



# Alene

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Retold Fairy Tales

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She was sick of their looks. The seething, judging, disdainful glances that shot at her like silent arrows, every step becoming too much to bear. Mothers pulled their children closer when she passed, wives scolded their husbands if they stared too long. She was easy to spot, they all were. In this cold, gray village, crimson cloaks stood out like guilty stains of blood on the perfectly white, snowy reputation of the town. Yet despite their pristine ways, the men, and sometimes even the women, would still seek them out, night after night. These hooded beauties were a mark of their profession. From a young age they were taught the art of persuasion, deceit, and all a manner of sexual acts and cons to get what the Wolf demanded from them, until they turned into discarded shadows of the youthful flowers they once were. He kept all the money for himself, of course. Used the coins to buy more girls, or when the money ran dry, stole them from their houses deep in the woods. In return they were given food and shelter, which was more than the townspeople would ever offered them, so they stayed. Some pretended they didn't care, others cried at night until the Wolf or one of the older girls silenced them. You could see the flicker of hope and dreams burn out in all of their eyes eventually. Wandering the streets with their hoods of shame, reaching out for men, pretending to want them when inside their souls were screaming.

Alene was one of the girls who had been taken for free. She still remembered sitting on the floor of her grandmother's cottage, playing with two wooden horses that her grandfather had carved years before his passing. Her grandmother's home was warm, full of love. It was only the two of them, but they were happy. Every night her grandmother would sing to her and brush Alene's long auburn hair, and every night she would play by the fire as she dozed off in her rocking chair. Perhaps that's why neither of them heard him coming. As silent as a cat, the Wolf had crept into the cottage while their unsuspecting backs were turned. Without a sound, he had grabbed Alene in one swift motion, clamping a sharp, bristly paw over her mouth before she

could cry out. She kicked and struggled but was no match for his overbearing frame that coiled around her skinny frame, and reeked of evil. Her grandmother never even saw her go, this haunts her the most. Perhaps she went looking for her, perhaps she thought she had run away...Regardless, she was gone, and that had been over ten years ago now. For many girls, this was the only home they had ever known. To Alene, it was somehow worse that it was not her only home. It is harder to feel love and go backwards into a world of cold, unfeeling existence. To not know love and joy at all would have helped her to accept this life.

Now she visited that cottage only in her dreams. All day she was spit on and ignored by the townspeople, and by night she became a slave to their deepest, most terrible desires. Her mind was the only place she could escape to, and she escaped over and over to that home, that fire, the creak of her grandmother's chair and the gentle thud thud thud of the figurines on the pinewood floors. Many girls were caught trying to escape. If the Wolf didn't get to them first, the woods claimed them. Nothing but dark, gnarled branches and walls of thorns lay on the outskirts of town. The pathways were littered with dangers, and even if Alene could reach them, the city walls were high and gated at sundown. But she had to try. She had been caught several times before staring at the gate, staying out later than the Wolf allowed so she could strategize, and she had paid dearly for each wandering. This time, she had a plan.

Alene was working that night in a particularly seedy district of the town where few guards bothered to patrol. She had asked one of the girls to switch with her for a wealthier, more populated area that she was supposed to be in. The girl was all too happy to oblige, without a trace of suspicion or time to pause and wonder why Alene wanted a trade. In that area, she knew the walls defenses were weak and poorly lit. It was her only chance. As the girls crossed the run down, broken threshold and out into the night, the Wolf stopped her. His sharp teeth and rancid breath halted one inch from her face, as he sniffed her and growled. "You're working the south end tonight, I hear? Tell me, why would a stupid girl like you make a stupid decision like that?" Alene had been prepared for this question; looking coolly into his yellow eyes "the men in that district like me, I charge less but I make more money there. More customers" she said. The Wolf snarled. "That's because you're cheap and getting old. Go on then" as he spat at her feet.

She rushed out into the night and waited until his looming frame left the doorway before turning sharply on her heel and running to an abandoned barn behind the house. She only had a few minutes before he started patrolling the area, making sure all his girls were earning and staying on their assigned streets for the night. Heart pounding, she slid open the rusty barn door as slowly as possible so the wheels would not squeak. When it was just wide enough for her, she slipped through the doorway and scrambled around in the dark for the hollow floorboard, tapping gently all around her. With a thump, she found it under her fist. She lifted the

board with care and pulled out shreds and shreds of red cloak, all tied together to make one long, velvety rope. With a quick check behind her, she tucked the yards of rope underneath her robes and hurried to the south end of town.

When she reached the wall, she spotted the iron sconce fastened to the top of the wall, meant to hold a torch, yet it had been empty and un-lit for years. That is what she would loop her rope around. Tying a tight lasso, she threw her rope as high as she could, again and again as sweat beaded on her forehead until finally it caught on the sconce. She tugged on the slack line to make sure it was tight enough and began her climb. The rocks were slippery under her worn out shoes, she slid several times. With each slip she could hear her heart pounding in her ears, catching her breath and looking frantically around to see if any passerby's had spotted the commotion. When she reached the top of the wall, she pulled herself up gasping for breath and lay for a moment to collect herself. That is when she felt the rope tug sharply underneath her. Panicked, she looked down and there he was. "YOU." She heard the Wolf's deep growl call up to her, filled with rage. "I knew you were up to something. Get down from there you stupid girl, or I will make you wish you had never been born." And with one swift pull, the wolf ripped down the sconce and the rope, her only means of getting down the other side. Looking around wildly, she tried to think of another way to lower herself to the other side, but there was nothing. The wall was nearly fifty feet high. To her horror, the Wolf let out a blood curdling howl and sank his razor-sharp claws into the side of the stones and began to climb. He would reach her in no time if she didn't act fast, she had only one choice. She jumped.

She landed with a scream of pain, the crunch of her ankle shattering under the impact of hitting the hard ground. It had to be broken. She saw stars as her blood pulsed to her foot and her eyes smarted with tears. But she had to run. The Wolf would be at the top of the wall any second. Tearing off for the woods, she hobbled and tried not to cry out in agony, ripping away thorns that scratched her face and arms, hastily pulling off her red cloak to keep it from catching on every sharp branch. She felt like she had been running for miles. When she dared look back, the wall was gone, covered in a thick shroud of brambles. The Wolf's howls were distant, it seemed he had run in the wrong direction.

Catching her breath, Alene finally looked around her. There was no path, but up ahead she could see a tree clearing where the thorns and brush were thin, so she set off towards it, limping but slowly growing steadier with each step. The moonlight peaked dimly through a shroud of leaves and branches, lighting the way just enough for her to make out a path. It stretched into total and complete darkness, but it didn't matter. The end of this road couldn't possibly lead to anything darker than what lay behind her, right?

A cold breeze brushed her face from the mouth of the pathway, she pulled her tattered robes closer and tried to

think of her grandmother. The fire, the chair; love. Up ahead, she thought she saw movement in the trees. Was that the sound of a twig snapping, or had that been a trick of the mind? Nothing to cut the silence but her ragged breathing, in and out, in and out. Her breath made frozen puffs of smoke in the air, when had it become so cold? Keep going, she told herself. Keep going. The darkness swallowed her up.

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