



# *A Red Snow Night*

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Retold Fairy Tales

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ONCE UPON A TIME a little girl named Ylva and her dad Henrik travelled north towards the coastal community of Hammerfest. There resides Ylva's grandparents, living out their days on the family estate amid a landscape of pristine serenity. Although the location and distance were familiar to her, this trip would mark Ylva's first winter spent in a true winter climate. Years prior, everyone of importance in her life deemed her too little, too young, or too precious to traverse such unforgiving weather. She has been looking forward to seeing Hammerfest in the winter for a long time. So much so that she was inspired in the autumn season to learn how to bake, and has come prepared with sweet offerings of deliciousness to enjoy with her loved ones.

"Half of one?" her dad said.

"Please stop asking," said Ylva, "I know you already ate a muffin."

"How do you know?"

"You big silly, I counted them."

He took a hand off the steering wheel and ruffled her hair, acknowledging his slyness was found out. In that moment, they both bounced in their seats having had runover something. The car juddered onward at a much slower pace, for strewn about the road were twigs and broken branches. Further ahead, they found the route completely blocked by an enormous, uprooted tree laying side face in a pile of earth and gravel.

"Keep buckled."

Henrik exited the vehicle to inspect the damage. With her eyes, Ylva followed her dad as he pressed both hands on the tree. She knows this helps him to think, touching the surface of whatever he wishes to work with. He then returned to the car, brushing away a clearing with his feet.

Baggage in the back was shifted to one side to make way for his hand and power tools and landscaping gear—Henrik was a tree surgeon by trade.

“Put on your coat and shoes,” said Henrik. “I will need your help.”

Ylva laced her shoes on tight, but because the afternoon sun shone in a visibly blue sky, she decided to tie a lighter cardigan around her waist instead.

Henrik put down his gear and took a knee to speak directly to her.

“Listen closely, while I’m cutting through this tree, I need you to get to an emergency-telephone on the other side and ask for help.”

Ylva groaned.

“We’ve come too far to double-back and the nearest station is ahead. Now come on, up you get, we are losing light.”

Ylva put one foot in her dad’s clasped hands and the other foot on his shoulder. She was lifted high enough to grip onto the grooves of the bark and pull herself up and over on top of it.

“How’s it look?”

“Clear pa. Better than this side.”

“Good. I will use the winch to pull this section away when you return. Hurry, and be safe Ylva.”

Ylva balanced along the trunk until she reached branches that were sturdy and long enough to safely climb down. She started jogging towards her task as the sputtering sound of a chainsaw revved alive behind her.

There was no horizon to be seen in the forest or rays of light squinting between the canopy, only shadows as deep as the night—that was how thick and vast the woods were up north. Ylva needed to stop and take breath. Birdsong and the shushing of a thousand trees focused her attention. She thought it pleasant, until a faint purr of an engine echoed up the corridor of trees lining the highway. Thirteen seconds later, she saw the car come careening around the bend at the bottom of the steep road, where she knew a solar-powered telephone box was. The grey muscle truck slowed down a little when Ylva came into their view. They had no real intention of stopping and shouted things to her at speed.

“Hey little girl, can you point me towards the nearest zoo?!” The man cackled after he spoke.

Ylva shook her head and immediately directed her gaze to her footsteps. She heard the wheels skid to acceleration and an empty aluminium can skip on the asphalt. They were in for a surprise. These four men were younger than her father and a lot less mature, except for maybe the one sitting in the trailer with an arm

rested on beautiful reindeer antlers. He seemed a not-so-thrilled hunter. She went back for the beer can on the road and took it upon herself to see that it was disposed of properly.

Ylva listened with the phone receiver pressed hard to her right ear, when the dial-tone connected to an automatic message;

“Hammerfest Police Department thanks you for your patience. Our emergency call operatives are currently busy at the moment. Please do hold the line, and we will be with you as soon as possible.”

A wind gust blew Ylva off balance. It was strong and carried in it the sound of that same engine returning from up the road. She hung the receiver, closed the telephone-box and ran into the woods to hide behind the treeline. The shadow of the forest was cooler than any wind, which made Ylva want to return to the heat retained road as soon as possible, but she was patient. Those men who seemed in a hurry to leave would certainly be agitated on their way back. Their truck zoomed past trailing a lingering stench of dead animal and burnt smog. Once more Ylva began to jog and hurried back to her dad, who was right to tell her to wear something thicker. Warmness retreated as blue skies thinned away and deepened. The sun was dipping behind nearby ranges.

Ylva reached the fallen tree and called out to her dad. The chainsaw was silent, and it was odd not to get a reply. She climbed the same branches, stood tall and saw the car parked where she remembered it was, but Henrik was nowhere in sight.

Ylva waited in the driver's seat. Three-quarters of an hour passed before she decided to chance walking alone to find help. She promptly emptied her backpack of books and time wasting knick-knacks to be replaced with cakes, fruit, water, the car's first aid travel kit and a compass. She doubled up her socks, traded her sneakers for high winter boots, put on her gloves, and dawned her hooded raspberry cloak.

Before setting off once more down the long road, she inspected the progress her dad had made in the log. A substantial wedge had been extracted. Standing there she noticed splotches of red had stained the wood inner rings. She knew what sap looked like and this coagulated blot was not that. More splotches of red were discovered trailing back to a smashed headlight. It was certainly blood. Ylva cried out for her dad again, fearing for his safety. Perhaps he was with them, looking for her on the road, or speeding to the emergency hospital. If either were the case, then help would likely meet her along the highway. One last thing she had almost forgotten was a flashlight. She retrieved the torch from the boot then saw, lying among arborist

equipment with its face starring up at her, her dad's chocolate brown hickory hatchet. She attached the beltloop and holstered the short axe in its leather sheath, then intrepidly followed after the setting sun, onwards to Hammerfest.

No one had come for Ylva. Only stars in the night sky offered her aid, and even then they would disappear behind camouflaged clouds. The air was chilled. Colder than Ylva has ever experienced. Every breath she took warmed her nose, and how it dispersed in front of her eyes had her believing it to be the only comfort she would have for the next however long. Floating over the trees, however, she noticed a different form of rising heat moving faster than she.

Somewhere in the woods burned a fire.

Tracing the trail of smoke as far as she could see, she noted the brightest star above its general direction. Ylva fastened her attire, turned on the torch and stepped off the highway. Confident that she would find people to help her, she entered the woodland.

Darkness and biting temperatures did not bother Ylva so much as the unfamiliar noises reverberating around her did. The torch was unable to identify the cause to the sounds of distant crackles and rustling leaves. No point turning back now that she was in the thick of it. The shrilling of wind grew louder. Foliage and dirt transitioned to white flakes of powdery ice crystals the further apart the trees had grown from one another. She reached a clearing and was relieved. High in the sky above undulated the ethereal waves of the aurora borealis. It shimmered a greenish hue and was mesmerising. Its prettiness was obscured by dark smoke billowing from the chimney of a cabin just over the hill. It was a bittersweet moment, wanting to admire the northern lights and at the same time leave.

Ylva pushed through thirty inches of accumulated snow. As she came to pass a buried car, her nostrils flared from whiffing a foul pong in the air, and she dared not to take another step towards the front door. Voices from inside were loud and merry, but the grey muscle truck parked adjacent to the cabin tempered her eagerness to be a part of their enjoyment. She scanned the landscape for alternative shelter but saw nothing of the kind, only more trees and snowfall on snow. However, there was a fence beside the cabin. Not around the cabin as Ylva first thought, but next to it as its own fenced off area. At one end was an unusually big doghouse. Its corrugated iron roof was covered in snow and looked more like a small igloo. At the other end was a strange lump. Upon closer inspection Ylva saw how the snowy mass was in fact a man. Reddened snow from his knee-caps to his pelvis indicated what bad shape and the danger the both of them were in. Although, he did not seem

to be responsive. Three slim sticks protruded from his body. At their tips were fluorescent green and orange fins for visibility and aerodynamics—aluminium arrows—fletching andnock. Slowly she moved closer towards him and soon recognised his profile was the same as her dad's.

She jumped the fence and ran to him, careless in her haste, for so too did a beastly animal come tearing out from within the doghouse. Its slender leash chocked it from moving beyond halfway, tied to its post. It snarled through clenched teeth and purple lips, before retreating back into its dreary refuge. Ylva brushed off all the snow and embraced her dad who felt as stiff as frozen iced cream in her arms.

“Irish Wol–Wolfhound. It wants to ea–eat me,” said Henrik with a brave chuckle in his frosty breath.

“Pa, what happened? No, wait. Don't talk.”

His hands were tied behind his back in an unsophisticated figure-eight knot.

“Run, and don't look ba–ba–back.”

Ylva was too tired and had not the strength to leave her father in a state of hopelessness. She released him from his bonds but left the arrows alone, better untouched. She stood, moved behind him, and wrapped her short arms around his icy chest. She caught the hound's glare, fixated on her with greater interest. Without hesitation, Ylva pulled Henrik out from the snow. She pushed against the snow blocked gate with her back, and with bent knees tensed, dragged him all the way to the house. She took out the hatchet and began chipping away at the lattice under skirting that decorated the foundations. What she had managed to chop through she kicked the rest of the way in. She crawled under first, then dragged her father beneath the house with her. It was not ideal, but an improvement from exposure to the elements.

She ripped open her bag and fed him a banana nut muffin, almost forcing it down his throat because he was too cold to bite off a piece for himself. She tucked her bag under his head when she saw him chewing. Henrik would not let go of her.

“You wanted me to go, now you want me to stay.”

“Da–da–danger–dangerous for you.”

“I need to cover that hole, and you need a blanket.”

She pulled herself from his parental clutches and crawled out into the white. Ylva avoided the front of the house where firelight and a din of rowdiness emanated. She peered inside every other window. There were no blankets in the bedrooms, not even a mattress. The house seemed bare of furniture, books and family portraits, essentially all the things that would easily burn. She doubled-back, and was spotted by a man

relieving himself in the kitchen sink. In his drunken state, Ylva thought she had time to run to the car and place misleading footprints in the snow. Unfortunately for her, a man was smoking on the porch—the driver—and eye contact was made. He spewed foul language, and before Ylva could react she was outnumbered. The four of them were wrapped in linen and patterned drapes, bloodied from either wild animal or the original tenants of the cabin. One man vaulted over the deck, another stayed inside and watched hanging out the window. The driver stopped his friend from hurling his bottle, apologised for their behaviour, then began to speak softly. They tried to entice Ylva with promises of comfort and warmth, sweet things too.

“My-oh-my, what pretty eyes you have little girl.”

Ylva’s answer to them came in the form of her unsheathing the hatchet and holding it edge-on.

“The be–be–better to s-ee you with,” said Ylva.

They were unintimidated by her feebleness. She backed away slowly as they advanced, maintaining a distance between them.

“Wouldn’t want them freezing over now would we, and what scrawny legs you have.”

Ylva’s slow retreat backwards was hindered by a rattling, immovable fence. As the wolfhound came barking for her, so too did the men. She ran, and when she was halfway she dove over the fence line. The men made a last effort reach to grab her but were also attacked by the dog.

Ylva saw this, quickly picked herself up from crawling and sprinted towards the doghouse.

“Tispe!”

“Ha, which one!”

“Nowhere to go now.”

In the other corner of the kennel was a shallower area of snow. Ylva altered course and made a beeline for where the smell was most potent. Her nose told her she had found the origin of the earlier stench. She dropped to her knees and splashed her face with its yellow snow and rolled in its hidden filth. Both wolfhound and the men came for her now. She cowered in the corner clutching the hatchet and hoped with all her heart that her dad was not awake to hear her scream.

The leash was more than long enough to reach her and did not snap, nor did any viciousness occur. The wolfhound recognised its own scent on the girl and adamantly sniffed her out. Ylva took off her gloves and let the handsome beast identify her. It licked her hand and with the other she petted it, then embraced the dog as she had her dad. This affection too did the dog recognise and so too removed all threat. In that moment, the

hatchet was raised high. She brought it down and severed the slender leash, then read the dog's name embossed on its leather collar; "APION."

Apion, like Ylva, was freezing cold, exhausted, and very hungry.

"E-a-s-y tispe." One of the men edged closer, foolishly unintimidated by the abused and domesticated animal.

"Oh-my, what nice, sharp teeth you have doggo."

Ylva rose to her feet, hatchet in hand.

"The better to chew her di-dinner with," she whispered, heated breaths soothing her wet nose.

Unbeknownst to Ylva, Henrik was not asleep and heard those wicked fellows' final shrieks of sanity being devoured, all the while with a banana nut muffin in his mouth.

THE END

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