

Celia
An Adaptable History
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The Doppelgänger is viewed as an ill omen because it portends a loss of control over oneself and one's destiny. Some other being has adopted one's appearance and could be out, carousing about town, engaging in debauchery of the lowest sort at the expense of our reputation, or perpetrating a crime for which our freedom or perhaps even our life will be forfeit. Creatures fixed in a single shape naturally distrust the Changeling for crossing boundaries of decency to which we are prohibited. As such, we can hardly be blamed for assigning them a mantle of villainy. From this perspective, the Doppelgänger is damned, serving no noble purpose.

From the point of view of the Doppelgänger, the situation is not much improved. If those of a fixed appearance can suffer self-doubt and undergo a crisis of identity, how much more so can a Changeling be afflicted by this malaise of anxiety? Indeed, Changelings, as a race, know no culture of their own, have never established a philosophy, architecture, religion or literature to which they can lay claim. Instead, they live dispersed amongst the civilizations of the world, adopting not only the social mores of their hosts but their complexions and builds as well. If an entire people can be judged so bereft of any trademarks of self-identification, what hope is there for individuals?

Changelings are scattered; hiding their true identity. Discovery means certain persecution—banishment, imprisonment or death. One might suppose that if a Changeling lived in peace long enough among a community, those people might come to see it for its virtues, even were its true nature revealed. Such is never the case; the longer the Changeling manages to hide, the more hearts in which it engenders kindness and compassion, so much more the betrayal, indignation and fury when it is discovered to have played its neighbors false. No, the lot of the Doppelgänger is an unfortunate one, from any point of view.

The sorrow of their misfortunes is told in many versions of the same tale. A queen dies of a mysterious illness and, lying in state in the palace hall for the night, rises the following morning, healed and whole. "A miracle!" cries the King. "Something amiss," mutters the court sorcerer. Twenty years may pass and the Queen, a paragon of regal propriety, bears the King a crown prince and subsequent children—a model of familial bliss to be envied across the realm. But the misgivings of the sorcerer are never entirely extinguished; eventually he catches a glimpse of the queen, alone in her chambers, in her true featureless form and all her years of loving labor are undone in an hour. Banished to live in the wilds, her exile short-lived for it is no easy task, even for a Changeling to adapt to the rigors of the forest after decades of palace comforts. The children, regardless of whether they share their mother's particular talent, meet with varying degrees of unpleasantness, depending upon the hard-heartedness of their father, the monarch.

There are other versions of this story, although they too end in tragedy. A young girl wanders from the house, while her mother is occupied with chores. A passing Changeling child, cast out from all society, finds the small carcass ravaged by wolves. Sensing an opportunity, she adopts that likeness and returns to the village. The momentary strangeness of the child is attributed to a scare she received in the woods. That child is loved all the more dearly for having almost been lost. All her young life she is cherished as she grows into a dutiful daughter beyond reproach. Her beauty blossoms, her suitors are numerous, one lucky youth among them is chosen to wed her. The venom of a spurned suitor knows no bounds and does not ebb until a

flaw in his rival's perfection is discovered. We know very well the nature of that flaw. We know too its outcome. She is again cast out, a seducer, a deceiver, a witch both by nature and deed.

The life of a Changeling is hard, born only to adapt, but never to be accepted. We can pick any version of the story that suits us to provide background for Celia, a Changeling of interest here. She will offer no argument to whichever background we select for her, such is her nature. Any one of those miseries could have driven her from society to a rocky out-cropping at the edge of a mountain range to stand upon the precipice in her true, ambiguous form as the wind whips about her, where she contemplates death.

In those remote mountains, a hidden ravine leads to an isolated monastery. An elder hermit meandering through the wilds collecting medicinal herbs for his brothers observes her in her moment of weakness. "Why should you jump, faceless one?" asks the old man, though he needn't ask. He reads very clearly the history written in the smooth flesh of her face.

"Do you have a better idea?"

The hermit monk has many ideas, most of them are bad, which is why the other brothers always send him out on solitary chores, in which he disturbs no one else with these bad ideas. This time is no exception. Inviting a female Doppelgänger into an exclusively male monastery is judged an extraordinarily bad idea by all the other monks, perhaps the worst idea this particular hermit has ever hatched in his long, long life filled with terrible ideas. Still, the damage is done. The Changeling knows the location of their secret temple. They can no more release her than they can kill or imprison her. These brothers know only one way of life and that is the rigorous training of monks.

Celia has little choice but to learn that life as well. It is not so hard. It certainly seems preferable to the alternative, which remains waiting patiently on the precipice. There are in fact certain remarkable delights in this situation, foremost among them is the fact Celia lives without disguise, a truly failed Doppelgänger among men.

Many people claim monks are useless. In this case, these reclusive men served a purpose that no other community would have willingly fulfilled. In doing so, they saved a young girl's life. When she reached the age and level of training where monks were sent out into the world to find their way, she too left the monastery. The monks had prepared her as one of their own. Celia, the Changeling monk, would find her own way.