

## How She Became Beautiful By Corie Ralston

Originally published in The Leading Edge, October 2003.

The Prince first saw the mountain girl at the Autumn fair.  
She offered up the bowls from her father's pottery wheel  
in large, coarse hands. She wasn't petite the way  
girls were supposed to be; the way the valley girls were.

She danced with one of his soldiers at the Evening Dance.  
What did his soldier see in her,  
with her coarse red skin and uneven teeth,  
her hair tied back in a simple, unflattering knot?

When his soldier married her the following Spring,  
the Prince stood in the pew and saw her gentle smile,  
how she made even the old men in the gathering feel worthy.  
He decided his soldier had made a good choice after all.

Her first son died when he was but two.  
The Prince accompanied his soldier to the funeral  
and when he saw how she held herself in great composure  
despite her pain, his heart opened for her.

The Prince finally chose one of the pretty ladies  
who came through the palace trying to catch his eye,  
a woman with glossy black hair and eyes  
green as the spring meadows after a rain.

His wedding celebration was filled with elaborate music  
and the ladies wore their finest silks,  
but when he lay his head down to sleep that night,  
he dreamed of the mountain girl in her simple dress.

He found a reason to visit when her soldier was away.  
He realized then that her hands were not too large,  
but just the right size to work the clay, and her eyes  
were just the right shade and shape to convey her thoughts.

She really listened when he spoke;  
it made him careful with what he said, and he liked that.  
At the end of the visit, he discovered his legs were trembling  
in a way they never did on the battlefield

He prepared his troops for battle.  
He decided the mountain girl did not need to lose her husband.  
Just before they rode out,  
he nicked his soldier's sword arm so he would have to stay behind.

The arrow pierced only one lung.  
In the four minutes it took the Prince to die,  
he lay on his back in the wild grass  
and thought of the mountain girl.

The thundering hooves and clash of metal  
and screams and shouts faded into a distant murmur.  
When he closed his eyes the image of the mountain girl filled his mind,  
the most beautiful woman he had even seen.