His eyes as black as cobalt stars,

dying embers start to burn.

“The woodsman lied!” he growled and coughed.

“A little red herring to hide his sins.

The brat invaded my quiet den

Loud as Judgment day, and meddlesome.”

He paused to flick his jaundiced teeth.

His voice wheezed like hot empty kettles.

“She wandered out to hunt for fungi,

Mushrooms for her mother’s broth

(Or so she said; I knew the truth.

Her twitching hands were plain enough).

I told her where they often sprang

In dark and fetid hollows tucked

Away, through hidden forest glades.

No fault of mine if dangers lurked,

Ready to pounce a lonely girl.

My friend the bear—” he then broke off,

A wracking, hacking, wheezing cough

Curled his body around the tale

That spilled out like a pool of blood,

Curdling and seeping into the cracks

Of wooden beams, withered struts

Supporting his bed.

                                      “And you never—”

“Not for a blink,” he snarled back.

“Too little flesh, except in spots.”

A weathered sneer tortured his lips.

“Besides,” here sneer became a leer,

“from what I heard the little tart

Already had a rendezvous

With other prey, deep in the woods.

Morels indeed!” a watery snort.

“It’s hard to think a dainty thing

Like her would tempt you not a whit,”

I slowly mused. “Unless…” A pause.

A glint of light flashed as he gripped

A glass of water. “You were saying?”

A wolfish grin.

                                “No, No,” I stammered.

“P-Please continue with your tale.”

“Where was I? Ah! The rendezvous!”

His long pink tongue escaped his jaws,

Striking the air with malicious glee.

“A regular jaunt, from all I heard.

A frolic with a carnivore.

My friend one day stumbled upon

The feast of Eros. No better table

Was ever laid!”  he grinned and then,

A watery laugh. He paid for it,

As drops of pain welled in his eyes.

“So all of it—”

                                “A pack of lies.

No cottage, gran or travestie.

A bunch of bunk from start to close;

I never donned a woman’s robes.”

Was that a twinkle ‘neath his brows?

“The woodsman..?”

A growl arrested me.

“That quaking excuse for humanity

Fled like a deer if so much as

A rabbit’s ear appeared. A lesser

Son of men I never saw.

His only brush with me began

With screaming and a lively dash

O’er hill and dale. I let him live

To my chagrin. His lying lips

I should have ripped from off his face,

That sniveling pasty jackanapes!”

By now his voice had risen to

A yowling roar, which might have once

Turned blood to ice; yet now the sound

Held little terror, a faint echo

In canyons of time. He knew it too,

And sullenly he glanced my way

As if in hope my skin would crawl.

I cleared my throat. “Well, if that’s all

You can recall, then I’ll be off.

Thanks for your time.” He waved a hairy

Arm farewell, his bloodshot eyes

Losing their fire. “Oh one more thing,

If you don’t mind. Do you recall

Just how she died?”

“Who said she died?”