



# *To Be Deserving*

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Retold Fairy Tales

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That's always the way, isn't it?

The plain little maid turned pretty; draped in delicious fabrics and jewels, suddenly the belle of the proverbial ball. The name on everyone's lips, the pattern given to every seamstress in town. An ash-streaked face suddenly powder-white; plain, dry lips miraculously scarlet. The most exciting newcomers are those who come from nothing and nowhere, not those who come from good names and breeding. Perhaps the mystery of her accounted for the allure.

It makes me sick to think about it.

The little blue dress. The coy smile. Those ridiculously tiny slippers that made the most impossibly beautiful sounds on the marble. The sheer cheek of the girl in such a state. The height to steal away what was rightfully mine- what I deserved.

My daughters.

I love them.

Despite their pettiness. Despite their clumsiness. Despite their most obnoxious noses, even. I love them as a mother does. As only I have.

Don't you dare think I didn't hear the whispers. They called me a jealous wife and a wealth-seeker, a murderess even. I suppose in a twisted sort of fashion, they were not wrong.

I thought that I had finally found the place for them – the place that would accept them and love them as their father didn't. As Master Tillsbury and Sir Olton and Mister Jenkins did not. A place where my darlings would have more than myself – more love and care, more gowns and jewels and feathers and hairpieces. Which I believed and still believe they deserved. Standing in the mirror in my white gown for the fourth time, I was sure of myself. The mother-of-pearl fastenings and French lace assured me of his care, as did his white-gloved hands guiding me down the aisle. I had watched him love his little daughter-child. I was sure he would show the same love to my daughters. I was sure.

But of course, I was wrong. Only I can love my children like I do.

I will not lie; my anger grew every second I glimpsed them together. Packages tied with ribbons of every hue. A pretty new frock each week. Maids and governesses and attendants waiting at her door – and oh, the birthdays. Each year was more extravagant than the last. It was a blessing I only had to endure two years of creme-filled this and jewel-encrusted that. Gifts that should have been my daughters, given to them at every whim. But they did become their belongings soon enough.

So, the answer to your question is yes. The speculations you harboured each time you heard my story are true. It was me. It was always me. He – like the others – deserved what he received. Ignorance, selfishness, preoccupation and greed. They all deserved it.

I may be jealous – but aren't we all, in some small way?

And yes, of course, I sought wealth. My daughters – and I, of course – deserve comfort.

The term murderess seems so dramatic – I completed tasks that had to be done.

But wicked?

Well, I suppose I am in some way wicked.

“Lady Tremaine? Please follow me.”

Of course, my trial. You didn't think the story ended with me melting into the shadows, did you? No, not on this occasion. The shadows were ready for me, as was my past.

Perhaps my statement will show me to be deserving of leniency.

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