



The Demon in the Stepmother

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Retold Fairy Tales

I walked for hours through the dark forest. The night air was heavy with silence and every step I took echoed among the trees. I was only eighteen at the time that I ran from my parents' home—into the wicked forest of Cinder. I knew that if I traveled through the evil that lived in such a place no one would dare to follow me. My breaths were uneven from not only exhaustion, but fear. I knew that anywhere was better than the hell I was growing accustomed to in that home, but this—this was where the demons came to play.

There were stories that my maids told me before bed. Stories about the forest of Cinder that were meant to scare me away from entering its thick brush. It was said that once a person entered the home of the wicked, there was no seeing the light of Grimmland again. Grimmland is the land where I lived as a young child, growing throughout my years. My family all lived together in a large castle in the valleys and they never let me forget their wealth. Since I was to inherit this great gift, my mother prepared a marriage to a man she saw fit. Little did she know, he was sloppy filth. I begged her; I got on my hands and knees, weeping for her to cancel the marriage.

I cried, "Please, mother, he hits me! Look at my face. Look at my bruises!"

She pushed me away from her supposed loving touch. My mother spat at me, "Get up, girl. And stop whining." And so that night I packed my bag and ran for the forest. I had no plan, and surely no money. But I knew the life I wanted for myself. As I walked, I dreamed of a man holding me close and encasing me in his warmth. I desired—craved—nothing more than to be loved with a purity so strong that nothing could come between us. I did not want wealth; I did not need a large castle. All I needed was my other half.

I was quickly swept out of my day dream by the sound of drums rumbling through the leaves. My heart quickened and palms slid together from sweat. I had accepted that a demon would come. That he would take me back to his home and force me to live in an evil far greater than I could imagine. The drum beat quickened and so did my steps. There was nowhere to run and nowhere to hide.

“Ah, dear child, how nice it is for you to come across my beautiful home.” A sweet elderly voice shook me from my shoes.

Wanting to hold myself together I called out to the voice. “Who are you? Where are you hiding?”

“Well, oh my! I am right here, child. Look at the oak you have your hand on.”

Taking my hand from the rough bark on the tree I looked at the trunk closer. A face engraved in the bark smiled at my panicked eyes. I let out a scream and fell with a THUMP on the forest floor.

“I must warn you, child, before you are deceived. There are terrors in this forest, ones that cannot be beat.” The face sang in a melody.

Standing myself up on my shaky knees I squinted and managed to say, “I know the wickedness this forest holds. But you do not know what I am escaping.”

The face began to chuckle at me. “That may be true, but are you sure? There’s always a way around, but you must be pure.”

I was so angry, and still afraid, at the face for doubting my travels, that I began to stomp away.

“The demons are out tonight! Dressed in faces of fright!” The face whispered one last tune at me before I traveled further than her eyes could see.

I kept running deeper into the forest and praying for the other side. Thoughts were so bunched up in my head. What did that oak mean? Was I pure enough to survive and escape the haunting demons? I wanted to go home, to curl up in my bed. But sadly, home was not even my home anymore. My heart had been beaten down and crushed. I slumped against a tree, defeated. Sitting down put my strained legs at ease and allowed my lungs to slow. The slower breaths that I took, the more my eyelids began to flicker closed.

“Wake up!! Wake up!!” My body was being shaken awake in the dark night.

I jumped from my position against the tree and immediately checked to see if there were a face speaking to me once more.

“Ugh, I’m down here!” A short little man stood at my feet and peered up at me with large golden eyes.

“Who are you?” I slowly stepped away from him—unsure of the evil inside his soul.

The little man started jumping up and down. “I have a large cottage just behind those pines. You are welcome to come. I have plenty of gold and can promise a life of happiness and wealth.”

I thought about the little man’s offer. I would be safe and away from the dangers in the forest. His money would allow us to live for as long as we needed. All of these thoughts scrambled in my brain until I remembered my desires. The strength and bravery welled inside of me and I patted the man on the head.

“Thank you for your offer, kind sir, but I do not desire gold. I want to find my home.”

The man became so enraged at my response that he screamed and melted his skin away. Underneath his face was a demon of true horror.

“You bitch! Who doesn’t desire wealth?!” The demon started stomping and flailing his arms all around in a crazy fit.

He was blinded by his anger and I took that as my opportunity to run. How could I have been so stupid as to believe a man in this wicked forest? I chastised myself, but also took a breath of relief because of the decision I had made. I would have never seen Grimmland again if I had stepped foot into the little demon’s cottage.

I continued through the thick forest as the night grew on. Hiding underneath the dead leaves on the ground was a large brown root from an old withered tree. My foot got stuck under the root and I fell to the ground on my face. I never tripped as much as I had in this wretched forest. Sitting up on my knees I began to brush the dirt from my arms and shirt. Suddenly, a hand reached down and lifted me to my feet.

“I saw you fall and I had to help you up.” The man had a gorgeously smooth-sounding voice that sounded like music to my ears. His face was stunning—a solid jaw line with silky black hair on his head. Ah, he was dreamy and I was enchanted at the sight of him.

“Thank you for helping me.” I could feel that my cheeks were rosy red at the sight of him.

The man kept a hold of my hand and said, “Listen, I am in need of a wife, and you just happened to fall here in front of me. I have a castle behind those black, deathly bushes over there. We can live together until the day we die.”

I questioned his offer. This handsome man actually wanted me to be his wife. I couldn’t believe my luck. Of all the fair ladies in the world, I embarrassingly tripped on my face and he wanted me. I was so overwhelmed with happiness that tears built up in my eyes.

I squeezed his hand back and prepared to accept his proposal. “Oh my, I— “

Wait. I stopped myself. This man may be beautiful, but I do not love him. How could I spend forever with

someone who is not the other half of my soul?

Slipping my hand out of his, I whispered, "I'm sorry but I do not love you like I want to love a man one day." The man's gorgeous face suddenly turned firey red. "You are saying no to me?! How dare you!" The skin melted away much like the little man from before. A demon was waiting underneath. The man pulled at his wiry hair and blew fire into the night sky.

Again, I took this time to escape and fled from the scene. How did I almost made the same mistake twice? I needed to get out of the forest to be free of those demons. I pushed my legs harder than I ever have before and ran through the branches. I jumped over tree roots and dodging spider webs. I was determined not to be another scary bedtime story about the forest of Cinder. As I saw the light overflowing the sky of Grimmland in the distance, I pushed on harder—running until every muscle in my legs ached in pain.

It was that moment, a scream pierced the heavy air. Stopping in my tracks, I listened for another yelp of terror. The scream was coming from a tree away from the Grimmland sky. I knew that I had to help. Every bone in my body yelled at me to never leave another in need. So, I turned and dove into the forest in search of the scream. The closer and closer I got, I began to see drops of blood on the leaves. As I approached the body inhabiting the scream, I realized that it was just a young girl.

"What has happened to you, dear?" I said as I eased closer to the girl's side.

"Miss! Please help. I cut my leg while I was running from a demon." With tears in her eyes, her voice shook.

"I can help get you out of here. Grimmland is so close." I attempted to lift the girl and carry her out of the evil forest.

The little girl quickly made me stop. "Wait! My two sisters are by that stream over there fetching me water. Carry me over to them?"

"Oh. Sisters?" I questioned the girl with some doubt, but assisted her to the stream anyway. I just couldn't wrap my head around why her sisters weren't helping her.

I held the girl on the side of her bad leg and dragged her over to the stream. The two other sisters sat crouched over the water.

"Sisters, look, this nice girl has come to help me." There was a sly tone in her voice.

"Ah, what a nice woman indeed." They said in unison.

Before I could speak back to the sisters, the girl in my arms stood up as if she was never injured and held my head sternly between her hands.

Looking deep in my eyes, the girl whispered, “Teufel im Inneren.”

She conjured herself into my soul and the demon took over my body.

Giving the sisters an evil glare, the demon used my mouth to speak, “Let’s go make a life for ourselves, girls.”

I felt as though I was a puppet. I was still conscious—still very much alive. But, I was trapped in my own body.

My compassion was my ultimate downfall.

The demon walked me out of the wicked forest and towards a city I had never seen. She spent her days with her sisters in search of a marriage. She spoke of how she wanted a life—one that wasn’t in the wicked forest.

It was a rainy day when she took my body to a market. It was there that she met a nice, rich man. Using my sweet voice and youthful beauty, she convinced him to give her a ring. So, there he took us to our new home—me hidden beneath muscle and bones, the demon, and her two ugly “daughters.”

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