



# *The Tale of the Two Sisters*

Ursula Gerhard

Retold Fairy Tales

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This story tells the background behind the Evil Stepmother's hatred of Snow White

I see it, sightlessly. Flickering through my mind like the nightmare it has become; running rife with the flap of wing and merciless rip of bramble and then the beastly, beastly darkness. Darkness that I would never escape. Afterwards, they told me that my blindness was a careless mistake; that I had run through the thorns at an unfortunate angle and had been too preoccupied with my game to blink my eyes closed in time. I knew otherwise. Remembered the strange moment, standing in the clearing, when the unforgiving bramble branch had whispered through the air towards my face. Like a premonition of what was to come. The first delicate blush of evil. But who would believe the sightless girl, found in the arms of her screaming sister, with bloody tears and a promising future laying before her, tattered and twined in those hateful brambles.

I learnt to adapt to my circumstance, to hold someone's hand when outdoors, to use sound as my way of gleaning what exactly was happening but the hardest thing was to change who I was. I had been the notorious beauty of the village, daughter of a promising heritage, family favourite and bound to ameliorate my past and marry well. Instead, I grew into a shadow, the constant presence in the rocking chair by the fire, knitting away whilst my sister and brothers laughed around the table. I was not so unhappy, I could stand the bitter isolation of being blind, but it hurt. Hurt to see Amara take my place as the village 'belle', my little sister, once so jealous of me, now casting my shadow- yet I could never choke down my suspicion: she had been there that day. The seasons passed and she blossomed. The debutante world called out to her and she was soon dancing in the most elite circle, dining with the wealthiest families. I loved her as my sister, but hated her as my replacement. And still I sat in that chair, wallowing in 'what could have been'. Sometimes, I felt her eyes on me and I

resented whatever she must have felt- pity...mockery...sorrow...it felt to me more like hatred. And disgust.

Again, the trees blossomed, fruited, turned auburn and lost their leaves (not that I saw any of it). The wintry season called for more extravagance than ever before. The ball of Crown Prince Leopold himself, searching for a wife as his coronation neared and his hairs turned grey. Aging, with straining waistcoat buttons and a frankly roving eye, I doubted that any young bachelorette would marry him for love. This was about status and opportunity and for him, an heir. Naturally, Amara was to go, clad in the most opulent of gowns, dripping with jewels and with strict instruction to enchant our would-be-king. Not that she would have done anything different. Her aspirations were huge.

Prince Leopold was 'in love', boasted the papers. My brother August sometimes read them out to me when they contained something interesting. 'Smitten' with the pretty young lass, Amara Wilde, he was. Their engagement had come nearly three weeks after the ball and now our family was the epicentre of all attention. We had been smiled upon kindly by the royals and would receive endless recognition for it. I was relegated to my bedroom- stashed away- in case anyone got the wrong idea as to our untainted reputability. Then, the gifts started showering in from His Majesty and his new bride. An incredible, mahogany clock for my father, engraved with the royal crest. Swords for my brothers- bejewelled and reeking of pounce and privilege. China for my mother, the most splendid, yet delicate, tea-set ever seen outside of the palace. Our neighbours coveted our new possessions. And for me, an extravagant ivory comb, beautiful but positively useless for how was I to see to do my hair? And my mother was far better preoccupied to style it for me. It was a lonely few months.

Then things changed. For the better.

One bright spring day, a huntsman turned up at our door begging for a place to stay in exchange for work, obligingly willing to cut firewood, hunt game, work in the garden or execute any outdoor task. My mother agreed to his services on one condition: he was also to talk to me, to be my companion. I suppose she assumed that my misery stemmed from jealousy of my little sister, she had found love and I was alone- destined to be the creepy old maid who sat in the corner, rocking on the chair. I could not stand the pity, nor the sympathetic eyes on me. Which is why I hated him at first. When he introduced himself as Alvarez and came to speak to me about anything and everything: his day's work, the harvest, the prevalence of bees... I sat sullen in the corner, staring into space- unseeing. But I learnt to appreciate his company, at first as a friend and then I grew to love our daily conversations and eventually to love him also. A weirdly mutated form of romance, but a romance nevertheless. I was his and he was mine. And I was so very happy.

It was November of the following year that my sister returned for a visit. Her childhood narcissism and vanity had been enhanced by the spoiling she had received at the palace. Alas, she was no longer even capable of stooping for her laced handkerchief- not that she would have ever reused it when it had touched the floor. She took great pleasure in informing me of her new lifestyle, lavishing me with the details of her wealth and presenting me with another gift; silken ribbons for my corset. Silken ribbons that I would never use. I resented the gravity she possessed over me, in that she was not disfigured, and over all others, now that she was a princess.

Stomaching her bloated self-centredness, I could have managed that. But what she did next...I will never forgive. That evening she met Alvarez for the first time, he was sitting attentively by my side when she entered the room like a breath of frosty air. I felt her eyes on us and knew then, she had found a new prize. My huntsman. How was I to know that he had been so handsome, how was I to know that she would wrap him around her finger like a snake, whispering lies about me in his ears, tempting him with her youth and beautiful, big, blue eyes? I was no match for her.

When she returned to the palace, Alvarez went with her on the grounds that she had been so impressed with his work that the royal staff would simply thrive with his attention. And King Leopold welcomed, with open arms, to his home, his wife's new lover, the gullible fool was still so bewitched and intoxicated with my sweet sister that he didn't even remotely consider her infidelity. She sent me a 'replacement' for my dear Alvarez, a mirror. Engraved on its gilded frame where I could always feel them were six words, 'So you can see yourself'.

And whatever I hurled at that mirror, it never broke unlike my splintered heart. I hated her then. Hated, despised, loathed, detested, who she was. What she had done. And what she had made me.

So I sit in the corner, gathering my weapons. Letting my hatred manifest. Waiting for the right time. Pulling tight on those ribbons...dipping the comb in the most lethal poison...whispering to my mirror. . 'Mirror, Mirror on the wall. She's now with child and is soon to fall.'

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