

## **Unbraided**

**by Chrystyna Lucyk-Berger**

***Fiction***

The alpine grass was only ankle high as she ran through the meadow. She imagined her family discovering that she'd once more fled the Hof. Her mother would smell the scorched milk, find the kitchen empty and move to the doorway, the ends of her headscarf flapping like a truce flag in the spring wind. Her last words, You're a young woman; behave like one, were lost on the early spring wind.

Mutter would see Bernd pitching manure and ask if he'd seen his older sister, and Bernd would complain that Annamarie had again shirked her chores. Her father, cleaning out the milk pails, would hear of it and his face would read resignation as he lay the switch aside for when she returned. That made her want to laugh and every impact with the spongy ground created a gasp, a sound not unlike sobbing.

She was just sixteen. She was running because she still could.

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Her foot slipped on the bark of the tree. She liked the hot, stinging tingle flooding over the arch to below her toes. Taking hold of the branch again, she propelled herself up into the cradle and closed her eyes against the sun settling between the mountain peaks.

"I could have helped you," Marco said next to her. "You farm girls are strong, though."

She opened her eyes. "All you Italian tourists think we're just farmers up here. We're not."

"Well, if you're no longer Tyrolean, and you're not really Italian, and you're not a farmer, what are you?"

She looked at his bright blue Fascist scarf, Mussolini's head stamped on the silver clip that clutched it together. "I'm going to be an actress," she said.

He sniffed.

"If I lived in the city," she said, "I'd spend days and days in the cinema."

"I supposed you wouldn't make a bad actress. They don't need much talent from what I saw. They just need to look good..." He winked at her. "You got potential, doll."

She swung her legs. What was she supposed to say to that?

"Yeah, if you had your hair done, get the German out of your accent, and wear a dress that shows more of you..." His smile was crooked. "You'd have to learn how to kiss for the screen."

She punched his arm.

He laughed, rubbing where she'd hit him. "That's exactly how it starts."

"What starts?"

"That's how the girl gets the guy to kiss him. She pretends to be offended, and then she slaps him and pouts and so he—" He grabbed her and pulled her to him, his and the dictator's faces very close to hers. His lips were then on hers and he held them there, his eyes shut.

She turned away and heard him brushing himself off.

"They close their eyes in the films," he said.

"We should go. It's getting dark."

“You could just close your eyes.” His next kisses were a little softer.

Back at the Hof, she leaned against the walnut tree and put her hands where he had, and gradually moved them upwards and waited, waited for that sensation again, found it and gave into it. At the window of the Stube, she looked in. Her family was inside, as if nothing had changed. For her, everything had.