

# ONCE UPON A FUTURE

Tales from a Distant World

by Holly-Jane Rahlens

Original English (sample)



*For my son,  
my nieces  
and nephews,  
their friends,  
their generation,  
their future.*

European Commission of Culture  
Luebeck-on-the-Baltic

December 20, 2440

Dear Readers,

Congratulations! You have just opened a book – probably for the first time ever. Welcome to a new experience in celebration of “1000 Years Gutenberg Press.”

Exactly one millennium ago, in 1440, Johannes Gutenberg of Mainz invented the movable-type printing press. Until then, books had been painstakingly written by hand, but now book production became less costly and time-consuming, making reading matter available to a greater audience, ushering in the age of literacy and education for the masses. It was a giant step for humankind and is rightly considered one of the great inventions of the second millennium.

Printed books lasted a long while, but some five hundred years after Gutenberg’s invention they were sadly disappearing from our lives. Around 1990, we began reading texts digitally with the aid of computers and soon after with smaller electronic devices. E-books were introduced into our lives. By 2190, once all the snags and health hazards were ironed out of Brain Buttons and especially after the innovation of new thought-wave technologies, our own personalized brain interfaces became our libraries — and we never looked back. By 2325 physical books had virtually disappeared from our daily lives.

Now, for the first time in over 100 years, in celebration of the Gutenberg anniversary, 1000 of Europe’s most popular books of the past ten centuries have been reprinted for a general audience.

The book you are holding in your hands, *Once Upon A Future*, edited by Hailey Layne-Arlens, was originally published in 2312 in commemoration of the 500<sup>th</sup> jubilee of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's *Children's and Household Tales*. It features ten beloved Grimm-themed fairy tales written, recorded, cinematized and/or transcribed between the years 2019 and 2290. They have come down to us through the ages in varied ways: as a poem or a diary, as a children's song or a short story, a video or a braincast — each in its own way paying homage to the original fairy tale and to the diversity of storytelling itself.

In order to understand the historical and cultural context in which each tale emerged and then diverged from its original source, Hailey Layne-Arlens added notes after each story to illuminate the times in which the retellings appeared. We have reprinted these notes as we felt they would interest the 25<sup>th</sup> century reader too. Also included are facsimiles of the original illustrations that Hailey Layne-Arlens chose especially for this edition.

*Once Upon A Future* was initially conceived as a gift book for Forester adolescents upon completing their general education, but it quickly became a favorite among Forester readers of all ages. "The book casts a spell of enchantment that's hard to resist," one reviewer wrote at the time. We hope you'll agree. This may be the first time you read a book — but if you're lucky, it will not be your last. Enjoy!

**Raleigh-Joya Hada**

Director European Commission of Culture

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## *The Sleeper and the Spellbreaker*

Magnus sat down on a large rock near a tangle of trees at the edge of the forest. The moment he'd been waiting for had finally come. His hard work had paid off; all the body prep, the pushups at six in the morning, the healthy food, no snacks, the judo and yoga, the fencing. Magnus de Koning the Younger of Amsterdam was 100% prepared. Nothing could go wrong. He just wished he hadn't stayed up so late in the hotel bar with Bodo and Nixo drinking spicers. What had he been thinking? How many had he had? Three? Wait! Hadn't he jotted down in his BB the number of drinks he'd had? Magnus activated his Brain Button. He clicked into the diary function and read his entry from the evening before: *Magnus had one espresso, ~~one~~ two Mars sodas and ~~three~~ ~~four~~ five spicers.*

So five. Sheesh. That's a lot.

He was aware of a headache coming on, a pinpoint of pain on the left side of his skull. Where were those little pink mind-binders he'd bought? He hectically searched his pockets for— There! He found one and let it melt under his tongue. It was cherry-flavored, but ultra-sour. It made him wince, but almost immediately he felt the fog in his head lift.

He rolled his head a few times to the right, and then to the left, and heard a crunching, cracking sound at the back of his neck. He sighed. Now that his brain was clear, he realized that he actually needed something for his nerves as well. Too bad he didn't have a chill pill with him.

What time was it anyway? Magnus clicked into his Brain Button for the exact time, 13 hundred hours 29 CET. Okay. He still had a half hour before his buddies Bodo and Nixo arrived. Was he good to go? He checked his laser sword. It was charged and in standby position. He bent down and tested the buckles on his boots. They were locked. He inspected the uppers: the shafts and toes were dust-free. He slid his tongue across his teeth. Any breakfast crumbs? No.

Magnus made himself more comfortable on the rock, then pulled a flask out of his crosspack, took a sip of water and moisturized his lips. Better. Okay. Now what? ... Maybe he should listen to the story again — as prep. He remembered the first time he'd heard it. The women and men who cared for him as a child, the nannies and nandys, used to read to all the children in his Near & Dear to calm them down before sleep. It was a nice memory. His favorite story as a child was this one, "Once Upon A Future." The best part about it was that it was real: a true story.

Magnus activated his BB again, eye-typed *o-n-c-e u-p-o-n* in the search window of his brain grid. "Once Upon



a Future” popped up and he clicked into it. His BB played the tale back to him and he heard it in his mind’s ear.

*Once Upon a Future – A Fairy Tale*

*In the olden times — to be exact a few years after the turn of the millennium — there lived a man and a woman who—*

Magnus stopped the narration. He didn’t like the narrator’s voice. It was a young male’s voice with a Mandarin accent. He liked Mandarin, but that accent wasn’t right for this story. He went to Preferences and changed it to a mature female voice with a slight North American, East Coast accent. It reminded him of the teachers he’d had when he took classes on the North American School Channel.

*Once Upon a Future – A Fairy Tale*

*In the olden times — to be exact a few years after the turn of the millennium — there lived a man and a woman, Mr. and Mrs. Sheen, who longed for a child. But no matter what they did and how hard they tried, it wasn’t meant to be.*

Magnus let out a soft laugh and stopped the narration again. He wondered if “what they did” two hundred years

ago was what they did these days too. Things couldn't have changed *that* much in two centuries, could they have? And then he wondered how hard, *exactly*, had they tried. What did that mean? *No matter how hard they tried*. Did that mean they did it quicker or they did it more rigorously? Or perhaps it meant more often? Did they wear special apparel or use aids? If so, what kind of aids? When he was a child it never occurred to him to question that. But now that he was twenty-one he wondered about such things — a lot. He tried to picture "how hard they tried" but nothing came to him. All he saw was them doing it faster, like rabbits at a petting zoo. But that couldn't have helped. Or?

*Finally, a urologist by the name of Dr. Froschmaier figured out what was wrong. The husband's spermatozoa were just too slow. So Dr. Froschmaier prescribed some medication and said to the Sheens, "Your wish shall be granted. Before a year passes you will have a child. Trust me."*

*Soon after, lo and behold, the woman was pregnant. Nine months later she brought a baby daughter into the world. And what a darling she was! The man and the woman called her Dawn, for a new day, a new life, a new age, had indeed begun for them. Her middle name would be Rose, the first faint pink light of dawn.*

*The husband and wife were so thrilled with their child, Dawn Rose Sheen, that they decided to celebrate their happiness with a huge brunch for family, friends and neighbors. Oddly, though, when the day arrived, a Sunday noon, and the guests trickled into the Sheen's apartment,*

*baby Dawn was not herself. She lay listless and limp in her mother's arms. Mr. Sheen rushed downstairs to the second floor of their building to ask a neighbor, a wise pediatrician, to take a look at the infant. The doctor was professional enough to examine the infant despite it being Sunday and despite the snub of not having been invited to the celebration.*

*By the time the wise doctor had finished with her examination her face had gone white. She suspected the baby had a serious health problem. Dawn Rose was rushed to Children's Hospital.*

*A few days later, after countless tests had been conducted, the pediatrician's suspicions became certainty. Severe congenital heart disease was the diagnosis. The child would not live to see her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.*

*It was a terrible prophecy. Mr. and Mrs. Sheen were devastated. They were terrified. They were saddened to the very quick of their kind souls. Their tiny, perfect baby was deathly ill? They refused to accept the doctor's opinion and brought their daughter to other wise specialists for second and third and more opinions. There were twelve specialists in all and all of them had the same message: Dawn Rose Sheen would not live past her eighteenth year.*

Magnus paused the BB narration and took another sip of water. It must have been terrible living in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century with all those diseases and no way to cure so many of them or keep them in check or prevent them. These days, it was usually accidents and advanced old age that got you in the end. Occasionally one heard of violent fighting in remote communities which in some cases led to

death through severed limbs, head injuries, or damaged organs because the victims couldn't get help fast enough. On the whole, though, disease and illness were pretty much under control. If Magnus lived long enough, he might even be lucky and get a shot at immortality!

*Soon enough the infant became a toddler, then the toddler a young child. Years passed. Dawn was a lovely girl. She was beautiful, clever, virtuous, gentle and kind. But, alas, the fact remained that she was also ill. She suffered under great spells of fatigue. When she walked too fast, she became breathless. Her pulse raced. She was plagued by fits of dizziness.*

*Despite her illness, Dawn Rose remained optimistic. "Surely they'll soon find a cure for this malady," she always said. Her parents had failed to let their daughter know the truth about her disease. If she had known that she would not live to see her eighteenth birthday, she might not have been so cheerful.*

*One day, when she was seventeen, Dawn Rose was home alone when the doorbell chimed. There stood a woman in a sensible suit and sensible shoes. She had an appointment with Mr. and Mrs. Sheen. "They must have forgotten," said Dawn, apologizing for her parents. "Not to worry," said the woman: she would make a new appointment and come back another day. She left a booklet and her visiting card on the sideboard, and disappeared.*

*Curious, Dawn Rose took the booklet to the sofa. A modern steel-and-glass building surrounded by tall evergreens was depicted on the cover. It was a research foundation with the name ALYA. Dawn Rose started reading.*

ALYA, named after a faint binary star, is a non-profit organization that advocates, researches, and performs cryonics: the freezing of human corpses and brains in liquid nitrogen after legal death. The hope is that — at a future date when new technologies, especially molecular nanotechnology, are developed and cures for specific diseases are discovered — the corpses will be regenerated and restored to full health. We at ALYA know that immortality is only a matter of time.

*If Dawn Rose had not suspected it earlier (though something at the back of her mind told her she had), she knew now that she was soon to die. The shock of her fast approaching death, of her mortality, was great, but even greater was how she imagined the shock of being restored to life at some future time, destined to live out years in a strange and foreign world without the friends and family she loved. Would she be herself? Would she have her memories? Her soul? Her own body?*

*She sat there, alone and despairing, for a long time — till it struck her that as gruesome as it was to think of her frozen body floating in liquid nitrogen, it might actually make more sense than burial or cremation. Those two were so absolute. They left no hope.*

*When Mr. and Mrs. Sheen returned home that afternoon Dawn Rose had already made up her mind. She would do it — but only if her parents promised to do it too when it was their time to leave the living. She needed them and they needed her. If they were all revived at some future date, they would have each other. The thought was a great comfort.*

*After much discussion, Mr. and Mrs. Sheen agreed to their daughter's wish. Yes, they would have themselves cryopreserved too, when it was their time to go.*

*During the next months Dawn Rose's health declined. With the little energy she had, she prepared herself for the inevitable. A dear uncle built her a durable*

chest of Western red cedar. Dawn filled it with memorabilia: books she had loved, dolls she had cared for, diaries she had written, clothes she had worn, photos she and others had taken of her at all ages, photos of friends and of her parents and relatives. In the event that she would be revived at some future date, she hoped these precious artifacts would help her remember who she once had been.

Dawn Rose's dental and medical records also found a home in the chest. Her measurements, of every limb and every fingernail, were taken and filed away in a box that was likewise put in the chest. Her height and her weight were jotted down, her birthmarks noted, the distance from her shoulder to her pinky. For all they knew, body parts might have to be substituted, new organs implanted. These notes, these measurements, were vital.

Shortly before her eighteenth birthday, lovely Dawn Rose took a sudden turn for the worse. She knew her end was near. Scientists and lab technicians from the ALYA Foundation were called in. They settled into the living room with all their equipment, prepared to rush in and begin the preservation process the moment the girl was declared legally dead. Speed was of the utmost consequence.

Two days shy of her eighteenth birthday, Mr. and Mrs. Sheen lay down in bed beside their dying daughter, this beautiful child who had given them so much joy for so many years. And so it was that Dawn spent the last hours of her short life sheltered between her parents, each holding one of her hands. They whispered how much they loved her, their tears falling on her cheeks. Breathing quietly, slowly, in and out, holding their child's two slender hands, the mother and father could do nothing more but wait for the curse to be fulfilled. Oh, if only they could give



*their daughter their own breath, their own lives, they would have done so in a heartbeat — but they could not.*

*In the very early hours of the new day, just as the sun showed her soft pink smile at the horizon, Dawn Rose Sheen closed her eyes, breathed her last breath, and passed into darkness, a darkness filled with nothing but nothingness — until once upon a future, she might be kissed awake, the spell broken.*

The narration was over. Magnus de Koning the Younger was weeping. He always wept when he came to the end of this story. He looked around to see if he was still alone. He was — whew. He fumbled for a piece of cloth he kept handy in his crosspack for moments like this, patted the tears away and then blew his nose. No one liked to see anyone cry, but that last scene — wow. The archaic notion of family — Mother, Father, Child — touched him deeply. The three of them in bed, holding hands, the parents sheltering their child, waiting for the inevitable, grabbed hold of his heart. It happened every time he heard the story: it reached into him, held tight to his heart and wouldn't let go.

He wondered what it would be like to grow up in a family and not in a Near & Dear as he and most of his generation had? Yes, his parents had given him life and were special, but his caregivers were special too, Nanny Annie and Nandy Davey had actually been around more than his folks. And he felt close to his buddies, Nixo and

Bodo. They had grown up together in the Near & Dear. But were they family? Maybe.

When the three of them were growing up together they'd all wanted to be the person who awakened the famous sleeping beauty. Dawn Rose's story had first been publicized seventeen years ago. Researchers had discovered the Sheen family in a long-forgotten ALYA Foundation depot where they'd been frozen in liquid nitrogen for two centuries. It was announced that, within the next two decades, cryo-specialists would be implementing new methods to restore the Sheen family to life. They would be defrosted, regenerated, rehabilitated. Old organs would be removed and replaced with new ones, memories sharpened, health issues resolved. Then, finally, they would be reanimated.

Today, Magnus thought — almost two hundred years after her passing — the sleeping beauty would be awakened. Others had tried to get this far but had failed. He would prevail.

Magnus sat quietly thinking about Dawn Rose. What courage she had had: what strength of character. He couldn't hold a candle to her, this he knew. But the fact remained: he was here now. And he had a shot at it. He would be the one to kiss her awake.

He stood up, his eyes scanning the dark, unyielding woods before him. Tree trunks and branches, bushes, scrambling shrubs, thorns and thistles, wanton and wild,

were fighting each other for space, choking each other for light, obstructing his way. But he would endure. He was sure. He would be the One.

Magnus heard movement behind him: aha — his best buddies, Bodo and Nixo. Once more he checked his laser sword, his boots, his crosspack flat against his back, tightly strapped. He moistened his lips. He was ready.

"We're rooting for you, bro," said Bodo approaching him.

Nixo gave Magnus a bear hug. "Time to go in and get the girl. Make us proud."

The three men slipped into their protective gloves and lowered the visors of their full-face helmets. Magnus's laser sword was synced to his BB. He activated it and pointed it between two trees, where huge knots of undergrowth grew. The three stood together, waiting for their BBs to strike the hour. Magnus was glad his best buddies had time to do this with him. Bodo was watching the time and would give him the cue.

"Action!" said Bodo.

Magnus waved his sword. The laser sliced through the thick, thorny green as if it were dandelion fluff.

Bodo and Nixo joined Magnus on either side. They slashed and slit and laser-axed their way through the gnarled woods as fast as they could. It was easier than Magnus had hoped, but exhausting nonetheless. Thankfully, with every step, it became more pleasant. The

deeper they penetrated the forest's interior, the more flowers bloomed. The sweet scent of roses and lilacs, lavender and jasmine, and even apples, filled the air they breathed like the scent of fruit pie straight out of the oven.

Before they knew it, the woods were behind them and they stood in a clearing before a huge geodesic dome made of glass and steel. It reflected the trees and flowers that surrounded it like a magical kaleidoscope. It was dazzling in the light of the sun.

Had they done it? Had they gotten through?

The three young men looked at each other and broke out in grins, hugging and congratulating each other. But after a few moments they pulled away from their embrace. There was more to do. The gig wasn't over.

Magnus strode confidently to the glass dome, Bodo and Nixo at his heels. They stepped into a cathedral-like, sun-lit entrance hall. At its center stood a glass cube; they walked toward that, slowly, as if approaching a mystery. Inside it they saw the sleeping beauty lying on an ivory dais as if she were an ancient Roman sculpture, a sleeping Venus — but she was alive. Magnus saw her chest rise and fall. She was just a hair's breadth away, a kiss away, from reanimation.

When he came closer he saw that the girl was indeed the most exquisite creature he had ever seen. Her lips were full and red; her cheeks blushed pink; her dark hair shone like black silk; her skin was an unblemished,

translucent alabaster. Her long and slender frame was draped in a clinging, ruby red silk robe.

The heart of Magnus de Koning the Younger was beating so wildly that he put his hand up to his chest to steady it as he stepped up to the dais where the beauty slept. He kneeled down at her side regarding her for a moment, then slowly he leaned his upper torso toward her, lowered his head ... and kissed her.

Her lips were soft and warm. His lips lingered a moment on hers, tingling. Then he lifted his head slightly and let his lips graze her cheek ever so gently, breathing in her loveliness. Then he leaned back and waited for her to open her eyes.

He waited. And waited some more. Her eyes remained closed. After a minute or so he wondered if something were wrong. Why hadn't she—

"Cut!" boomed a voice from above.

Magnus was stunned.

"Cut?" said Bodo, throwing down the pouch that was slung across his shoulder. "Oh, fuck."

Magnus looked around him, and up at the steel beams. "What's going on?" he demanded of some invisible entity. "Why's she still sleeping? We were the first, weren't we?"

"Yes. Congratulations, Magnus!" said the voice.

"Well done! You were the first! The other two contestants got stuck in the briars. It's a bloody mess back there. We

had to send one of them to the hospital. We've got the images. Excellent footage."

Magnus wondered why the director had to boom at them over a sound system. He could have just as well made the announcement quietly via their Brain Buttons. It was some sort of power game, he thought.

"Hold on a sec, Magnus, okay?" the director went on. "The assistant director's coming down."

A young man appeared at the back of the studio.

"Shit," Nixo muttered under his breath. "AD attack."

The AD approached Magnus. He was carrying something under his arm.

"Sorry, dude," said the assistant director in an unnecessarily loud voice when he got to Magnus. He unfolded a chair and set it down with a bang next to the sleeping beauty. "Our medical people over in the cryo-lab ran into a problem. Apparently there's a malfunction with the reanimation synchronization. Have a seat. It might take a bit. Would you like something to drink?"

Magnus shook his head. "No, thank you. — But she *will* wake up, won't she?"

The assistant director shrugged. "That's the plan. But it's a reality show, man. Anything goes. You know that, right?"

Magnus nodded. Of course he knew what he'd gotten into when he agreed to audition for a reality show, even if he hadn't really believed the jury would actually



choose him. But they had. They'd liked his looks, his attitude, his stamina. They loved that he wanted to be a cyborg psychiatrist and that he enjoyed listening to something as retro as stories. It made sense that a young man like him would be paired off with someone like Dawn Rose Sheen who had an authentic retro personality and was, of late, half cyborgic too. From 1,687 contestants they'd been whittled down to ten and then to three. And now he, Magnus de Koning the Younger of Amsterdam, had come out on top. He was thrilled with his prize: a place at a university of his choice, all expenses paid, in a major of his choice. Plus, he'd get the girl. Or at least he had first dibs.

The AD turned to Bodo and Nixo. "Wait for our cue this time. Okay? And no more expletives. Got it?"

Bodo and Nixo laughed.

The AD turned back to Magnus. "Millions of people are going to see you and adore you. You're going to be fabulous! Trust me. Who cares if it's the first or the second kiss? And if it doesn't work out with the girl in the end, big deal! You'll have plenty of others. So make the most of it. Give it your best. And remember: you're all she's got now."

"What does that mean? 'All she's got now?'"

The AD looked surprised. "They didn't tell you?"

"What?" Magnus sat down on the chair. "What?"

"Sadly, Mr. and Mrs. Sheen didn't make it."

Magnus was dumbstruck.

"What happened?" Bodo asked.

The assistant director shrugged. "Their bodies rejected the organ implants, or something. Probably they were too old when they died." He swatted a hand toward Dawn Rose, lying asleep on the ivory throne. He didn't even look at her. "But she's good to go, as soon as they get the kinks out of that reanimation thingy. Gotta go, Magnus. If you want something, just ask. See you at the cast party." He started off.

Something about that guy bothered Magnus. What was it? Lost in thought, he regarded Dawn Rose, sleeping there so innocently. After a moment he knew what had irritated him. The assistant director had acted as if she were just a piece of furniture. A prop. He hadn't even looked at her!

The loss of Mr. and Mrs. Sheen was a worst-case scenario. For one thing, this was not what Magnus had wanted. He'd wanted the whole package. He'd wanted the Family. All of it. Mother-Father-Daughter. And he would be the Son. Or rather the son-in-law. He wanted to be a part of *that*.

Yet even more important, he knew that this outcome was exactly what *Dawn* didn't want. How did they put it in her story? *The shock of her fast approaching death, of her mortality, was great, but even greater was how she imagined the shock of being restored to life at some*

*future time, destined to live out years in a strange and foreign world without the friends and family she loved.*

Magnus looked at the young woman asleep on the dais. The people saw her here as a mere “prop.” A beautiful prop in a reality show. A reality show! Did she have any idea what that was? Did they even have reality shows back then in the 2020s?

“Okay, folks!” said the director’s voice from above. “We’re ready. Sorry for the delay. Magnus, Bodo and Nixo proceed to the hall’s entrance. We’ll pick up from there. Positions!”

With a heavy heart Magnus started walking back toward the entrance. It occurred to him that he *could* leave now. He could just walk out the door and leave this all behind him. It would probably make for good footage. They might even thank him for it. The contestant who came in second place behind him would definitely thank him for it.

Bodo and Nixo were each to one side of Magnus, keeping in step with him, when Bodo unexpectedly reached out and took Magnus’s hand. They had used to hold hands when they were little.

Magnus turned to Bodo and smiled at him.

“You’re the best, bro,” Bodo whispered in Magnus’s ear. “We know what you’re thinking. Whatever you do, it’s the right thing. We love you.”

Then Nixo, just as unexpectedly, took Magnus's other hand. "We stick together," he whispered in Magnus's other ear.

Magnus de Koning the Younger stopped in place a moment, hoping to control the wild surge of emotions that was threatening to overwhelm him. For the first time ever he actually felt like a part of something greater than himself. Bodo and Nixo had reached into his heart and weren't about to let go. He loved those guys. And they loved him. They were his ... family.

When the three young men got to the hall's entrance, holding hands like that, they looked out at the set in front of them, the perfect reconstruction of a dark, tangled fairy-tale forest — perfect, but pretend. Magnus smiled to himself and then turned back around to face the glass cube in the center of the hall. He gazed at the lovely woman lying there on her silvery, ivory dais. She was breathtaking. But—

"Quiet on the set!" said the director's voice from above. "Sound. ... Visuals. ... Action!"

But strangely, instead of striding forward to his sleeping beauty and his fairy-tale future, Magnus about-faced and walked straight toward the exit and the woods. Bodo and Nixo, his family, were right at his side. But just as Magnus was about to walk through the exit and leave Dawn Rose behind someone called out to him. "Wait!" said a lovely, sweet voice. "Please! Come back!"

Astonished, Magnus turned back around toward the cube. The sleeping beauty was awake. She sat up, and her ruby red silk robe fell in soft ripples around her, exposing her shoulders. She smiled gently at Magnus. "Please," she said again. "Come back."



The “Sleeping Beauty” retelling, “Once Upon A Future,” the tale of Dawn Rose Sheen, the story-within-the-story in the above piece, originated, we believe, in late-21<sup>st</sup> century North American Forester culture. The frame story, however, “The Sleeper and the Spellbreaker,” Magnus de Koning the Younger’s open-end story that plays out in an Urbanite setting, is a more recent, early 23<sup>rd</sup> century addition: first mentioned in Hahj Lii-Roonies seminal work *Tales My Sister Whispered at Dusk – Storytelling Through the Ages* (2252). Does this mean that the frame story is of Urbanite origin? No, not necessarily, but in answering this question it will be helpful – especially for our younger readers – to elaborate on the rise of the Forester and Urbanite cultures.

In the early years of Dark Winter, mid-21<sup>st</sup> century, a small percentage of the world’s population opted to flee the chaos of the cities and hunker down in the world’s forests, hoping the mayhem of disease, war and climate change would soon blow over. They called themselves Foresters. They had little but the clothes on their backs, elementary communication devices, and a strong will to survive.

At the end of Dark Winter in 2095, most Foresters – less than 10% of the world’s population – opted to remain in their communities. For two centuries they flourished, establishing



tight-knit, self-reliant communities with strong ties to other Forester colonies the world over.

In the meanwhile, the world's city dwellers – the Urbanites – rebuilt their cities and immersed themselves in the task of creating a future through science and technology. Despite incredible technical advances and leaps in science, from today's vantage point the Urbanites failed at certain endeavors, among them their push to reform the world's languages.

For over two hundred years – from 2040, the start of Dark Winter, until the Majorca Accord in 2270 – Urbanites throughout the world, but especially in the Germanic and Italic subgroups of the Indo-European languages, spoke without using the first-person singular pronoun. It was a strategy that many nations during Dark Winter had developed to encourage cohesion and cooperation by reducing individual identity, in hopes to better survive the gruesome difficulties of Dark Winter and the hard times thereafter. At the probable time of origin of the frame story – *The Sleeper and the Spellbreaker* – illeism, or the practice of speaking of one's self in the third person, had become second nature among Urbanites. They were saying "this person" instead of using "I," for example, or saying "we" instead of "I," and likewise they did not state personal opinions except by formulating them as questions.

Foresters, however, kept to "I."

By mid-23<sup>rd</sup> century, however, illeism was slowly losing its hold on the world's languages. Then, less than fifty years ago, in 2270, the Majorca Accord ushered in a new era of détente. Since 2299 Foresters and Urbanites have been joined under one world government. Most people, save a few diehard Urbanites, have also returned to using first-person singular pronouns.

At first glance we might think that the frame story was an Urbanite tale. It is clearly told from the perspective of a young Urbanite and it never employs the first person singular pronouns "I/me/my/mine": an Urbanite no-no.

Indeed, in the very first paragraph of the tale attentive readers are alerted to the use of the third person for a first-person narration. Instead of writing "I had one espresso, two club sodas and ~~three~~ ~~four~~ five spicers," Magnus has written, "*Magnus* had one espresso, etc." The entire frame story is, we believe, a first-person narration! But does this mean that it is an Urbanite retelling? No, it does not. The frame story was told by Foresters for Foresters, perhaps as a cautionary tale imitating an Urbanite aesthetic and depicting the "horrors" of Urbanite life.

The spellbreaker character, Magnus de Koning the Younger, and his second cousins Bodo and Nixo, are depicted in a favorable light. Although this might be proof enough for some that it is an Urbanite retelling, the careful reader will notice that Magnus embodies positive *Forester* values and qualities – brotherly love; family loyalty; spontaneity (Magnus weeps and the cousins use vulgarities); a vivid and sensitive emotional life (Urbanites were loath to demonstrate emotion in public); and a love of stories and literature. Magnus's character is juxtaposed with the callousness of the Urbanite assistant director who takes on the central role of antagonist in the frame story, supported by the booming voice of the director and the overall absurdness, heartlessness and phoniness of the reality show format. At its core the frame story criticizes Urbanite life while extending a hospitable hand to young Urbanites like Magnus and his

cousins, giving them the chance to show that they are Forester material at heart.

For any of you who are learning about the storytelling craft, it is interesting to also note here the use of a story-within-a-story narration adding complexity to this reimagining of "Sleeping Beauty." The story-within-a-story gives space and depth not only to the sleeping beauty character, but to her parents and, of course, to the "prince" who is on track to break her spell. This is something that the original fairy tale did not do.

Two references in "The Sleeper and the Spellbreaker" may be unknown to some of our youngest readers.

"Cryonics" was a speculative science in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, based on the hope that deep-frozen corpses might be resurrected in the future when scientific advances allowed for it. By the late 21<sup>st</sup> century, though, it was largely dismissed as an anti-science of cheap tricks and humbug, but the magical thinking behind it (immortality) was reworked into the beloved Forester retelling "Once upon a Future." Little more was heard on the subject in the scientific community, until the early years of the 23<sup>rd</sup> century when a cryogenic depot was discovered in the far reaches of Siberia. Several deep-frozen corpses had survived some two hundred years, through a clever automatic system that used liquid nitrogen to refill, every two months, the tanks in which the corpses were stored. Once again, cryonics became a subject for imagination and speculation, thereby probably inspiring the frame story. The corpses, however, were never revived, although the rumor persisted that one corpse – a

beautiful young 21<sup>st</sup> century woman – had been reanimated but hidden from the public eye.

The second reference needing some explanation is a “Near & Dear,” an Urbanite creation that evolved around 2100. Near & Dears were styled after communal living centers in the Middle East nation of Israel called *kibbutzim*, which had come into being some 140 years earlier in the 1930s, as well as after so-called intergenerational houses and *Mehrgenerationshäuser* that prospered in Great Britain, Germany and in most European and North American countries beginning around 2005. Several generations – children, parents, grandparents and great-grandparents – lived under one roof or, later, as in the case with Near & Dears, inhabited huge complexes that encompassed nurseries, kindergartens, schools, cultural institutions and community facilities such as hospitals.

In 21<sup>st</sup> century Europe the original idea behind such housing had been to bring together diverse groups and reduce age stereotypes in the hope that these families would develop a high level of personal attachment. But by the end of the 22<sup>nd</sup> century, the Near & Dears, where large extended families lived together in one community, had become massive, bureaucratic complexes. Most Urbanite adults worked long hours, many in faraway cities, so their children, were often housed in huge Near & Dear dormitories and cared for by ersatz mothers and fathers (so-called nannies and nandys). The enormous need to rebuild the world after Dark Winter along with a strong General Global Government work ethic, had in fact made it increasingly necessary to leave one’s offspring at home. An unfortunate long-term consequence of this practice was increased alienation

between parents and their children: the opposite of the system's original intent.

Most recently, in the wake of the Majorca Accord and reunification, Near & Dears have been under reform and many Urbanites have begun integrating Forester-like nuclear family elements into their socialization concepts. In fact, you'd be hard put to find a family complex these days that uses the term "Near & Dear."

Lastly, we would like to note that the name given to Sleeping Beauty in this reimagined fairy tale – Dawn Rose Sheen – strikingly resembles the German name for the princess in the Grimm original: *Dornröschen*. The reimagined tale explains the origin of "Dawn Rose": the Sheens called their child "Dawn" because she signaled a new day for them. Her middle name, Rose, was the color of dawn. Their surname was Sheen (meaning, by the way, "beautiful" in German and in medieval English). All in all, it's a neat and tidy explanation and very likely an *intentional* play on words.

Or is it possible that originally the storytellers were just *mispronouncing* the German name Dornröschen? Dorn/Dawn – rös/rose – schen/Sheen. German, we know, was for the most part a dead language by the year 2100, as one of the major side effects of mass migration out of Europe during Dark Winter had been the loss of several European tongues. Happily, these languages are now experiencing a renaissance. The Majorca Accord of 2270 revitalized an interest in Forester culture and cultivation of the old, dead languages.

Be that as it may, between the mid-21<sup>st</sup> century and the late 23<sup>rd</sup> century most Europeans would not have understood the

word *Dornröschen*, known its meaning, or known how to pronounce it. The oral storytellers of this tale may have somehow tried to make sense out of the mispronunciation.

You see, dear readers, there are so many questions and, unfortunately, too few answers. They, like poor Dawn Rose herself and her parents, are lost to us forever, locked and frozen in the far and distant past. But on these pages, at least, they come alive once more.

(end of sample)