita.

“Ahhhh,” the crowd said.

“Whooo, whooo, whooo,” my owl said.

“I can’t take any more of this,” I told Pluma, and swept into the house. People crossed themselves like crazy.

“I’m very annoyed that I wasn’t invited to this party,” I announced, pacing up and down and waving my hands, which really scared them. “You hurt my feelings.”

The crowd whimpered. Rosa’s madre and padre clung to her.

“Here’s my gift to Rosa.” I smiled. I can be very wicked when I want to be. “On her eighteenth birthday, I wish that Rosa will prick her finger on a spinning wheel. And fall asleep—forever.” The words spilled out like my anger.

Cries went up to the ceiling.

“Señorita, we beg you,” said Rosa’s parents.

“Too late. You should have invited me.” I stormed out, pleased with myself.

“Buenooo, bueno00, bueno00,” my owl said.

I started home. Then I slowed my steps. Maybe I shouldn’t have been so
mean. I decided to return to the house. I just wanted to watch Rosa cry. Since this was the worst spell I had ever cast, I actually wasn’t exactly sure it would even work. Usually, I give people upset stomachs or turn their hair purple.

Back at the house, Rosa was crying, her parents were weeping, and the guests were moaning.

“¡Un momento!” shouted Madrina Conchita.
The room quieted.
“I still have my gift for Rosa.”
“Uh-oh,” I whispered to my owl. “I forgot about her.”
“Nooooo, noooo, nooo,” he replied.
“I wish that Rosa will not sleep forever. I wish that she will sleep only until she is awakened by true love’s kiss.”

Rosa put her hands on her hips, tapped her small foot, and pursed her red lips. “What? Why couldn’t you have broken the bruja’s spell completely?”
“She’s powerful,” Madrina Sopita replied. “Isn’t that better than sleeping forever?”

Rosa thought about it and decided it was indeed better.
“I hereby order all the spinning wheels in the land to be burned,” commanded Rosa’s father, a powerful man.
“Sí, patrón,” the workers replied.
“Let’s not waste a good quinceañera,” Rosa said, signaling for the band to start playing. The party continued.
As I walked back home, the sky was lit with fires from all the spinning wheels being burned.

“So those madrinas think they can outsmart me, eh?” I told Pluma. “I’ll wait and get my revenge.”

“Ho, ho, ho,” my owl said.

Years go fast if you are waiting for revenge, and they did for me. I spent the days reading books, practicing spells, and learning new ones because I had no friends and that is all I had to do with my time. One morning, I looked in the mirror, combed my hair, and smiled.

I had grown pretty.

Then I became depressed. “Who’s going to see me anyway? Who will fall in love with a bruja? I should wish for a good-looking man, too,” I told Pluma.

“Guapo, guapo, guapo,” said my owl.

Before I knew it, it was Rosa’s eighteenth birthday.

This time, there was no fiesta. Instead, her mother and father locked her in a room all day so she couldn’t get out and somehow find a spinning wheel. I peeked in their window.

“We’ll celebrate her cumpleaños tomorrow,” her mother said.

“We’ll eat well and laugh at that bruja,” her father added. “Let’s see to the food.”

As they left, I snickered quietly. They didn’t know I had hidden away the very last spinning wheel in the whole county. It was very heavy as I
dragged it up the stairs to a room next to Rosa's. Then I pulled out a set of
keys that would open anything and unlocked Rosa's door.

"Rosa," I called in my sweetest voice. "Rosa."

Besides being vain and mean, Rosa also was nosy. She just had to find
out who had beckoned her. Meanwhile I sat, spinning wool into thread. I
hated spinning. The wool made me sneeze. She didn't come.

"Roooooosa," I called again.

Soon, the door opened and in she walked, even more beautiful than the
years before. She didn't recognize me because I had disguised myself as an
old woman.

"Were you calling me, viejita?" Rosa said.

I batted my skimpy eyelashes. "Yes."

"Do I know you? What are you doing here?" Rosa said.

"Spinning."

"I thought my father ordered all these burned." Rosa applied another
coat of lipstick.

This might be harder than I thought.

"Ah, this is a special spinning wheel. It spins gold," I answered with a
good comeback.

"That sounds like a kid's story."

"Don't believe me? Why not try it?"

Rosa leaned in and stared at the spinning wheel. "No. I don't want to. It
would be work. I don't want to break a nail. I've just had them done."
“You’re right—it is too difficult to understand. Only the smartest people can spin gold.”

Rosa stepped forward. “I’m very smart. Move aside, old lady.”

Of course, she pricked her finger.

“Uh-oh,” she said before she plopped down on the floor.

“Sueña, sueña, sueña,” my owl called.

Rosa was snoring loudly. Even though I got what I wanted, I didn’t feel as happy as I thought I would. Being a witch is just not as rewarding as it sounds.

“That was too easy,” I said, petting my owl’s fine feathers. “Let’s go home, Pluma.”

As I reached for the door, the three madrinas rushed in, bumping into one another.

“Too late, too late, too late,” my owl hooted.

“Dios mío,” the three women said, seeing Rosa on the floor.

“You evil old bruja.” Madrina Vivita wagged a fat finger in my direction.

“I’m not old,” I replied.

“Just because you’re unhappy, you want everyone else to be unhappy,” Madrina Conchita said.

“I am happy—happy to be rid of this spoiled girl.”

The madrinas huddled. They turned back to me with a plan.

“We’re going to put a spell on this house so no one will know of your
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bad deeds," Madrina Sópita said. "Everyone will sleep until Rosa’s true love arrives."

"Ha!" I said. "You're going to have to wait a long time to find anyone stupid enough to fall in love with Rosa."

They ignored me, prayed a little, and burned some special herbs that smelled of soap and sopa. Soon the entire household was asleep. The three madrinas were pleased with themselves.

I rolled up my sleeves. "Well then, I’m going to make very sure that her true love has a real tough time getting in here."

From my pocket I drew my special oils that smelled of scorpions and cucarachas. I held my nose and rubbed the oil on the walls. The ground grumbled as giant cactuses grew all around with thorns as big as swords.

"Let someone try to get past these nopales grandes," I said with a laugh.

"Ay," the madrinas sang in sad harmony.

One year passed, and I often walked by Rosa's house to check on whether the cactus plants were still thriving. They were. Yet I grew even lonelier because everyone else was asleep.

A crow who liked to gossip told me that the madrinas were out trying to recruit rich men to cut their way through the cactus, but none were brave enough to try.

Then one morning, as I walked past the house with Pluma on my shoulder, I spotted a handsome young man riding a horse toward Rosa's
house. His face was strong as a wall, but also tender. He was as princely as any gentleman, although his clothes were humble.

"Hola, señorita. Is this the house with the sleeping beauty inside?" he said.

"Yes, but aren't you frightened of those big cactus plants surrounding the place?" I said.

He shook his head. "I grew up in the desert and I've seen some even bigger than these. Excuse me now. I'll try to see if the stories are true."

"Good luck," I told him, but didn't know why I said it.

"Thank you," he said.

His smile warmed me. At that moment, I knew why I had wished him luck.

"What's your name?" I called as he rode toward Rosa's house.

"Pepe. And you?"

No one had ever asked me before. "Maricela." The word sounded odd on my tongue.

"Pretty name for a pretty girl." He smiled again and rode on.

"Pepe." I repeated his name.

I followed on foot. When Pepe reached the house, he pulled out the largest machete I had ever seen. He took a deep breath and whacked away at the cactuses. The thorns flew this way and that, but Pepe continued on.

"How handsome and courageous he is," I said to my owl.

"Bravo, bravo, bravo," the owl agreed.
At last, Pepe cut his way through and reached the courtyard, where he found everyone asleep. I followed as he searched the rooms, looking for Rosa.

“He called her a sleeping beauty—what a dumb name,” I told my owl.

After much searching, Pepe found the room where Rosa slept. I watched from the doorway.

Dressed in a lacy white gown and wearing her shiny quinceañera crown, Rosa was beautiful, mostly because she was asleep and not talking.

Pepe approached her slowly, taking tiny steps as if not to wake her.

“Qué bonita,” he whispered.

Envy squeezed my heart.

“I have heard that you will awaken with true love’s kiss,” he told the snoring Rosa. “I will give you that kiss.”

A tear traveled down my cheek. I touched it.

“Oh, no,” I told my owl. “I’m crying, and the tears are taking away my bruja powers.”

“Boo, hoo, hoo,” the owl said.

Pepe bent down on one knee and kissed Rosa’s lips gently. I touched my own, pretending his beso was for me, sweet as sunshine.

Rosa’s eyes fluttered and opened. Pepe smiled.

Rosa sat up, frowned, and yelled. “Well, it took you long enough to get here! Do you know how long I’ve been sleeping? Look at my dress! It’s wrinkled. Look at me! I’m all dusty!”
“Sorry,” Pepe replied, a bit disappointed at this reception. 
Rosa got to her feet. In other rooms, I could hear her family stirring. 
Rosa stared at Pepe and his patched pants and worn shirt. “You’re not rich, are you?”

“No, I’m a farmer.”

She shook cobwebs off her crown. “We’ll have to get you new clothes if you’re going to marry me. I’m rich, you know.”

“I’m proud of being a farmer.” Pepe stood tall.

“But you’ll like being rich much better,” Rosa said.

“Leave him alone.” I dashed into the room. “Pepe is good and strong and brave.”

180 Pepe smiled.

Rosa’s face twisted with fury. “It’s you . . . the bruja who cast this horrible sleeping spell.”

“You don’t have to worry anymore,” I said. “I’ve lost my magic to do harm. I really didn’t want to be bad in the first place. It’s just that no one ever gave me the chance to be nice or do good. They always thought that just because I was different, I was evil.”

“Lost your powers, eh?” Rosa screamed. “I’ll have my father send you to prison for making me sleep so long. Just think of all the parties I’ve missed. Good thing I still have my beauty, or you’d really be in trouble.”

“Go ahead. Send me to jail. I just don’t want to hear you whine,” I said.

“Wait.” Pepe stepped up to me. “I think I have found my true love.”
"You mean me, don't you?" Rosa yelled.

"No, I mean her," Pepe replied, and took my hand. "Maricela, I would love to show you my farm."

"I would love to see it, Pepe," I said.

"Hold on! This is not how this cuento is supposed to end," Rosa complained.

"I did my part, señorita," Pepe told Rosa. "You're awake, and I hope you live happy ever after."

Rosa's mouth hung wide open in shock, which is how I'll always remember her.

Outside the house, Pepe gave the kiss of true love to me! As he did, goodness and kindness awakened in me after a long sleep.