



# *Snow Black*

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Retold Fairy Tales

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## Snow Black

Snow had never seen the cottage look so beautiful and enchanting.

As her coach pulled up alongside the gate she sat and marvelled at her little palace. Its charming little round windows sat perfectly encased in their frames, frames as white as snow; the luscious emerald hanging ivy hung as full as an enchantresses' hair and its crowning glory was a magnificent old wooden door that stood proud and inviting, a door as red as blood.

Of course, the cottage should look perfect, they had been preparing it for the last nine months. Every second spent making things just right for this moment. Nesting. It was a real thing, Snow thought, an actual psychological reaction to impending parenthood. Of course, she hadn't done much herself, she had had fourteen pudgy little hands only too eager to help.

And now the day was here, today she was bringing little Maleficent home. Her beautiful fairy princess, her queen of queens.

Snow alighted from the carriage carefully, baby in arms. The smell of freshly baked bread drifted towards her from the cottage, drifted through her and away on the breeze into the shadowy woods behind.

"We're so happy you're home, Snow." They chimed. Seven little voices one by one and yet all together.

It jarred her.

She winced.

"Shhh now." She whispered holding her hand to her temple. The dwarfs all nodded happily, they didn't want to wake the baby. But that wasn't it, their voices were grating. Snow was sure she was just tired. Really tired.

They all started up the familiar curvy pebbled path, one by one passing under the old gnarly chestnut tree as

they went. Snow instinctively held her hand over Maleficent's little chubby face to guard her against any rogue falling conkers. When they reached the door, her little friends hesitated and turned to see if she needed anything. Their expressions perturbed Snow, they seemed anxious, concerned maybe. Perhaps she wasn't the only one who had been losing sleep lately, she smiled the funny little fellows to reassure them and with a flick of her chin gently motioned for them to continue, into the void.

The bright sunshine of a few moments before was starting to dull and rain clouds were threatening. As they skipped under the archway, one by one, the first cloud split its seams and little drops peppered Snow's paper skin. They felt good. She threw her face to the sky, enjoying the sensation, like an army of angry fire ants caressing her body. It was quiet, peaceful, she took a moment. Inside, all of her friends would be running around, making everything perfect, she knew she would be engulfed by the constant hum of activity. Out here there was nothing. Snow drank it in. With one last deep breath, she emerged from her peaceful cocoon and followed her dwarfs into the darkness.

Those first few weeks passed in a blur, a blur of nappies, feeding, pestering and oppression; each week bookended by emotion. The first week began with excitement and ended with tiredness. The second week began with tiredness and ended with wariness. The third week began with wariness and ended with frustration.

And now this, the fourth week, had begun with frustration and was ending in suspicion.

Suspicious. Was that what she was feeling? Surely that was not what she should be feeling now, now in the happiest days of her life. But suspicious she felt. Sitting here, in her comfy old threadbare armchair, in her own reading room, which she had occupied for years, she felt out of place. The room, like the rest of the cottage, seemed full of shadows, everything had started to decay. There was moss spreading up the corners of the bookshelves and unnatural networks of spiders' webs hung all around.

Snow could not put her finger on why she was feeling this way, or even what she was feeling. Every few minutes she found her eyes wandering from her page and creeping over the inconsistencies of her magic eye reality. Her world had become confusing. It was nothing, nothing substantial anyway. But Snow felt it. She remembered a night a few years back, a night out with her friend Belle. They had got a little drunk and Belle had confessed she suspected her husband was cheating. "It's nothing solid," Belle had said, "but I can feel it. I see it behind his glances and hear it within his words." It hadn't surprised Snow; Belle's husband was a brute of a man. But Belle's words leaped from her memory chamber and assaulted her now. Snow could hear them, over and over, because that was exactly how Snow felt right now, there was something in the cottage behind what she saw.

It wasn't her husband cheating, of course not. He was a good man, and he was away now fighting in France at his father's wishes. But something was going on. They were plotting against her. All of them. They laughed in corners and whispered behind walls. They thought she couldn't hear them, but she could. They came to her in the stillness, a marching band of whispers letting her know all was not as it should be. Those that she thought were her friends, her co-conspirators, were plotting a mutiny.

The baby squirmed in her arms and she soothed it gently. Maleficent stretched out, opening her eyes briefly she looked lovingly at Snow, her eyes as black as tar. Beautiful, big, black eyes.

She knew. Maleficent knew. Babies sensed things.

Just then, as Snow straightened up in her old chair, Sleepy crept up behind her.

"Do you need anything, Snow?" he whispered, menacingly.

He played it nonchalant, but his poker face had never been great. Of course, if she had questioned him, pulled him up on his sneaking around and ominous behaviour he'd have proclaimed innocence.

"Oh, no, Snow, No! I didn't want to disturb the baby!"

He'd have declared. But Snow was onto him. Snow was onto all of them. She had to be careful though, it was seven against one. She had to protect her baby. There were suds all up the little man's arms. She almost laughed out loud at this amateurish attempt to fool her into thinking all was well, that compliance was rife within the cottage. She knew the truth. Trickeries were afoot.

Snow shook her head not meeting his eyes, Sleepy casually made his way over to the bookshelves. One by one he fingered the mildewed binders, always looking at Snow. He didn't want a book, of course, he didn't, Snow had never seen him with a book once, nor any of the other dwarfs for that matter, they did not grant pleasure in such things, no, the books in this place were all there for her escape. As predicted Sleepy finally gave up his espionage and left the room, nothing to report here.

What did they want from her? It had started slowly, a darted glance here, an elbow nudge there, small, minuscule things that screamed corruption. Was it Her? Had She come back and polluted Snow's dwarfs. Sometimes, Snow thought she heard the clanking of steel against the wooden floors. Always in a room just out of her vision. Iron upon wood, a clunk and then a scrape, as if She were there in her smouldering iron slippers, just out of sight, trying to get to Snow, trying to get to Maleficent. Trying to get revenge. Snow had not set that fire, put the iron in the flames. No, she had no more done than be the one to lock the shoes on her feet and watch her dance the dance of death. Snow had not watched and laughed as her skin had singed and blistered, as her fat had melted, and her tendons had snapped. Yet Snow was still the object of her fascination, as she had always been.

The dwarfs were teasing her too, toying with her like a cat with a mouse. Trying to make her crack. They must've been sullied to be acting with such debasement.

And then there was the smell, for days now the air in the cottage had hung heavy with the stench of burnt toast. It was all-encompassing and completely overwhelming. Snow would unexpectedly pop into the kitchen at least four times a day to catch them in the act but she found nothing, no toast under the grill, no toast in the bin, no remnants anywhere. Of course, they all held back their chokes and insisted they smelt nothing.

How long had it been since they had started this? Snow wondered. Sat here, in this mouldering old carcass of a room it seemed like forever. She thought back, it was a Tuesday, just a week past, when she had realised their game. She had been out in the garden with her little mistress of mischief, sat crossed legged on her gingham blanket, eyes down dancing across the pages of her book. Eyes down trying not to notice the decaying empty husks of the magpies that were piling high outside the cottage fences. Was this evidence of the dark forest leaking into Sanctuary? Evidence of Her imminent arrival? Just as Snow's eyes had lifted to sneak a peek at the growing wall of putrefaction, Dopey had come out to them to call them in for tea. He'd snuck up behind her as well, it was a new game of the dwarfs, 'oh, let's scare Snow, let's make her think she's crazy'.

Once inside she'd seen it. It was, in fact, the very first thing she had seen, they had planned it that way. Just as she had bent under the doorway and taken her first step into the little round room, her eyes had adjusted to behold a big bowl of rosy red apples right in the middle of the dining table. She had halted, but only for a second, a slight limp in her otherwise steady step. They couldn't break her that easily, she could not show her growing fear.

Then came the comb, her comb, it had disappeared from her dressing table. She went to sleep, and it was there but when she awoke it had evaporated. She looked high and low. They looked high and low, and then it had come.

"Don't worry, Snow, we have bought this new beautiful comb for you." With that they had presented her with a beautiful gift-wrapped box and all smiled up at her one by one. Ha! Did they think she could be hoodwinked so easily?

After that day Snow had covered all the mirrors in the house, she'd had to cover every possibility of infiltration. This had caused a tumult amongst the dwarfs. Endless tuts and 'worried' glances, feigned concern. No, perhaps it was not feigned, perhaps they were concerned, but not about her, not about Snow, about themselves, about whomever, or whatever was corrupting them; it had to be her!

That night Snow slept restlessly. Apparitions of doom visited her chamber one by one. They taunted and teased her. They showed her happy phantoms of her husband, of her child and then cruelly snatched them away. The

dwarfs permeated her unconscious, they laughed at her, they pushed her, they told her to give up. "Give up Snow, just give up now, do not make this hard." But she wouldn't, she couldn't, all that mattered now was her baby. She had to protect her baby.

"Kill them." A voice whispered in her dream. It crept in from behind her and bounced around in her brain. Snow squirmed, she tried to wake herself, she could not stand being trapped in this petrifying land of terror. "Kill them."

This time it was louder.

Her body thrashed the sheets, sweat beading on her temples. She tried to cry out, to force herself into consciousness but her screams were only muffled whimpers. Snow had suffered from sleep paralysis before, but never like this. She felt an overbearing feeling of doom. She knew she was asleep but could not wake herself.

"Kill them."

This time it was in her ear. She felt the tiny hairs in her ear reverberate the sound to her brain. Just when she thought she would be trapped forever in this sandman's hell she awoke violently and jumped from the bed. The room was dark. She breathed deeply. Calm down, Snow, just calm down.

Breath in.

Breath out.

Breath in.

Breath out.

Her pulse began to slow. She looked at her beautiful baby snuggled up on the bed, this soothed her some more. Maleficent smiled at her.

"Kill them."

Snow froze. The baby smiled.

"Kill them, Snow, kill them before they kill you." Maleficent blinked slowly, eyelids encasing the blackness from the sides like a reptile.

"Maleficent, hush. They couldn't be, they wouldn't be,"

Snow was whispering, she knew there was a chance the dwarfs were out there in the darkness of the corridor. Obeying their new master's demands, watching her, listening to her, biding their time. All seven of them crouching in the shadows, kneeling in the corners, lined up one by one anticipating her exit, waiting on Snow's every move, every breath. The wind howled through the window behind her and a chill climbed icily up her spine. She clambered into bed next to her baby and pulled the covers up over both of their heads. In doing so

she trapped the smell of burnt toast under the sheets with them, Snow felt nauseated.

“Do it tonight Snow, tomorrow will be too late, these men use women, they ruin us and when they are finished with us they toss us to the dogs like scraps”

“But they’re my friends.”

“No, they’re not. They want you dead, they’re going to stab you, one by one they will stab you and then they will take me away.”

“No, they can never take you away. Why would they?” Snow felt faint. Her breath was shallow.

“It’s Her Snow, of course, it’s Her. She’s found you and She wants you dead. You’ve already got the knife Snow, do it. Do it now and do it quickly.”

“What knife?”

“The one you snuck out of the kitchen earlier, it’s next to the bed. You must go to them, you must take their lungs and liver. It’s the only way to get rid of Her. You know this to be true Snow. Get the knife!” Snow was baffled, Maleficent must be confused. She pulled the covers back and turned to look at the bedside table. It gleamed. There in the moonlight, between her new silver, unused, comb and an old copy of Alice in Wonderland she’d been reading to Maleficent it shone. Snow gasped and ducked back under the covers.

“I have to do it.”

Maleficent smiled. Snow nodded

. She had been waiting for this moment to come from the minute she got home from the hospital. She had fooled herself, tried to tell herself she had got it wrong, that they were on her side, that they were her dwarfs, but she had known deep down, they were nothing now. There was nothing left of her little friends, nothing but seven mounds of corrupted meat, they were already dead. The walking zombies of an evil queen.

Snow slipped from the sheets silently. Always aware, always on guard. She needed to be certain about her moves from here on, one slip, one miscalculation and they would be upon her, clawing at her flesh, tearing at her eyes, rabid like the beasts they had become.

Quietly, very, very quietly she slipped out of her nightdress and pulled a pair of slacks from the dresser drawer. She couldn’t risk giving them anything to twist their little hands around, give them anything they could use to pull her down. She sat, quietly, at her dresser and twisted her long black hair into a bun. She couldn’t check her reflection as her mirror was still shrouded in black lace, but then why would she want to, what was the correct attire for murder? No, not murder, they were already dead, she reminded herself.

All the time Snow spent in this morbid preparation Maleficent lay smiling at her.

Blades are always depicted as cold in fairy stories, it was always ‘The blade was cold in her hand’ or ‘she touched

the icy blade' these thoughts ran through Snows mind as she delicately picked up her weapon, but this was no fairy story and Snows blade wasn't cold, Snows blade was burning hot, like the fiery embers of hell.

"One by one" Maleficent whispered.

"One by one" Snow nodded.

She could do this slowly. This had to be done slowly. She had always been good at managing her time. She had spent years with these people waiting on them, being good, being silent, what would a few more minutes matter. Then it would be over, one by one.

She wrapped Maleficent onto her tummy, tight, and crept into the dark corridor. Seven dark doors lay ahead of her.

"Are you ready, Snow?"

"I'm ready, my darling."

They smiled at each other and slowly moved into the darkness.

Entering each of the seven small doors. One by one.

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