



Bad Women

Christine Gutierrez

Action/adventure

It all began with an abrupt conversation.

“Val, dear,” my mother addressed me, a look of concern tinting her aging eyes, “there are some things you must know. Things I’ve been afraid to bring up since your father left us.”

I looked up at her from the book I had been reading, unable to completely disguise my confusion.

“Yes mama?”

“I am growing old. You need to learn the ways of the world so that you are better prepared to grow old yourself. There are a great many things I can tell you, however you will only learn by experiencing the world yourself.”

“Whatever do you mean?” I heard my voice tremble and tried to look her in the eyes.

“In this world, people fear what they do not understand. I do not want you to grow up in fear. I want you to be prepared. In this world, they call us nasty, bad women. You are strong and capable. I know you can change this world. Your name foretells your strength, and there are no limits to the things that you are capable of. We preach a world of equality here, but we do not stand on the same playing field as the others. They are afraid of us.”

I closed my book, turning to face my mother. She met my gaze, pursing her lips and then proceeding to take a heavy breath.

“Out there are monsters, mother. They warned us of these monsters in school. What am I going to do about it?”

“Darling, the monsters out there are nothing like what you’ve heard of. The real monsters are hidden within man himself. You must work to prevent fear from overcoming you and turning you to a monster yourself.

Therefore, I am sending you on a journey. This is the only way you will understand.”

My mother pulled out a small leather knapsack from behind her, lightly tossing it into my lap.

“Inside you will find everything you need. I would like you to return to me when you have filled that notebook inside of your bag with stories to pass on.”

I then found myself outside of my house, seemingly abandoned. I did not cry. I did not look back. I proceeded through a nearby forest against what my instincts told me, for I had been told stories in school of a number of monsters living in the forest. I had barely walked for half an hour when I heard a soft whimpering from inside one of the bushes. I followed the sound and pulled back a large branch to find a small wolf, bleeding onto the surrounding foliage. The wolf had a gunshot wound in her shoulder and she looked up at me with pleading eyes. I had never seen a wolf before, other than in textbook pictures of aggressive creatures baring their teeth. This creature looked far from aggressive.

“Help... me...” The wolf whimpered, her eyes glazing over.

I tenderly scooped up the animal and ran through the forest, calling out for anyone who was nearby to help. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a shadow dart through the trees. I turned to face the being and called out towards them. A girl of about my age anxiously stepped forward. She took one look at the creature in my arms and darted forward, placing her hand on the wolf's shoulder. As soon as she took her hand off of the creature's shoulder, the wound was gone. The wolf jumped out of my arms and bowed her head.

“Thank you both for your kindness,” the wolf said to us and then raced into the forest.

The girl who had come to help turned her head, refusing to meet my eyes. She stood up from where she had knelt to help the wolf and began walking away from me.

“Wait!” I called, and she stopped, still facing the other direction. “Who are you?”

“It does not matter. You can forget you saw me here.”

“But why?”

The girl turned to face me, and I saw that half of her face-which had been hidden underneath her hair-was badly burned.

“Aren't you afraid of me?” The girl finally met my eyes, and I saw a certain sincerity in them.

“Why should I be afraid of you?”

“I'm... I'm a witch. They've been hunting us for years.”

“Why should I be afraid of that? You just helped that wolf. My mother taught me that I should not be afraid just

because I do not understand”

A small smile flashed upon the girl's face. She stepped closer towards me and held out her hand.

“My name is Minerva. Also, please do forgive my face. Even without the magic, others are afraid of me because I come across so scary to them”

“I've always lived with the idea that you should judge someone by their actions, rather than appearances. My name is Valentina, by the way. Val for short.”

“I wish more people carried your mindset. I was running from a hunter when you found me. I think that's how that poor wolf got hurt. The guy's been after me since I was little.”

Suddenly her eyes darted behind me and she giggled. I turned and followed her gaze to see the wolf from earlier dragging my knapsack behind her towards me.

“I think you dropped this earlier. I had to look around a bit for it.” Her words were slightly muffled, as she had the straps of the bag between her teeth.

I knelt down and picked up the knapsack.

“Do you like to be scratched on the head?” I asked the wolf, speaking before I had a chance to process what I'd said. “I...I mean I just don't want to be demeaning.”

The wolf stared back up at me for a few seconds before slowly nodding her head. I reached down to scratch her head and suddenly a blinding white light blasted out from underneath my hand, sending me back a few feet.

When my eyes adjusted again, in the wolf's place was an older woman with silvery hair and eyes. She wore a fur pelt that matched that of the wolf.

“I've been trapped in that body for years. I honestly didn't think I could ever become human again. I used to be able to go back and forth, but I'd been cursed to that body until a mortal human showed me the same respect they'd show another human. I'm Stella.”

Minerva and I introduced ourselves and we our stories and backgrounds. Minerva explained that a man had tried to set the forest aflame to extinguish the witches that lived there and she tried to put the fire out when she was caught and blamed for the fire that was taking over the forest. She narrowly escaped captivity and she'd been working to revive the forest since then.

Stella then talked about how she had been trying to break barriers between man and beast in order to coexist peacefully when one particularly hostile warlock cursed her to her beastly form in order to show her that man would never respect beast.

I admitted I had nothing extravagant to add to the mix but that my father had left my mother and I when I was young because he had gone fishing one day and had never been seen after his rumored encounter with some sirens. Minerva bit her lip and it looked as though she had something to say.

“Minerva?” I tried to meet her gaze. She finally looked at me with the same look of concern I had seen in my own mother’s eyes.

“I think that you may want to speak with the sirens if you want to know what happened to your father, but I’m not sure how you’ll take to the news.”

“I’m ready for anything. Where are they?”

Stella looked from Minerva to me and back to Minerva. They exchanged some sort of glance.

“I can take you,” Stella said, still looking at Minerva. “I just hope that you are prepared for what you might find out.”

“What do you know that I do not?” I asked, feeling a little blindsided.

“The sirens are similar to us in that we all feel misunderstood for what we are, however, they have, erm, a different set of morals than we do,” Minerva replied hastily, still refusing to look back at me. “I can come as well. You’re going to need me there anyways unless you plan on bringing them to surface.”

We all started towards the seaside. Stella, back in her wolf form, ran ahead of us to look out for hunters.

Finally, we reached the shore. Stella stopped at the edge of the forest, adding that she hated the feeling of sand getting stuck between her toes. Minerva scooped a seashell from the sand and used it to collect some sea water. She blew into the water, creating a very large bubble, which she cast over my head.

“There,” she said, “now you can breathe underwater until you emerge again.”

I dove into the water, unsure what exactly I was looking for. I hadn’t swam since before I had lost my father, and it took a few moments for me to get the hang of swimming underwater. I swam towards a shadowy object, soon realizing that it was the silhouette of a sunken ship. When I got closer, I saw many women with long, slender fish tails swimming around the ship. One of them swam towards me, capturing me in a piercing stare. She had long claws on each hand, and she was very pretty. Her fish scales ended around her waist, and her pearly skin appeared to glow under the sea.

“What do you want?” The woman hissed, swimming closer with every sharp word.

“I want to know what happened to my father.” I looked the woman directly in the eye, refusing to show any signs of fear.

“How should I know what happened to your father?” The siren’s eyes narrowed, and she pointed a claw at my throat.

“My father was sailing near this area when he and his crew disappeared.” I replied. I then noticed bones all around me, some of them half-buried in the sand. “Did you kill him?”

“Oh, he deserved it.” The siren rolled her eyes, but continued to point her clawed-finger at my throat.

“Whatever could he have done to deserve death?”

“He was a filthy, dirty man. He and his crew were all the same. They see a woman’s body and suddenly they ‘can’t help themselves.’ They take advantage of us like... like we’re animals! Vile men they were. Tell me, did you ever notice anything peculiar about the relationship between your mother and your father?”

I thought back to when I had walked in on my father standing over my mother, her nose bleeding and her eye swollen. I realized then how much more liberated my mother appeared after his disappearance. The siren seemed to have noticed the changes flashing through my eyes, because she lowered her hand and looked at me with a more genuine expression. I suddenly understood what my mother meant about how fear can turn man into monster.

“I’m... I’m so sorry...” I mumbled, my gaze falling.

“Oh please. Do not excuse the actions of others. I would much rather you help to change these attitudes.”

I looked back up at the siren, “I believe that people are not inherently evil. It is only when fear takes precedence that we succumb and become monsters ourselves. We must learn our limits and to respect others. My father was afraid of the monsters within the seas, and he let his fear transform him into the monster. I will in no way excuse his actions. I will instead work to lessen fear of the unknown.”

The siren smiled. “You have restored my faith in your kind, girl. Before this, ah, incident, we strove to protect sailors from bad weather and other poor circumstances. After that all happened, we feared that all humans were alike.”

“I hope that this has changed your mindset then.”

“I will spread the good word of your actions to the others. Here, take this.” The siren dove down and plucked a pearl from the sand below. She placed it into my hand. “If you squeeze this pearl, you will be transported down here. Feel free to visit any time. And don’t worry about breathing. That’s all covered.”

Once I emerged from the sea, the bubble around my head popped just as Minerva had told me it would. She was waiting for me on the shore, a smile across her face.

“I’m happy to see that you’re still alive. I knew if anyone could reason with them, you could.”

I chuckled, “Thanks, I guess. I feel like I should get home to my mother. It has been a long day and it is already dark outside.”

“Allow me,” Minerva stated, digging around in her pocket. She pulled out a vial full of a glimmery powder and pulled out a pinch of the shining dust. “Just close your eyes and imagine where you want to be, and there you shall go.”

I closed my eyes and pictured my front door. I felt a short burst of wind and opened my eyes, and suddenly I was standing on my doorstep. I plucked the key from under the rug and let myself into the house.

“Mother!” I called, running towards her room where I found her lying in bed, a handkerchief full of blood sitting on her bedside table.

“How was your quest?” My mother asked, pausing to cough violently into her handkerchief.

I told her everything I had encountered, carefully sugarcoating the things the siren had told me of my father, however the look in my mother’s eyes suggested that she already knew.

“Did you meet any of the fairies?”

I shook my head, and my mother whistled a short tune before breaking into another coughing fit. Moments later, three small balls of light flew in through the window and manifested into three women before my eyes.

“Susanna, Rosanna and Liliana.” My mother introduced the three fairies. They each bowed their heads as their names were called. “These three fairies helped me to care for you when you were little while your father was off at sea.”

We each talked to my mother for hours. The fairies shared stories of my childhood and stories of children generations before my own. We continued to keep the room in light spirits until my mother took her last breath. The fairies then helped me to bury her outside in the garden.

Years passed since that eventful day, and now I have stories of my own to pass onto my own children.

Read more fairy tales on Fairytalez.com