



A Winter Wonderland

Aven Elder

Magic

Once upon a time...

There lived a cruel and unfair raven. The Raven would fly everyday over the white wonderland of the City, it was beautiful. The Raven was as black as the pitch roads that were covered in snow, his feathers were as ugly as his soul and he had a beak that was craggily and crooked. He was so ugly that no one had ever dared to speak to him.

He resented the beautiful snow of the City, it turned everything in it beautiful. It hide all of the wicked people and terrifying buildings that were, the Raven was sure, there. One day, an old witch met the Raven outside of the city.

She was as beautiful as a jagged rock and she too hated the city. The witch made the Raven a deal, she'd melt all the snow in the city and turn him beautiful as long as he'd give her what she wanted.

"What do you want?" The Raven asked.

"Nothing important. Nothing valuable. Just a favor when I ask."

The Raven agreed to the Witch's deal. So the witch clapped her hands and said her spell. The snow in the city began to melt and the Raven began to transform. He moaned in pain as his body slowly expanded until he was a beautiful prince.

His pitch black hair had become as white as the snow that use to fill the city, his beak had become a perfectly straight nose and his feathers had become skin that was smoother than anything in the land.

Before the Raven and the Witch, everyone in the city had been happy. They would all make snowmen and huddle around their fires at night. They had a plethora of comforting food to eat and plenty of coats to keep them warm. They always had something beautiful to look at.

So when the snow melted, the only beautiful thing to look at was the Raven. So the people worshiped the Raven

like they did to the snow. The Raven had never had any attention from anything before so he quickly fell in love with a girl from the city. She wasn't beautiful but she was kind to the Raven. They quickly married and ruled over their city together.

The Raven couldn't have been happier with his life. The citizens were ugly and so was their city, they soon forgot about snow and how it made them happy. The days were now filled with scorching heat. They paid fortunes for water, destroyed all of their clothes and ate meals that didn't fill them just to survive the winterless land.

Years had past since the Witch visited the city and the Raven was forgetting about his promise to her. When the Witch showed up at the castle, he wasn't worried. She could have anything. If she wanted money, he'll just make more. If she wants fame, she'll be the city's star. If she wanted a child, the city had a hundred of them. The Raven and his wife welcomed her to his castle and asked what she wished for.

"So you remember our deal, I can have anything I want?"

"Of course," the Raven said, "name it and you'll have it."

"I want her."

The Witch's face had a wicked smile plastered on it and the Raven gasped in horror. He had never expected for the Witch to ask for the one thing that he could never replace, his wife. The Raven immediately refused and told her that she could have anything else.

"When we made our deal, you owed me a favor. All I am asking for is an unintelligent and ugly woman, she means nothing to the world."

The Raven refused and immediately banished her but before she was out of the castle, she turned him back to the terrible bird that he is. The wife, too dull to realize that the bird was her husband, order her chef to cook him. The wife ate the stew that night and went to bed wondering where her husband had went.

In the city, Gertrude had grown up hearing stories from her mother about the snow that use to decorate the city. Her mother had said that it made everything so beautiful and magical, everyone was happy when there was snow.

Gertrude was short and often the victim of teasing because she was much uglier than anyone else in the city. She was miserable. The only time she ever felt happy was when she was listening to her mother's stories.

On an especially hot day, Gertrude's mother had gone into the market to buy some more water. She only had enough money to buy water for Gertrude and on her way back home she suddenly got very hot. Gertrude's mother was so hot that she died from heatstroke. A stranger on the street made her drink the water but it wasn't enough.

Gertrude now had nothing in her life that made her happy so she decided to bring the snow back. Her mother told her that it made everyone happy so it would make her happy too, Gertrude thought. So she went to the oldest person in the city, an old woman with a hunched back and wrinkled skin.

The old woman had been at the wall when the witch casted her spell. She told Gertrude about the Raven who hated the snow, the witch who made him a deal and about the spell that was used to melt all of the snow.

Gertrude thanked the old woman and left to find the witch. She searched all of the city, looking for a woman so ugly that she would hate anything that would make everyone happy. When she couldn't find the witch, she decided to go to the wife of the Raven.

So she went to the city's castle, one of the only things in it that were still beautiful in the City, and knocked on the castle's doors.

A servant answered it and refused to let Gertrude see the Queen but the wife heard about the girl who was asking about a witch around town. She invited her into her home and answered all the questions that Gertrude asked.

Everyone had heard that her husband had disappeared but no one knew that he use to be a raven besides the old woman who told Gertrude. Gertrude asked if an especially old and ugly woman had ever come to see her husband.

"The day he disappeared, an old woman came asking for me in return for a favor that he owed her. When she left, my husband was gone and there was a strange bird in my house that made an excellent dinner."

The wife was not smart enough to realize that that woman was a witch and that she and she had ate her husband. So Gertrude thanked her for her time and went to the gates of the city.

It was rare for one to leave the city and return unless they were accompanied by the King's army. The forest was a dark and dangerous place, many people had disappeared in it.

Gertrude started her way on the stone path, laid there thousands of years ago when the forest was only a single tree. The forest soon became too thick to see the beating sun and thick enough to see the eyes that hid in the trees.

All around Gertrude, there were creatures that ate men but Gertrude ignored them and focused on the path. Every time she heard a growl, she stopped in her steps and every time she saw eyes, she would look at her feet. The forest got thicker and thicker the more she walked, she had been going down the path for hours.

Finally, after several scared and seeing creatures that she had never seen before, the forest began to thin out again. Gertrude was beginning to feel something that she had never felt before, she felt like small little pins were poking her skin. Then something small and white flew past her eyes. The pins began hugging her skin

and the white began to stick her hair.

The forest began to clear out and Gertrude saw a small patch of white with a house in the middle. Gertrude stepped out of the forest and onto the snow. She began to smile and brought her hands towards the snow and rubbed it in her palm.

She then understood why it had made everyone in the city so happy and why the Raven had hated it so much. It was so beautiful and, although she was happy, she knew she looked like a monster next to it. She understood that she had to bring snow back to the city.

She watched the snow melt in her hand and walked towards the small house, she knocked on the door twice.

The door slowly crept open and she heard a voice croak, "What are you doing here, sweetie?"

The voice was familiar but it was too hoarse for Gertrude to recognize.

"I have some cookies for you, I was sent from the city."

The woman opened the door and let Gertrude into her house. The walls were falling apart and the roof was sloping into the building. In the corner, there was a large furnace and a small bed. Gertrude set the cookies down and looked up at the Witch.

"What a beautiful house you have and what is that outside of your home?"

"It's just snow, my furnace takes up half of my house just so I don't freeze."

"That sounds terrible, why don't you move into the city? It is always so warm there." Gertrude started to walk towards the furnace.

"Your furnace seems to be running out of wood. While I'm here, I can cut you some more firewood."

"Oh, that'd be wonderful. Thank you.:"

Gertrude walked outside with the axe that the Witch gave her. She began to shiver as she cut down the trees, her clothes were too thin and light but she continued until the clearing had grown. She reentered the house and helped the witch set her fire.

The furnace burned while the Witch began to prepare for her dinner and Gertrude was thinking about how she could make it snow again in her city. Gertrude would need to have a counter spell or make the Witch undo her spell. Gertrude had never done any form of magic.

Then Gertrude had an idea. The witch grabbed the fire poker and leaned into the furnace while she moved around the wood inside of the furnace. Gertrude step towards the witch until she was close enough to push her into the fire. She put her hand on her shoulder and the witch looked back.

"Excuse me, I should go back to the city before it's dark. Enjoy your dinner."

"Oh, can't you stay for dinner? You'll make the meal more meaty."

“No, I really should be going,” Gertrude said while she walked out of the door, “Goodbye.”

Gertrude walked through the snow, enjoying it. As she walked through the forest, she watched the eyes and jumped to the growls. It soon became night and she was in the city again.

She didn't have time to stop home and she went to the Queen's castle. She knocked on the door until another servant opened the door and instead of waiting for him to get the Queen, she just push past him.

She shouted for the Queen until she found her, pushing her spoon in the untouched soup.

“Queen, I know what happened to your husband,” Gertrude yelled as one of the guards grabbed her.

“Let go of her,” the queen got up from her chair, “I know this young woman.”

The guard let go of Gertrude and the Queen and her sat down together.

“Do you remember the old woman who came to your castle before your husband disappeared? She is a witch and she killed him. She lives in the forest, I can bring her back to the city.”

The Queen agreed to her plan, she'd punish the witch for her crimes when Gertrude brought her back from her house in the forest. So Gertrude made the journey through the forest again and knocked on the witch's door.

“Yes?” The witch croaked and opened the door.

“Sorry to interrupt you again but an old woman in the city said she needed to see you. The same woman who made you cookies.”

The witch immediately packed her stuff into bags, there was only one person in the city who knew where she was. She was the Witch's sister. The witch and her sister hadn't talked since she banished snow from the city because her sister loved the snow.

The witch put a skull, an eye of newt and all the other basic ingredients for any spell into her bag. She then followed Gertrude through the forest until they reached the gates of the city.

At the gates guards were waiting for the witch. The guards quickly tied her up and covered her mouth so she couldn't cast any spell and brought her to the Queen. The Queen tortured the witch until she admitted to killing her husband and then sentenced her to a public death.

The next day, the sun was beating upon the city and there was a guillotine set up in the middle of the city. The Queen walked up the steps with the Witch and the whole city cheered as the Witch was trying to save her life. The city cheered even louder as the blade fell.

As the Queen walked down the guillotine's stage, small white particles started to fall from the sky. Much of the city was confused at the sight of snow but the next day the City returned to it's former glory.

Children played in the snow, they made snowmen, people ate their meals by the fire and everyone was happy again. Gertrude lived happily for the rest of her life as a hero and the rest of the city live happily ever after in

the snow.

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