



The Snow Bunny

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Action/adventure, Animals, Kids

~1~

The loud thud on the shutters jolted me up. I could hear my racing heartbeat in my ears, as I slowly turned my eyes towards the closed window. The wind was howling outside and I dared not make a move, as I stared at the shutters which only allowed me faint glimpses of the dancing shadows outside. Nothing happened.

Slowly my eyes got used to the dark and I glanced at the other side of the room, where my big brother was sleeping peacefully in his bed. At least I wasn't alone. That always calmed me down and I began to feel sleepy again. I listened to the wild wind and stared at the window, until I could no longer keep my eyes open.

Another loud thud forced me to wake up again and this time I sat up on my bed. I clenched my heavy blanket as I was anxiously staring at the window, but again nothing happened. After a few deep breaths I decided to go to the window and try to see what was going on, through the shutters. But, before anything else, I reached to the lamp on the nightstand next to my bed and turned it on. The warm light filled the room making everything look normal again, my beloved cuddly toys, my books scattered all over my desk, and I immediately felt braver. I carefully tiptoed to the window and stood on my toes, trying to see through the small gaps of the shutters what was going on outside. Bright white snow was covering everything as far as I could see, big chunks of it somehow still hanging on the bare branches of the big oak tree in our yard. Everything was normal but then another thud shook the shutters and I felt them tremble. It was so sudden that I barely managed to contain a scream, as I leapt back and almost fell on my bottom. But at least now, I knew what it was. The wind was violently shaking the branches of the tree and sometimes one of them would crush on the shutters.

“What are you doing?”

This time I did scream. I turned around and saw my brother, still half-asleep, looking at me with an

exasperated expression. Before I got a chance to answer he turned his back to me and pulled his covers up. “Close the light and go back to sleep.” he said and I felt embarrassed by my cowardice. I got so afraid of practically nothing and I woke him up. As I reached to turn the lamp off, I saw the book still left on my nightstand.

The Snow Bunny

I loved that story so much it was already the third time I was reading it. But maybe I should stop, because every night I did I would get so anxious that I would never sleep well. Maybe this was the reason I got so afraid of a simple tree branch knocking on my window. After all a thud in her window was how the character of this book first met the Snow Bunny and helped him defeat the Dark Smoke.

“Stupid book.” I murmured as I tossed it inside the nightstand’s drawer and turned off the lamp.

I looked at my brother again who either was already asleep, or just didn’t want to deal with me. I thought of crawling back into bed, but decided to head down to the kitchen instead. I was by now wide awake and maybe a small walk and a glass of water would help calm me down. And maybe, just maybe, I would leave our bedroom door open on my way back, so that the night light from the hall outside would break the darkness in here.

I put on my pink unicorn sleepers and quietly opened the door and got out of the room. I walked down the stairs, through the living room and into the kitchen turning every light on, as I was passing through. Something made me really anxious tonight and I wanted every shadow, every hint of darkness to disappear. I stepped on my toes and stretched to reach the water glasses on the top shelf of the cupboard. A thousand times I had asked my parents to leave one of them down, by the sink for me and a thousand times they forgot to. And at the same time they did not want me to climb on the kitchen bench to reach for the glasses.

“It is an accident waiting to happen” they always said.

“How do you expect me not to climb when you put them all the way up there?!” I mumbled just as my fingertips touched the cool glass. Just a bit more. Yes, got it! I could finally get my water!

I looked out the kitchen window as I turned on the tap. The water felt ice cold as it filled the glass and I could see the blizzard in all its glory from here. Tiny freckles of snow rising and falling with the wind, swirling endlessly like a thousand snow fairies in a mad dance, happily celebrating the arrival of a full winter. It seemed so majestic and terrifying at the same time. Like a scene taken right out of a fairy tale. The Snow Bunny fairy tale. Maybe tonight I would get to meet him. Or maybe, the Dark Smoke would chase me around...

I giggled at that and brought the glass to my lips. It was only then that I saw it. Only then that I noticed what was wrong with the picture in front of me. Somewhere in the blizzard I could see glaring green eyes staring

right at me. Nothing but darkness filled the air surrounding them, making those terrible eyes stand out even more. The image was faded at first but it seemed to become clearer and clearer. I squinted and leaned towards the window. Was it coming closer? It was, but that was not the problem. That thing was not outside. It was right behind me.

~2~

Ohhh, how I enjoyed this day. A clear blue sky with not a cloud for miles and a big bright sun, pinned right in the middle of it. A thick carpet of fluffy white snow covered everything, the endless meadows, the timeless forests of tall evergreens, the paths, the paved roads, everything. The sky was blue and the earth was white as far as the horizon spread and a light breeze would pass by from time to time, lifting a few snowflakes off the ground and swirling them around with it.

It has been decades that the Kingdom of Light and Darkness has been peaceful. And days like this? Well days like this were truly the days to live for! I yawned and stretched my feet behind me before getting up from the ground, where I was laying. A deep imprint of myself was left on the snow and I couldn't help but marvel at its peculiar shape. Just what kind of pose did I strike as I lay around?

I looked back at the enormous castle that rose to the sky. It was made completely out of Tide Stones which always changed color according with what was going on in the Kingdom. Now black was fading into white and white into black, restlessly moving, swaying and spiraling, but in a way that they were always almost equal. Yeap, peaceful and balanced; that's the way it's meant to be!

I thought of returning to the castle. I had a feeling I really should, but that evergreen forest on the other side, was just so appealing. It was calling me, inviting me to go and play and dig and stretch and lay around until I had my fill.

"Who needs a castle, I love my freedom!" is what I thought as I hopped excited towards the forest. I hopped, jumped up in the air and fell flat on my side, feeling the soft, cold snow beneath me. It felt so good I couldn't help myself. I plopped myself on the ground, even before I reached the forest and turned my face to the bright sun. Oh, how I loved this feeling. This was such a beautiful day indeed.

I closed my eyes and stayed there, enjoying the moment, when something zoomed past me, so violently it almost knocked me over. I immediately jumped up, my nose twitching uncontrollably as I felt a shrill chill down my spine. Whoever or whatever it was, it was nowhere to be seen. But that feeling of terror was alarmingly familiar so I turned to look at the castle. Its Tide Stones were now almost completely black.

"No, no, no, this can't be happening!"

I turned to go to the castle but I noticed something up in the sky heading my way. I stayed put as the Shadow Hawk dove from the sky and gracefully landed in front of me. He held a clear crystal ball in his claws with a big crack covering more than half of it.

“How did this happen?” I asked before he had a chance to utter a word. He picked up the ball and pushed it towards me.

“One of our young ones, picked it up.” he said, staring at the ball as if he could not believe it

“You are not supposed to touch it.”

“Well... he didn't know that... apparently...”

He gave me a puzzled look as I quietly looked at the empty, broken crystal ball. I seethed inside, thinking of all the trouble, all the pain and misery we had been through to put the Dark Smoke away. And now it was free again because of such a stupid reason? I just couldn't accept it. The Shadow Hawk abruptly turned towards the evergreen forest.

“We have to hurry, it's almost at the Transcendence Tree.” he said and turned to me. “I will guide you.”

I looked at his face. One of his eyes was half-closed with a deep scar running right through it. Another courtesy of our battle to stop this thing.

“Don't worry.” he said “It takes a lot more than this to slow me down.” he spread his wings and took off to the sky. “Try to keep up, little bunny.” he shouted as he took altitude.

I raced after him, as he went higher and higher until he became but a tiny spot in the sky. He often dove down, just to make sure I hadn't lost him, and as we entered the forest he came under the trees and flew low.

“We're too late.” he shouted as he beat his wings hard and picked up his speed. I did the same trying to focus on what had to be done and not what those words meant.

The Transcendence Tree... we are too late...

That thing had probably already left. Went to another world to spread havoc and destruction. Again... If we were not fast enough the door would close and then we would never find it. The Transcendence Tree. It leads to infinite worlds and once the door closes the possibility of opening again to the same world is practically zero.

What a nuisance!

Hawk was now circling like crazy, around a certain, small evergreen tree. That was the tree we were looking for. I could not see it, I could never see the Transcendence Tree, but he could.

“I kept the door open.” he said never ceasing his mad, circular flight. “Go on then. And hurry back. I can't keep this up forever.”

“Okay!” I said and jumped right in the middle of the tree trunk.

~3~

I only realized I had let go of the glass by the loud, smashing noise it made on the kitchen floor, as I swirled around and run out of the kitchen, slightly brushing the huge shadow lump. I managed to escape in the living room, but before I could run up the stairs the thing appeared before me, blocking my way.

I screamed for my father, my mother, my brother, as I was desperately trying to get away from it. But it would always get in front of me, blocking any attempts of escape. And then it stretched, it got bigger, it filled the stairs, the living room and I was forced back in the kitchen. Those glowing green eyes were pinned on me as it slowly started to fill the kitchen as well. I rushed to the back door.

Get out, get out, get out...

That was all I was thinking, tears in my eyes, as I frantically turned the key and then reached to unhook the latches. The thing was coming closer and closer, slowly covering the four walls of the room and that damn lower latch was stuck again. I pulled harder, one hand on the latch and another already turning the handle and the door finally flew open.

I stumbled as I rushed out and fell on the fluffy snow. The cold wind whipped my face, my pajamas flapping against me and I could feel my whole body going numb. I hurried along, first on my hands and knees before slowly getting back on my feet. I turned around and saw that dark thing still behind me. It came out of the back door and I saw it rise up to the sky, stretching like smoke everywhere, swallowing up my house. Unbreakable darkness was now covering the entire space of where my house used to be. Even the rays of the bright full moon were completely lost in there.

Suddenly it launched at me and I panicked. I jumped back, fell again on the snow and put my hands up to protect myself from the attack. A bright flash of white passed before my eyes and I dared a glance. The dark thing had retreated and I let my hands drop curious as to why. And then I saw it.

Snow white fur glistening in the moonlight, bright blue eyes like frozen aquamarine crystals. The Snow Bunny! It was right there in front of me. So that must mean that the black thing with the green eyes was the Dark Smoke!

No, no, no. This can't be happening. These are both fictional characters, part of a fairy tale!

A tentacle of smoke attacked the bunny and it hopped, landed gracefully behind it and kicked some of the fresh snow on it. The snow disappeared inside the darkness and an instant later, the tentacle seemed to evaporate.

The bunny took the chance and turned to me.

“You are the Snow Bunny!” I exclaimed staring in disbelief at the creature in front of me. “You can’t be real!” I said and pinched myself so hard that a sharp, intense pain spread through my entire hand.

“I am as real as your death will be if that smoke gets you.” it –or better he- said and then stretched out a back foot and plopped it deep in the snow. The snow seemed to glow under it for a second and when he lifted his foot, there was a pale blue crystal the shape of his foot.

“The Rabbit’s Foot Medallion!” I whispered in awe as I stared at the crystal that glowed silently.

“It will protect you! But I need your help.” the bunny said as I carefully picked up the medallion. It felt smooth and cold in my hand but at the same time all my fear and anxiety vanished. I felt as safe as if I was in my mother’s arms. Then I remembered. My mother, my father, my brother. They were all in the house. Trapped inside the darkness that had swallowed everything and continued to grow.

“My family is in there!” I cried as I looked at the bunny that, other than his twitching nose, was completely motionless. Oh, how I wanted to tap that pink nose and cuddle this beautiful fluffy bunny. But that was not the time for that.

“Keep it together.” he snapped. Despite appearances he was not cute at all. “Hurry up and follow me. Your family will be fine.”

He hopped towards the other side of our yard, where our old oak tree stood, its branches long and barren, snapping around in the cold wind. I looked up to see my bedroom’s window but I only saw darkness in its stead. The Dark Smoke had taken over my entire house and was continuing to grow and stretch. But, for some reason, it never came any close to the oak tree.

“Bunny!” I heard a rough voice over me and I looked up. No way, why was the Shadow Hawk here too? “We have to hurry it up.” he said as the Snow Bunny hopped towards him.

“What about the door?” the bunny asked and I stood frozen still, staring at an image that made no sense.

“They are holding it open, on the other side. I came to help.”

“Help?” I shouted and they both looked at me. “You are the bad guy!” I said and I swear if they had eyebrows they would have definitely arched one of them.

“I’m the bad guy?” the hawk asked, confusion clear in his voice

“You’re not the bad guy.” the bunny snapped and turned to me. “What do you mean the bad guy?”

“He is your enemy.” I explained pointing at the hawk “He is from the Kingdom of Darkness and he is fighting you because he wants to take over the Kingdom of Light.”

“Wow...” the hawk exclaimed in a flat tone “Evil overlord! I can live with that.”

“Alright, first of all, there is no Kingdom of Darkness fighting a Kingdom of Light.” the bunny said “It is the

Kingdom of Light and Darkness, it is one Kingdom. Second I don't understand what you are saying. And third, none of this is important. I need your help to trap the Dark Smoke in a prison again."

"What about my family?" I asked

"If we manage to contain it, your family, everyone, will be fine." he said and I took a deep breath. I looked up at where my bedroom was supposed to be, where my brother was supposed to be sleeping. I nodded quietly.

~4~

Of all the places it could have escaped, I should have known it would pick this one. A dimension of humans. With their little minds and their vast unwillingness to accept anything beyond the scope of their limited understanding. I never thought I would have to deal with this again. As I never thought I would find myself saving a small, female human from the clutches of the Dark Smoke, just in the nick of time. Again.

Again, I found myself saving and teaming up with a little girl. A creature so small and slender that looked as fragile as a twig. But then, it was only with the help of such a creature that we managed to defeat the Dark Smoke the last time. So maybe this trembling girl with the weird, fluffy pink things wrapped around her feet, was what we needed to defeat it again.

Fortunately she didn't start screaming when I spoke to her. Somehow she knows about me, about Hawk too, though she seems to be confused about most of it all. She knows about the Four Directions prison spell and she offered to help us with it, in order to contain the Dark Smoke. To be honest, I was thrilled with the offer. This spell is our best chance of winning.

"Alright." she said, clasping the medallion I gave her. "North, South, West, East, right? I'll go put the mark on them all." she said and set to take off.

"Wait!" Hawk and I said at once and the girl turned with a puzzled look

"The medallion is not enough." I said and she tilted her head.

Hawk snapped the edge of a small twig with his claws and held it tightly for a while. It glowed in a bright red color and when it subsided it had the shape of a black feather pen, laced with red lights. He tossed the twig at the girl who caught it and took a sharp breath.

"The Hawk's Feather Pen!" she whispered and looked at Hawk.

"Kingdom of Light and Darkness, remember?" he said "You need them both for the spell to work."

She nodded intensely and looked at us.

"North, South, West and East." she said meaningfully. "I'm off."

She turned and run towards the north and Hawk and I immediately launched against the Dark Smoke. For this

plan to work, we would have to keep it busy. Keep its eyes away from her.

I saw Hawk rise up in the sky and dive down right at it, a red flash of thunder cutting through the darkness as he passed through the Dark Smoke. I hopped towards the entrance of the yard, where one of its tentacles was out of the limits of the house. I launched right through it, causing a small whirlwind of snowflakes to rise up and tear it apart. I stood in front of the entrance and let myself feel the force of the light ground blizzard on my body. It was not much, but there was a frozen wind blowing, packed with beautiful snowflakes, the ground covered with thick snow and a full moon shining brightly on the sky. This world was on my side tonight.

I let myself connect with the snow and the wind around me. I felt it pulsating, heard it slightly humming a far away tune, saw it dancing and breathing lightly. The snow was alive in this world too. Winter was alive. I concentrated and managed to pack most of the blizzard's force around the house's yard. They knew what was at stake and they were most willing to cooperate with me. Now the Dark Smoke was trapped within these limits and I could concentrate in cutting it down, weakening it in order to make its imprisonment easier. As I launched against it, I saw the girl running towards the south. Good, one mark was already in place. And now with the wind and the blizzard gathered out and around the yard, I could see her moving much faster and easier.

Hawk was still flying around and cutting through the Dark Smoke and I jumped high and landed right in the darkest part I could see. I could see nothing, but I felt the soft snow underneath my feet. I kicked my back feet up, sending a cloud of snowflakes up in the air and I heard a deep, almost silent growl as the darkness around me cleared away.

I kept attacking the Dark Smoke like that, forcing it to pull back, shrink and gather to a more compact size. Meanwhile Hawk was doing the same from the air and the blizzard that was still circling the yard provided an impeccable barrier. There was no way out for it and the Dark Smoke was already cut down to the size of the house. In fact, I could see part of the house's stone chimney protruding somewhere, which meant we were doing a good job.

The girl was at the East now. It was almost time.

"Hawk!" I said and saw my friend stop, dive and turn to me. "Start circling him."

He immediately rose and started circling at the top of the Dark Smoke, so fast that he was causing a whirlwind to form. I hopped around, on the ground, looking for that thing's eyes. I needed to know where they were, so I could accurately form the spell.

It was only then that I noticed. Those bright green circles, blazing with hatred in the deep darkness, where not turned towards me. Or Hawk. They were turned towards the girl, the little girl who was crouched on one knee

on the snow, completely absorbed in drawing that last mark correct. I don't know if the Dark Smoke knew she was the key to its imprisonment or if it felt this was over and wanted to take one last revenge.

It launched at her, in full speed and I rushed to stop it. I jumped and managed to land on her shoulder, knocking her over in the last minute. Then I turned and jumped right at those eyes, making my spell. I didn't know if she had managed to get the last mark done, but the way things stood I could only hope.

~5~

This was the last one. The last mark I had to draw and then it would be over. Thankfully the blizzard had quieted down and I could now move, without feeling like my skin would freeze and fall over in every move. I rubbed my hands and heated them with my breath and then began.

First the medallion. Press it down, gently but firmly. It's a good thing it is snow I have to work with. Makes it so much easier to make an imprint. Then the pen. Trace the imprint with the pen and make four dots like a cross in the centre. Easy enough, right? Not so much when I am trembling from the cold and my hands are frozen and the fate of the world may lie in whether I do this right.

Slowly... carefully... I could feel my heart beating louder and louder, as I traced the imprint and I couldn't help a sigh of relief when it was done. Now the four dots. This is the last part. I would not mess it up now.

I was so consumed by this though, so thrilled with the idea that I managed to get this done, that I never realized what was going on around me. Suddenly, someone violently pushed my shoulder and knocked me on my side. I looked up terrified and I saw the Snow Bunny landed next to me and the Dark Smoke's eyes only inches away. The Snow Bunny turned and hopped right into those horrifying eyes and the Dark Smoke jolted back.

There was a bang and a deep, loud growl and then the Dark Smoke stretched in all directions like it exploded. I felt a wave of air hit my face and I fell back. And then, there was darkness. Darkness and nothingness.

And then light. Light and the pleasant chirping of birds. I opened my eyes and I was back in my room again. The shutters were wide open and I could see a clear blue sky stretching out of my window.

I shot up and looked around me. My brother was already up but other than that everything was fine.

Everything was normal. I looked on my nightstand where The Snow Bunny book lay, as I had left it before falling asleep. So maybe all of it was a dream, even placing the book in the drawer.

"So you're awake little girl." my brother said as he walked in the room all dressed to go and picked up his gloves. Before leaving he stood at the door and turned to me. "Hurry up and join the snow-war, or I will bring the war to you!" he said with a fake threatening voice and a mischievous grin.

I beamed at the thought of playing in the snow and jumped right off the bed. I put on my slippers puzzling

momentarily as to why they were wet, but I paid no attention. Playing in the snow was more important than anything. As I took one step I felt something being kicked and I looked down to see what it was. There, among my scattered toys and trinkets, right in front of the face of my unicorn slipper, lay a Rabbit's Foot Medallion and a Hawk's Feather Pen.

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