Well known fairy tales from a different POV

Fantasy Faction Monthly Writing Contest Anthology, April 2016

Various Authors

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# Well known fairy tales from a different POV

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Snow, Glass, Apples by Exsanguini  
  
We know those stories by heart - but only from the hero's POV. Did you ever think about the motivation and justification the big bad wolf had for eating Red Riding Hood's Grandma? Maybe he was the good guy and we got it all wrong? Remember, the winners write history and they never picture themselves as the bad guys...  
  
For inspiration I recommend one of Neil Gaiman's best shorts: Snow, Glass, Apples from his short story collection "Smoke and Mirrors".  Another, more funny, example is the movie Hoodwinked!

*All content originally appeared on the Fantasy Faction Forums in the Monthly Writing Contest. You can see more information (and even participate in the forums!) on this particular contest by visiting the site.*  
<http://fantasy-faction.com/forum/(may-2016)-well-known-fairytales-from-a-different-pov/(may-2016)-well-known-fairy-tales-from-a-different-pov-submission-thread/>

# Table of Contents

1. [Elegy for a Master Chef: A Poem by Alex Hormann](#story1)
2. [The Prince's Promise by SJBudd](#story2)
3. [The Emperor's 100% Cotton Clothes by Henry Dale](#story3)
4. [Peter and James Learn How to Fly by Mr.J](#story4)
5. [The Wolf of Tales by Nora](#story5)
6. [How I Met Your Mother by Jmack](#story6)
7. [Sweet Release by m3mnoch](#story7)
8. [The Strangled Heart by tebakutis](#story8)
9. [The Three Billy Goats Gruff by Anonymous](#story9)
10. [What's the Harm in One Little Drink? by Rukaio\_Alter](#story10)
11. [The Magical Lamp by Lanko](#story11)

# Elegy for a Master Chef: A Poem

## By Alex Hormann

I built a house the other week

From candies bright and sugars sweet.

And though I had all I could eat

I found myself in want of meat.

I stuffed liquorice in the walls

And turned gingerbread into halls.

Through rice paper windows I called

But meat did not answer at all.

Once, then, I left for one lone day

And left my house to while away,

Abandoned not, appear what may.

For into my house stumbled prey.

A child. No, two! A boy, a girl.

The boy, he danced. The other twirled

As though my house was their own world.

The doors I locked, and spells I hurled.

I caught the boy, wrapped him in chains,

Told the girl I'd bash out his brains.

Gave him a mop to clean the stains

He had made on my windowpanes.

At last there was meat in my life,

I licked my lips, sharpened my knife.

They were fat little things who skived

From the home of father and wife.

I thought to share with my coven,

but then they put me in my oven.

The boy laughed, the girl was shoving.

My plan: eat them. Theirs was another.

# The Prince's Promise

## By SJBudd

Once upon a time there was a lonely and beautiful maiden who lived in a tucked away place in a magical wood that

had never been named. Inside its boundaries many people feared to tread lest they offended an archaic beast or

force of nature. Ellie had never known fear but she was well acquainted with loneliness. Her heart was a hungry

hunter and each night she went to bed alone and hungry.

But on one morning where the dappled sunlight lit up the copper forest floor, a tall dark handsome stranger came

riding in. Catching a warming scent of ginger and cinnamon his twitched his nose and completely forgot about

hunting purple speckled dragons that day.

In a small clearing he caught sight of a small squat cottage that hugged the earth and standing on the door step was

where he first saw her…

Ellie sighed as she swept the dirt and dust from her cottage outside, wiping her hands on her pristine apron.

“What’s the point of having a clean home where no visitors ever call?” Defeated she slumped on her doorstep

wishing for better, for a tomorrow.

“Excuse fair maiden, I couldn’t help but notice your house is made entirely of gingerbread.”

Ellie gasped and looked up and saw before her a tall man who had the most beautiful smile she had ever seen, he

had the kind of eyes you only find on a deer.

“Yes, yes it is. I don’t know much about D.I.Y so when my house started to fall into disrepair I would fill in the

holes with gingerbread. I don't a have a husband you see, and am very single.”

“That’s genius,” he exclaimed, “I just love gingerbread, can I try a piece?”

“Um, I’d rather you didn’t just in case the house falls down.”

“Oh of course, sorry I wasn’t thinking.”

“But if you drop by later I could bake you some fresh gingerbread.”

The young man’s eyes lit up, “That would be lovely, thanks…”

“Ellie,” she offered with her hand and was most taken back when he bent down to kiss it, “What’s yours.”

“Prince Charming,” he grinned.

“Oh.”

“And if your gingerbread tastes as wonderful as it smells I’ll ask for your hand in marriage.”

As soon as Prince Charming left to go hunting Ellie rushed around in preparation. She was not entirely convinced

that he was a Prince but he had an easy way with himself and looked like a lot of fun. Only a full blown meal would

be fit for a man of his charms and she spent the whole day in furtive preparation of the best meal a man could ever

taste. Never before had her home been such a hive of activity and it soon attracted the attentions of two young

scrawny children who came knocking at Ellie’s door.

“Oh please let us in, we’re ever so hungry as our stepmother has banished us,” wailed a small boy with hair so

bright and blonde.

“Of course you may come in,” Ellie replied as she opened her door wide to let them in, “I’m sure she didn’t mean it

you were probably just getting under her feet.”

“Thank-you,” curtly said the young girl, “I’m Gretel and this is my brother Hansel.”

“I’m Ellie I’ve just baked some fresh bread and there’s butter on the table do help yourselves.”

The children ate in silence as Ellie continued to clean and make her home ready for Prince Charming, but there was

so much to do she hadn’t even thought about her appearance. “I’m just going to wash my hair call me if you need

anything.”

However when she returned the kitchen was a terrible state there were broken plates and crockery upturned chairs

that would now need mending.

Ellie threw her hands up in despair, “Now I can see why your stepmother kicked you out.”

“The cat did it,” they replied in perfect unison. Ellie looked over to Marmaduke her beloved pet and saw him sulking

on the window sill, his black coat thoroughly drenched in flour.

“Oh Marmaduke what have they done to you?”

Gretel ran up to Ellie and pulled on her skirts, “Papa says that all black cats are evil and they serve witches. Does

that make you a witch?”

Ellie suddenly had an idea, she stood up straight with her hands on her hips, “Yes that’s right I am a very powerful

witch that likes to eat children particularly naughty ones.”

“We’re not naughty, we’re good,” trembled Hansel from behind a chair. The mention of witches made him very

afraid and he eyed his sister with great caution. Quickly he scrambled to find the broom and began in earnest to

sweep. Ellie noted that Gretel did not seem fazed and took a chair and sat by the table carefully studying Ellie.

“Can you do this?” Gretel enquired as she pointed her finger to an overturned chair and made it upright again. Ellie

gasped and took a step back towards the door that was still thankfully open. Gretel smiled and carried on, “Or

what about this?” Behind Ellie the door slammed shut and bolted itself. She turned back to Gretel who looked on

with pride and malice.

Gretel pushed her untouched plate of bread away from her, “I’m sick of bread I want to eat the cake you’ve got

cooking in the oven.”

Ellie giggled nervously, “But it’s for Prince Charming,” slowly she felt herself being pushed towards the oven by an

unseen presence, “please Gretel.”

“Gretel stop,” urged her younger brother.

Ellie felt the harsh heat on her face as the oven door slowly opened, she inched further and further until the heat

became blisteringly unbearable. She tried to scream but no words came, she tried to move her hands to stop

herself from falling in but they would not move...

There were no purple speckled dragons to be found in the magical wood that had never been named but

Prince Charming didn’t care; he was going to get laid that night. He grinned as he caught sight of the gingerbread

house.

“How quaint,” he said to his white horse who nodded in approval. He sniffed the air expecting the fine scent of

cinnamon and ginger but caught something else that intrigued him.

“My god what is that smell? It’s scrumptious,” he made his way inside the little home, “Ellie?” He called out but

there was no answer. Set on the table were two plates and in the middle was a huge slab of gingerbread which he

greedily tucked into.

“Why Ellie, you shall be my wife,” he grinned. It was so great being a prince all he had to do to sleep with a pretty

maiden was suggest that if she pleased him in some way he might marry her. Of course he would always be gone

before sunrise.

“Like a bat out of hell…” he sang wistfully to himself.

It was the smell of slow cooking meat from the oven that enticed him, grabbing a pair of kitchen gloves he opened

the door and pulled out a huge tray of meat. For a few moments he smiled after realising all the effort this young

girl had gone to for his benefit.

“May-be I will marry this one.”

Hansel and Gretel’s father took a big gulp of whiskey as he watched his two children approaching his tiny cottage.

They were both sat astride a fine white stallion and even from this distance he saw Gretel’s eyes narrow in

suspicion.

“Hansel! Gretel,” I’ve been so worried about you again,” he cried out. Hansel had a strange suspicion there were

tears of fear rather than jubilation. People didn’t seem to like his older sister, not even their dad and definitely not

their step-mother.

“Where’s our step-mother?” Called out Gretel as she tethered her new horse to a tree.

“I’m afraid she’s dead my dear,” Her father said looking down, “She died quite unexpectedly.”

“Good,” replied Gretel.

# The Emperor's 100% Cotton Clothes

## By Henry Dale

‘Damn it pa, I don’t care one whittle about that tailoring business of yours.’ Said Jim as he slammed the door shut behind him. The tears of his mom stung a bit but his dad had to leave him be. Didn’t Queen sing it on the radio about breaking free? This was his moment now. Jim took the bus to the big city, determined to make his fortune big time. Jim was dreaming big.

The city was big and full of light. ‘The place where dreams are made for sure.’ Jim thought to himself while being carried along with the throngs of people.

He almost stepped on a little girl with a red coat that slipped between the long legs of people.

‘Woah there.’ Jim thought. ‘If I catch that leprechaun I’m sure to get its pot of gold.’

But the little girl was fast, too fast for Jim and he lost her somewhere near an old worn casino. There went his pot of gold, so Jim was a bit down the lumps as he idled his way down the alley where he’d ended up.

Dumpsters were filed along the brick walls of old high rise and a television playing too loud declared that Rose had tossed Jack off that Titanic door once again. A small back door was open somewhere and a delicious smell of eastern cuisine wafted in Jim’s general direction. Something his stomach appealed to with a growl as Jim remembered he hadn’t eaten since this morning. He was drawn to the back door as if ensorcelled by the divine smells that emerged from that place.

A small brass sign read: “Dragon’s Palace, delivery only”. Jim’s hands went to his pockets in search of coin but they met only hemp. Maybe he could do dishes though? So, as if the tide of fate drove him, Jim pressed the tacky doorbell.

‘Yes?’

Jim was startled by this apparition. A wrinkled old man with a long thin beard stared up at the youth through two sharp eyes. He looked like he’d run away right out of some Chinese martial arts film.

‘What is it?’ The words were tossed in his direction in a less than amiable way. Though the old man was smaller than Jim, it was Jim who felt as if he was being looked down upon.

‘I’m looking for a meal-‘

‘What does this look like? A shelter? Scram!’

Jim wrung his foot between the door before it shut on him completely. The Chinese man gave him a tormented look. ‘Go away!’

‘I mean to work for it.’ Jim intervened.

‘Work?’

Jim could see the cogs turning in the man’s head as he considered this easy form of exploiting him.

‘What are you good at, kid?’

Here a problem posed itself because Jim wasn’t good at anything in particular. Nothing, except...

‘My father taught me the craft of tailor. I can make pantalons, shirts, ties and bowties,...’

The Chinese man simply stared at him expressionless. ‘Boy.’ He spoke. ‘This is a Chinese restaurant. What need have I of pantalons?’

‘I know you might not need it immediately but every person needs clothes right? I can make you a suit that will make you the envy of the city. People will stare at you in the streets and won’t believe their eyes.’

Jim knew he was threading on thin ice here as he definitely wasn’t as accomplished as he claimed to be.

The restaurant owner seemed to buy it though as the pensive look gradually developed into a gullible smile. ‘True enough. How about this? I give you a week to make me a suit. In exchange you get a room upstairs and scraps from the restaurant for free?’

The deal sounded anything but fair to Jim but he had nowhere else to go so he accepted the deal and settled down in a small room under the staircase after having double checked for lingering wizards.

Every day the Chinese man would come knock at his door to ask how the suit was coming along and every time Jim would make a lot of noise in his room or pretend to measure up the man’s size for the non-existent suit. During this time, he instead worked on a devious plan to trick the gullible landlord.

Finally the last day of the week came round and as always, the Chinese man knocked at Jim’s door.

‘The week is up. Is the suit finished yet?’ he yelled at Jim and Jim let him in to display the manikin he’d gotten ready to show off the suit. The manikin was bare.

‘What are you trying to pull on me boy? Where’s the suit I asked for?’

Jim had rehearsed this moment every day of the week so he turned around the empty manikin like a professional salesman, his hands pretending to brush across the invisible fabric.

'I made this suit of the finest of fabric sir, 100% cotton, easy to wash. So fine that the eye won’t see it just like that and so light you won’t feel it on your skin.'

The man looked at it and for a moment Jim thought he’d be strangled on the spot, then the lines in his face softened.

‘Wait outside, kid. I’ll see to you later.'

Jim hid down the street behind a bin to watch the old Chinese man flaunt around the streets.

‘Ow shit, he actually believed that?’

People stopped in their tracks to stare and gawk and gossip but the old Chinese man wasn’t aware of the commotion he was causing by flinging around his dong for everyone to see. A little boy pointed at him and yelled. ‘Look mommy! The man has no pants on.’

It only took moments for two policemen to take the Chinese man into custody for streaking and this was a sign for Jim to pack up his belongings and head back home with the fortune he’d gathered by robbing an old man blind.

Two weeks later...

‘Bloody hell, would you look at this, ma?’ Shouted Jim’s dad at the kitchen door. ‘Looks like them city folk have gone crazy at last. Newest fashion is wearing no clothes at all. World is coming to an end after all. They’ll be catching pneumonia in no time. I’m glad Jim left there in time with some common sense.’

# Peter and James Learn How to Fly

## By Mr.J

This is the story of Peter and James. The closest companions. Grown-ups would mock them for being tied at the hip; so much so, Peter often checked himself for black thread snaking between their skin.

They had abandoned their parents young, learned to live in the trees and the parks in the wilds of their city. But it wasn’t their city, it should have been, but the boys knew it could never be. There were far too many grown-ups for that. They were tall and dour and mean. They smelt strange and spoke in a monotone manner.

Peter was the older sibling by ten months, so was naturally the leader. He would take James on adventures, “Grand adventures” Peter would exclaim. He thought of the world as his playground, and everyone in it his toy soldiers to play with.

He would drag James to the tops of the highest branches, bare feet scratching and knees scraping at the leaves and twigs; they would disturb bird nests, and James would laugh when Peter put one on his head, flapping his arms like wings. Peter would often pretend to fly.

“I’ll jump one day, and the world will catch me!” he told James; the grown-ups would watch him soar above their heads, hats toppling like black dominos. Peter would laugh at them and feel the wind in his ears, light and free with no one able to stop him.

James would snigger and poke him in the side, mocking his dreamy boasting with a higher pitched squeak. “But why would it catch youuuuu” he said. Peter thrust his arms against his sides in a pose and smiled widely, yelling in his brother’s face.

“Because I’m a boy silly!”

One night, Peter pointed to the top of a building, a blackened grotesque hanging over the edge of a house. “I can climb up there” he said, “faster than you”

James shook his head boldly, but felt dizzy when peering up at the terrifying height of the statue. He followed Peter up the side of the building despite himself, bare feet slipping against pristine glass windows with a rubbery squeak.

James clutched at the grotesque desperately, disturbed by the curling tongue of the demon. “But how will we get down?” he said, calling up to Peter who stood proudly on the head of the statue, arms pressed to his sides like a Captain on his ship.

“We’ll fly!” Peter said with a beaming smile, “All you have to do is believe you can”

James shook his head but was hauled to the tip of the crumbling grotesque by Peter’s grasping hands. He held his brother’s fingers and leaned over the edge, toes slipping against the cold stone. The two boys fell; the street hungry for their small bones and gangly limbs; the air rushing past their ears and streaming into eyes.

Peter believed and James believed in his brother. They soared into the air and circled around the park they lived in. They were higher than the trees! Taller than the tallest building on earth! They whooped and cheered as they flew together, flying higher and higher into the sky and further and further away from London below.

After flying all night, they found a place known as Neverland. There were more boys there, abandoned by parents. They covered themselves in leaves and ruled the world on their little island. Peter was their leader. The boys following his every word. He was enthusiastic, screaming fun in the other boys’ faces. They all hallooed and leapt up joyously at his words.

But soon, James found himself tiring of the fun, even irritated by Peter’s boasting every time another Lost Boy (as Peter called them) suggested something and he took credit for his marvellous idea. “I’m just so clever!” Peter would say to them all, as the boys nodded enthusiastically, “We have such awfully big adventures!”

James began gritting his teeth every time he heard that little catchphrase. There were differences between him and Peter and the Lost Boys now. He was having to look down at them, his legs taller and thicker. When Peter led them on an adventure to a waterfall another Lost Boy had already found they all stripped and dived in, yelling and splashing each other. James realised how pink they all were, how freckled Peter’s round face as he grinned and played his makeshift flute, badly.

James would look at himself and see black hairs in strange places; he was embarrassed by them. No Lost Boy had ever been embarrassed. He slunk away into the forest, and felt alone.

Why was he so different than them?

He sulked into the jungle and heard voices beyond; a small cove with golden sands and gentle blue waves lapping at its edge. He saw grown-ups. They had beards and long hair. Except one; a younger boy with a shaved head, he was about James’ height. He dropped the crate he was carrying and stared at James hiding in the bushes. James crept out slowly to him.

They soon realised they were like each other; not a boy anymore, but not a grown-up either. James felt calmer with him, the word ‘normal’ entering his mind. He did not mention the Lost Boys, or Peter. The other pirates saw him and came over with gruff voices, jokes and hot breath stinking of beer. James shrunk behind the other boy as he explained to them where he’d found him.

James went with the pirates, marvelling at the size of their great ship; creaking wooden beams and crisp white sails towering above his head. The other boy smiled and patted him on the shoulder, giving him a guided tour. He felt happy again. James had found somewhere he belonged.

But Peter spotted the pirates taking James away, and declared to his Lost Boys his brother had been kidnapped! They must rescue him! “It would be an awfully big adventure” he screamed, as the boys stamped their feet in the sand, high pitched voices filling the jungle air with a heavy screech.

Peter flew onto the ship in his attack, spreading his arms wide like a hero. He pulled out his wooden sword and smacked one pirate over the head, knocking his hat flying as he swept through the air with ease.

His Lost Boys attacked the ship. They flew covered in a glittering, golden dust; laughing and erupting with screams as they kicked the faces of the pirates as they flew past. A few were grabbed, hauled to the deck with meaty hands. Peter kept laughing. “An awfully grand adventure this is!” he yelled above them, snaking between the flapping sails above the water.

He swept down and grabbed James, struck dumb with horror as he saw more Lost Boys plucked and smashed to the ground, heads cracking against wood or tossed overboard into the waves.

James held on desperately as they barrelled downwards, Peter unable to hold his weight up much longer. They splashed into the cold sea.

James spat out salt water and retched. He saw Peter fly out like a salmon and hover above him, hands on hips. “I rescued you James!” he said, dancing in the air effortlessly. James shook his head and bit back his fury, pointing to the ship desperately.

“The Lost Boys!” he said, spitting at his brother, “You killed them”

Peter frowned and shook his head. “But I saved you from the nasty evil Pirates James, it was an awfully big adventure too!” he said, flying above James bobbing in the water and swooping high into the air, “A grand adventure” he yelled before disappearing back towards the jungle. James splashed and crawled onto the shore, collapsing in pain. His head hurt and he wanted to be sick. He could hear Peter flying in the distance yelling to himself about adventures.

James swallowed and felt searing pain in his wrist. He turned to see a crocodile peering at him, its jaws consuming his hand. He screamed and called out for help. He tugged and tugged and kicked at the animal. It hissed, hauled its great body back. Its jaws tore at the skin and bones of James’ arm. He cried out again and collapsed in a heap; the pain too much to bear, blood seeping down his arm in a river.

James woke in a dark room to swaying floors and creaking sails. His friend stood over him, a sad smile painted on his lips. He said he was sorry for the hand.

James looked at his right arm, feeling nothing but numbness. The bloody stump of his elbow was all that was left. He wept silently as he stared at the metal hook they had tied round his lost hand.

James would be known as Hook now, he knew, with tears in his eyes and fury itching at his skin. He cursed Peter’s name, and realised he had forgotten how to fly.

# The Wolf of Tales

## By Nora

If you are brave, and venture in the world's wilderness, you can cross the Wolf's path and marvel at his tall shoulder, his golden eyes, and the thickness of his pelt. But the Wolf of tales is no simple Canis Lupus.

He is the loss of innocence, the end at the end of all roads, night after day, death after birth, he is the moment of change in the cycles of life.

He is, in short, an institution.

You might fear or hate him, but you cannot avoid meeting him.

For all his conceptual existence, the Wolf, on that day, hungers. Spring is still young, and he has not been lucky. He's walked much and ate little. He lays in a ray of sun by a stream to rest his weary bones, when a high voice appears and grows, singing a simple song. A child enters the clearing, twirling in the young grass and plucking flowers as she goes.

The Wolf beckons, using his softest voice. Curiosity brings the singer to him.

'Child, what is this I smell? Pie? Sausages? Will you spare one for a starving animal?'

The girl peers down at him. She wears a peasant's apron dress, blond locks spill from an old-fashioned hood. On her arm is the wicker basket that is the source of the delightful aromas.

'I canna do that, they're for my Gran, who lives all the way down the forest road, Ma sent me.'

'You will not spare a single sausage to keep me from dying? Do you have no heart?'

The girl shrugs, jostling her golden curls. 'Ma says it's for Gran, not strangers.'

The wolf rises then, his eyes burning with contained fury.

'If you won't hear the cries of mercy, what about the simpler call of threat?' He shows teeth, his mane bristling on his neck.

The girl frowns, but swings her basket behind her, and tries to look at him down her nose, a task made difficult by the fact that he's rather taller than her.

'No's no, mister!'

'Do you not know who I am?' The Wolf asks, incredulous.

'Are you famous?'

'Famous?' He snorts. 'Child, cemeteries the world over are monuments raised in my name. Does your hearth have no fire, that you never heard whispers of my deeds?'

'I'd no idea we've such a neighbour!' she squeaks.

The Wolf chokes on his protest. He's noone's neighbour. He passes through this forest like he passes through the world, but there is little to be gained by confusing her further.

'It's alright,' he says, more to himself than to the girl. But really it isn't. The child is too old to be this naive, and the Wolf hungers. 'So you truly won't give this to anyone but your Gran?'

She nods.

'How lucky she is, to have you come all this way for her!'

The child smiles, and brags of her many trips through the woods. It takes little prodding for the Wolf to get directions to the Grandmother's house, though they come with half the village's gossip. Seeing her collected flowers, he encourages her to follow the river a little ways to find daffodils and lilies of rare colours. She falls for it all, even thanks him. He ambles away, a smile on his canine lips, and soon is galloping through the underbrush.

The Wolf is half convinced he's lost before the trail finally turns into a path, that turns into a dirt road, that turns into the yard of a little house. Such a lost place! And not much to look at. The thatch is old and mossy, the walls lean on each other like drunks. There are no chickens in the coop, no cow on the grass, and the pond is fit for naught but a family of frogs.

The Wolf gathers himself and stands up, looking like a stark young man, with a mop of silver hair and a fur coat (not all of the wolf can quite fit in all of the man).

He steps to the door and knocks.

'Grandmother, open up!'

'Who is it?' comes an old voice from inside.

'I'm a hunter,' the Wolf says, 'been told you lived alone. I've more game than I need, so I thought you'd like a hare or two.'

'Pull the rope, hunter, and come in.'

The Wolf does as he's told, and the door unlocks and creaks open, revealing a small room, and in it an old crone, hunched over her knitting by a dim fire.

She looks ancient, this woman, full of stories and tales and old adages. The Wolf cannot help but think that if she'd stayed and lived with her daughter, then her grandchild would not be so painfully innocent.

The crone's eyes squint at his tall figure.

'Where is your game, hunter?'

'Oh, you're the game, Grandmama,' the Wolf says. 'Look at you. The reaper would have found you long ago, did you not live at the lost end of a lost road. Your time has long been up.'

The old woman's eyes widen, but she doesn't struggle as the Wolf grabs her chin and bends to kiss her wrinkled brow: she falls dead in his arms. Old folks rarely fight. They've heard the discreet patter of Death's footfall in their wake, when it lands off the beat of their own shuffling feet. Most welcome the end of such odious suspense.

The Wolf sets to work straight away. He strips the old woman and drapes himself in her rags, tying her shawl around his head and donning an old apron for the task ahead. He rends her flesh, works her bones and drains her blood. It is hard, messy work, as the crone is tough and dry. No amount of pies or sausages can make you tender past a certain age. Soon he worries he won't be done in time. But the little girl doesn't come until the Wolf is finished, tidied and ready, waiting by the fire, his belly filled and his mind wandering.

The knock rouses him.

'Gran, open up!'

'Who is it?' The Wolf calls in his best elderly voice.

'It's me, Gran, can't you tell?'

'Pull the rope, child, and come in.'

She does as she's told, and in comes the little girl, all dishevelled from running through the woods, her flowers in a large wreath, the basket hooked at her elbow. He welcomes her in, bids her to put her things aside, sits her and serves her a plate of meat, a glass of red (wine, he says) and watches her eat.

The girl looks at him too, as she chews on her meal and drains her cup.

'What big eyes you have, Gran. And what strong hands!'

The Wolf says nothing, but refills her glass and smiles.

'What wide mouth you have, too!' she exclaims.

At that the Wolf barks an awful laugh. 'The better to mock you with, little dolt!'

The girl, dismayed, looks as the clothes fall away from the Wolf's shifting body. Claws click on the tabletop, the wine bottle topples and spills its ruby red content. The Wolf towers above her, dark and terrible, outlined as he is by the firelight.

'Are you surprised I'm not dead in some ditch, after you wouldn't feed me, not for all the whining I could muster? I'm quite sated now, thanks to your Grandmama. But I'm generous! I can share, unlike others. I saved you a bottle of her blood, and a slice of her flesh. How did you like it?'

The girl stares at him, then her plate, in horror.

'It is true, he killed her,' comes a voice, that of a bat, speaking from the rafters. 'I saw it.'

'It is true, you ate her,' comes a voice, that of a bird, speaking from the window. 'You git.'

She screams, jumps away from the table. She retches and cries.

The Wolf watches the emotions that flash across her face: disbelief, rage, disgust, hatred, fear. Humanity.

'Here you are, my child,' the Wolf croons, 'all grown up at last.'

'Why?' she yells in a shattered voice.

'Because you're too old not to think for yourself!' he yells back. 'I pleaded but you would not be kind! I threatened but you would not compromise! Yet you're no infant, to not recognise danger when it crosses your road. You would not feed me, so I fed myself at your expense. You did not know me, but now consider us introduced.'

He strides towards her and colour drains from her face. 'Will you eat me, too?'

The Wolf laughs as he walks past. He stops in the door frame, glancing back at the trembling girl.

'You can tell your folks I tried, if it makes you feel better. Most do, some even say they cut themselves free of my belly. What matters is the lesson learnt, and besides,' his eyes glitter with cruel humour, 'I'm much too full as it is.'

# How I Met Your Mother

## By Jmack

*How did I meet your mother? You want to hear that old story. Are you sure you won’t be scared? Yes, you can sit in my lap. But if you fall asleep, I’m taking you straight off to bed.*

Once upon a time, seven dwifes stood weeping around a crystal casket in a forest glade. *Yes, that’s the right word: dwifes. Are you telling this story or am I?* Inside the casket was the handsomest prince in the whole world, Stormwhite.

*I’m starting at the wrong place? Alright. We'll go farther back.*

Stormwhite was born during a blizzard such as no one had ever seen. Snow peaked as tall as mountains. Stormwhite’s father, the king, was visiting a remote village when the storm struck, and every soul there froze.

When the queen heard that her husband was dead, she tried to throw herself from the tallest castle tower. The servants held her back, but she was so stricken by grief that she began to waste away. At last, they sent for a wizard who lived in the dark forest to see if he could help their queen. He arrived in a cloud of ravens and examined her. “I can help,” he said. “But if I do, you must let me make her my wife. I will be king over you all.”

That is what happened. The queen married the wizard. The wizard became our king.

In those years, I hunted wild game to feed the castle’s ovens. What happened inside that mass of towers didn't concern me much, as long as I was paid and left alone. But even I noticed the ravens. They filled the halls, and screamed at the servants. They pecked the dogs and terrorized the cats. The queen was nowhere to be seen; and Stormwhite, who was by then a rambunctious little boy, was left to run wild.

One day, I knocked at the kitchen door to drop off game, and found no one there. I wandered through dusty corridors under the beady gaze of the wizard’s birds. I heard voices, and went silently up a graceful staircase. The wizard-king stood before a huge, gilt-framed mirror. He wore the king’s crown on his head and the queen’s circlet on his brow. Stormwhite played with chicken bones on the bare floor at his feet.

The king raised his hands and commanded: “Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?”

Golden clouds filled the glass, and a woman’s face appeared. “You, oh king, are my fairest flower. If you ever loved me, free me to feel the sun on my face and your kiss on my lips.”

“Love is fickle,” replied the king. “Love is weak. Only strength survives, and only strength makes beauty thrive.” He spun toward the doorway where I spied. “You there, come out!” Though I hesitated, I didn’t run. “As you see, the servants have all abandoned us. You are now my chatelain, my cook, and this child’s keeper.” He waved dismissively at Stormwhite.

Such was the power of his voice, that what he said came true. I spent my days hunting, my nights and mornings serving. Stormwhite followed me everywhere. The child was starved for love. He was a sweet boy - love was easy to give.

Each and every morning, the king stood in front of the mirror and asked the same question: “Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who’s the fairest one of all?” The sad creature answered the same way every time: “You, oh king, are fairest.”

On Stormwhite’s sixteenth birthday, the king stood before the mirror as always. But this time, the mirror declared, “You are the fairest king, it’s true. But Stormwhite has grown fairer than you.” The king turned purple with rage. The ravens screamed and hurled themselves about the room.

“You!” he ordered me. “Take Stormwhite into the woods and kill him. Bring back his heart so that I know the deed is done!”

Such was the power of the king’s voice that once again I had to do his bidding. Though Stormwhite had grown tall, I was stronger still. I grabbed an axe, and we left the castle. The sweet boy begged me to stop, but it was only when we’d gone deep into the woods that I could resist the spell. “Quickly,” I said. “Leave me before I strike you dead. Go, and never return.”

When Stormwhite was well away, I slew a deer, carved out it’s heart, and bore it to the king, who made me serve it to him with turnips and potatoes.

Stormwhite wandered the forest, hungry and lost. He came across a little cottage up against a hill. Inside, he found seven chairs around a wooden table set with seven plates of gold, seven spoons, and seven knives. There were seven fiddles by the fireplace, and seven beds and wardrobes. Stormwhite ate what he found in the pantry and fell asleep on the softest bed.

He woke to find seven little dwifes staring at him from seven suspicious sets of eyes. Each had a pretty beard but was womanly formed in every other way. The tallest demanded, “Who are you? Why have you eaten our food, and slept in my bed?”

“I’m Stormwhite,” said the lad. “My step-father sent me into the forest to die, but fortune brought me here. If you let me stay, I’ll cook and clean for you, and make things comfortable in every way.”

“He doesn’t look like he’d be much good at cleaning,” said one of the dwifes. “Look at those soft hands.”

“Doesn’t look like he’d be much good at cooking,” said another. “You see an ounce of fat on those arms?”

“Well,” said the leader, “I’m sure we can find some use for a strapping young lad around here, don’t you, ladies?”

Stormwhite learned many things from the dwifes, and was very happy there.

Back at the castle, the king stood before his mirror again. “Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?”

The mirror answered, “You are the fairest king it’s true, but Stormwhite in the house of the seven dwifes is fairer still than you.” The king smashed the mirror, then stood weeping and raging among the shards. The ravens took him up in a roiling cloud, off, and over the hills.

Stormwhite was standing at the kitchen sink, yawning, and puzzling how to work the fawcett, when a knock came at the cottage door. An old woman stood there with a basket of apples. “Hello,” said the king - for it was the king in disguise, of course. “Will you buy an apple from an old woman?” He held out a beautiful red fruit.

“Of course, Grandmother,” said Stormwhite. No sooner did Stormwhite bite into the poisoned apple than he fell into a deep, deep sleep.

The king laughed and danced, dropping his disguise. He didn’t notice the dwifes returning from the mines. They took one look at Stormwhite, and realized what had happened. The leader grabbed a gem from her pack and cast it at the king’s head. He tried to prepare a spell, but a second stone took him in the temple. Then another struck, and another. The king fell to the ground, where they crushed him with their shovels.

Leaving the king to the ravens, the dwifes rushed to Stormwhite. They tried every remedy they knew, but nothing roused him. Finally, they made a casket from their finest crystal and placed the boy inside.

This was how things stood for many months. The dwifes visited Stormwhite frequently. As for me, I watched from the trees, ashamed to draw closer.

Word spread of the sleeping prince. As happens, the truth grew more confused the farther the story traveled. Sometimes the sleeper was a beautiful princess; sometimes a handsome prince. So it was that in a distant kingdom, Princess Charming heard there was an enchanted girl and decided to see her for herself. She journeyed many miles, before she reached the place where Stormwhite slept.

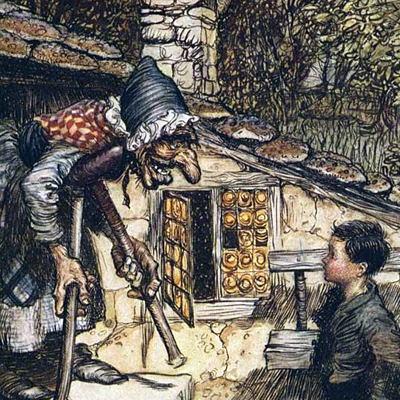
Let no one tell you that there’s no such thing as love at first sight. I stood in the shadowed trees, pulse pounding at the sight of the princess. I did what I hadn’t done in years. I reached inside my shirt, and unwound the wrappings that bound my breasts, un-hid my womanhood. I stepped forward, and met your mother.

As for Stormwhite, your mother’s and my embrace was so ardent that we bumped over the crystal casket. Stormwhite rolled onto the ground, and a piece of apple lodged in his throat came free. Racing to the clearing at the sound of breaking glass, the dwifes greeted the waking lad with joyous cries of “Dwusband!”

*It’s time for bed now, sweetling. The moral of the story? Alright, if really you need one, remember this. “Love is treasure. Love is sweet. Only love survives, and only love makes beauty thrive.”*

# Sweet Release

## By m3mnoch



She swooped through the boughs, leaves and branches rustling as her wings beat them to the side. Alighting on a low oak perch, she spied a child skipping his way down the trail toward where she sat. She started preening her feathers.

*Not now*, she told Theo, *I need you to be ready for the child.* The white crane squawked and refocused its attention on the boy, now poking a stick into a rabbit hole.

The minds of birds were fickle things and tended to wander.

Back in her candied cabin, the witch rocked in her favorite chair and reveled in the child playing. Her own sightless, red eyes closed, she relied on Theo's for the hunt. The boy, plump and well-fed would be a perfect treat.

From her cottage, Rosina twitched a finger and in the trees, the bird, Theo, plucked one of the sweets from its harness pocket, and dropped it to the trail near the boy.

She saw the youngster pause, blink, trundle over, scoop up the sweet, and pop it into his mouth.

Perfect.

Theo had half a dozen of the confections lashed to his body. The boy would be hers within the hour.



"What's your name, child?" The witch, nearly sightless and with her head cocked, posed the question through a crook-tooth grin. They sat at her little lunch table.

"William, ma'am."

"That's a lovely name. William, don't you think my home is marvelous?"

"Yes, ma'am. It's very nice. I'm sorry I ate part of the shutter. I just couldn't help myself. Did you know it's made of gingerbread?"

"I did indeed. Don't worry, William, we can fix it later. What matters most is what you thought of my secret gingerbread recipe."

"Oh, I loved it. I did!" The boy clapped his hands, excitement shining as he eyed the glaze-and-candy fireplace. William, now confident he wouldn't be scolded, turned back to the old woman and licked his lips. "May I try some more, please?"

"Such a polite boy." Rosina turned and hobbled, half-blind with her wooden cane tapping the way, towards the rear of the sugar cottage. "In fact, I need your help clearing out a few treats and making some room in the candy cellar. Would you like to follow me?"

"Of course!"

The two exited the witch's small home, walked past the vegetable garden, and approached a single, iron-banded door, angled as the entrance of a stone cellar. Rosina produced a key from her pocket and fumbled the lock open.

"This way." She beckoned William to join her in clacking down the hewn steps and into the sputtering shadows below. "I have to keep the sweets deep in the chill of the cellar so it won't melt."

One last glance around the garden, a quivering smile, and William entered the thick door behind the old woman.



The witch Rosina sat at her table, a platter of fresh-picked vegetables in front of her. Centuries spent living in a house constructed from candy had destroyed any sweet tooth she might have possessed. Her cravings ran more along crunchy cabbage and radishes, and she left gulping down fish and the scattered critters to Theo.

As if on cue, the white crane stabbed at a herring and swallowed it whole.

She cleaned up her lunch and prepared William's. Cake, tarts, candied pecans, gingerbread and chocolate sandwiches, all washed down with maple-laden milk -- filling a plump little boy's wildest desires as well as his belly. He'd avoided the treats the first day he was in the cage, but hunger finally pushed him to devour more and more each day since.

Taking his tray down in the cellar, she slid aside the little iron access door and slipped the platter through the slot. William tore into the sugary snacks, devouring the chocolate first. She'd discovered it was his favorite.

"Don't worry, dearest William. As soon as you finish helping me clean out all my leftover treats, I'll release you." She bent, her gnarled teeth showing through the snack door as she spoke. "You're the only one who can help me."

"I'm helping, I'm helping." Tears streaked down round, ruddy cheeks as he pushed a frosted cake into his mouth.

She hadn't lied. She needed his help. Securing the cell again, the witch turned and descended deeper into the candy cellar.

Spiral and torchlit, the stony stairs looped into the darkness. As always, on the trip down, she remembered her first descent down to the pit. It had been as an apprentice to the old witch charged with caring for the candy cottage before her.

She shuddered remembering the first time she'd seen what dwelled at the bottom of the stairs. To this day, herself now the old witch in the gingerbread house, luring children with the promise of sweets and chocolate, it was a memory that often woke her screaming in the night.

Rosina unbarred the door, though she wasn't sure why she barred it at all. An iron bar wouldn't stop them. Nothing would stop them. Well, almost nothing.

She pushed through the door.

The door opened to a rock outcropping, upon which sat a hate-carved stone alter. An immense hole, grave black and spattered with glowing red like hell extinguished, yawned before the offertory.

Rustles and shrieks crackled in the pit's darkness as she scanned the ledge floor where she stood, rough-counting the scattered bones. It appeared they were finished with the sweet, young girl. She began gathering the pieces of picked-over skeleton, gleaming a sharp yellow-white in the light of her torch.

The witch, arms loaded with bone, glanced one final time over the edge, at the burning embers below, before she made her ascent. With her red eyes, she alone in the world knew they weren't hot coals in the dark.

They were the eyes of evil. Devourers of the sinless. Birthed in hell.



Light from the moon shone through the clear sugar panes of her windows and Theo squawked. William had been cooperative, desperate for release. Desperate to see his mother and father again.

Back aching, she pushed herself up from the rocking chair and, once again, with the rising of the full moon, she would feed a child to the World Demons. She would save humanity from their worst sins made flesh and razor clawed. For each of over 2000 full moons, she'd sacrificed the babe-flavored innocence of one child so that many may live torment-free for another cycle.

Even so, those sacrifice tore at her. Tore at her like demons born of another ilk. The eager thought of her estranged children's descendants living to see another moon because she fed young flesh to monsters -- Even that comfort failed in making the duty lighter.

Walking to the window, she gazed out the sugar pane, imagining the ethereal mist giving way to bright moonlight, and envied the quiet peace of the forest. She craved its simplicity.

"What do you think, Theo? Would it be better to just quit? To allow the hell beasts to open their jaws and shred our age?" She glanced over to the crane as it speared, then gulped down another herring.

"I thought you'd say that."

Rosina felt around the edge of her little table where her cane leaned, grabbed it, and hobbled to the back door.

"Fly, my friend." She called over her shoulder, "Begin your quest to find the next."



It was dawn when Rosina emerged from her cellar. She was dirty and sweat-smeared from feeding the coal fires, mentally exhausted from blocking out the screams, glad for the forest breeze clearing out the stink of roasting hair, heartened by birdsong replacing rending wingbeats and vicious shrieks.

Because of her, the teeming farmlands existed, unrazed and unaware. There was comfort in the thought after a night of misery.

She crossed the garden, plucking a pear for breakfast, and entered her sweet home. Eager to rest for the remainder of the day, she put on the kettle and crumbled a handful of dried alfalfa and violet leaves.

A long trill rippled through the silent morning forest. Theo had already found another lost child.

Relaxing her mind, Rosina focused on her Birdsight and found the perched crane. He'd found not one, but two children wandering her path. Brother and sister, she could tell. Her first thought was to the small victory -- it would be two months before she had to disrupt another family. Some mother would have an extra month with her child.

She watched through the crane's eyes as the boy bent and scooped up the stick of licorice.

"Gretel," he called. "Over here. I've found another one."

"Wait for me, Hansel. Please don't eat it all. I'm hungry, too."

Leaning back in her rocking chair, the witch sighed. "Yes, children. Follow my Theo and I will feed you for the rest of your life."

# The Strangled Heart

## By tebakutis

The blood rites were finished, the words of power chanted, and the potion prepared. A drop a day would save the afflicted babe, but Ana felt ravaged from the inside out. This spellwork had stolen years of her life, but what alternative did she have? If she did nothing, she might as well murder the baby herself.

The sobbing parents arrived at dusk, motivated, Ana assumed, by fear. Everyone feared Dame Ana Gothel, and Ana bore the loneliness without complaint because the alternative was chaos. Her words of power would be used to kill, her runes to imprison, her magic plants to plague and poison.

No one else remained to protect the Walled Garden from men.

When the miserable couple reached the edge of her verdant estate, the mother’s sobs matched her babe’s. The smell of rotting leaves rolled off this mother, the stench of despair. Ana understood despair – she understood the pain of losing her only child – but this mother would not see her child *die*.

The father stank of frustration and regret, the stench of a bog mixed with the smell of iron and blood. He blamed Ana for this, of course, but Ana’s focus remained on the babe, on the squalling her parents assumed was natural. It most certainly was not. This babe was in agony, spiky roots tightening around her heart.

The mother wailed and clutched her newborn daughter to her breast. “Why must you steal our child, Dame Gothel? How have we wronged you?”

“The babe was never yours.” Ana maintained the stately pose she had cultivated to hide doubt and pain.

“I carried her!” the mother wailed. “I birthed her!”

“If you believe our bargain unfair, your quarrel is with your husband.” It was the greed of this father, after all, that sentenced his child to death.

“A bargain is a bargain.” The father motioned, impatiently, to the mother. “Give her the child, Nan.”

His emotions now smelled like spoiled oranges - guilt. Ana knew then he had not told his wife what the stolen rampion had done to their child in her womb. Men like him did not admit fault.

“All we took was a plant!” the mother wailed. “Why must I trade my child for a plant?”

“Ask your husband.” Ana stared at the man until his eyes fell.

“You’ll kill her!” the mother shouted. “You’ll sacrifice her in some blood rite! I won’t let you!”

“Your daughter dies already. Do you not hear the truth in her cries?”

The mother gasped. “You ensorcelled my child?”

“The rampion you stole from my garden did that. The plant you so foolishly gorged upon is strangling your child’s heart.”

“That can’t be true!” The mother’s eyes welled as she glared at her husband. “Eddard! Tell me it isn’t true!” The smell of her betrayal hung on the air, sickly and sweet.

The father’s downcast eyes damned him more than any word from Ana ever could. Ana stared at the mother. She stared at the dying babe. And with one more sniffle, that babe was hers.

\* \* \*

Fortunately for young Rapunzel — named, Ana decided, for the enchanted rampion wrapped around her tiny heart — drops of Ana’s potion slowed the plant’s growth and kept the baby alive. As years passed and the babe grew into a young girl, who grew into a young woman, Ana began to hope this child — her child, now, because she could no longer think of little Rapunzel as anyone else — would one day venture beyond the Walled Garden. If Ana could find some way to unwind those hungry roots from her heart.

The answer came on a fresh spring day, Rapunzel’s twelfth birthday. As Ana helped her daughter trim the ivy choking their garden’s walls, she saw its true nature. Tendrils around Rapunzel’s heart.

As ivy grew in the direction of water and light, so might the roots of the hungry rampion. Ana could not destroy the rampion, but she could lead its growth elsewhere. Ana would coax the magical plant out through her daughter’s brilliant blond hair.

That night, after Rapunzel slept, Ana returned to her mother’s tower. She carved, and scribed, and chanted, sacrificing decades of her life so her daughter might one day be free of the rampion curse. Ana knew when she was done, breathless and quivering with pain, that this blood enchantment would draw the rampion out of her daughter — but only if Rapunzel remained in the tower until the healing was complete.

Given enough years in this enchanted tower, the roots strangling her daughter’s heart would grow into luxurious blond hair, strong as hemp rope and long as the ivy clinging to the Walled Garden’s stones. Why strangle a heart when you could spread your blond roots, drinking in sweet sunlight and fresh air?

Ana would not live forever, certainly not as long as Rapunzel, not now. She had sacrificed so much of her life, and when she died, who would conjure the potion that kept the rampion from strangling her daughter’s heart? This tower was her only daughter’s salvation.

Some day, Ana would make Rapunzel understand.

\* \* \*

The moon was bright when the prince climbed the strong blond curls that had once strangled Rapunzel’s heart. When he saw Ana waiting for him, he almost fell right off the tower, and Ana was sorely tempted to let him fall. He was the reason her daughter hated her.

“Dame Gothel!” The prince’s eyes narrowed as his hand brushed his sword hilt. “Where is Rapunzel?” Like all outsiders, his first solution to conflict was violence.

“Not here,” Ana said.

“Foul enchantress! What have you done with her?”

“I haven’t made her pregnant, if that’s what you’re worried about.”

“I’d never..." the prince began, but his flush gave him away. “We didn’t … we only…”

“Rapunzel is gone, you fool.” The air shimmered as the rage Ana restrained writhed inside her. “She hates me, and will always hate me, but she is now free.” This prince had filled Rapunzel's head with lies, seduced her, used her, but he would not kill her. “You will never see her again.”

“You imprisoned her!” The prince pointed an accusatory finger. “You kept her in this tower against her will!”

“I saved her *life*, foolish boy.” Ana’s grief and despair smashed against her mental gates, shaking the tower and forcing the prince a step back. “I loved her, protected her, taught her, and now you have poisoned her heart against me. Yet you failed to kill her. I stopped that.”

“What do you mean? Why would I kill her?”

“If you had dragged her from this tower before her healing was complete, the decades I’ve sacrificed would be wasted. I sheared Rapunzel’s fatal curse from her head this morning, even as she shrieked at my cruelty and demanded her release. I love her, I will always love her, and so I set her free.”

Rapunzel's curses and threats had ruined Ana worse than rampion around her own heart, strangling, crushing, feeding. There was no pain like the hate of one’s own daughter.

“Where is she?” the prince demanded.

“Why do you care? You’ve already sown your wild oats.”

“I love her, Dame Gothel!” The sincerity of his emotions rolled off the prince in waves. “We are betrothed!”

His love was the smell of cherry blossoms in bright spring, a fresh rain on clean grass. It might not ease Ana’s grief, but it could ease Rapunzel’s. “Prove it.” Could Ana save her daughter one last time?

“I will do anything to find her. Anything! Please, help me.”

The prince craved magic. They all craved magic, just like Rapunzel’s birth mother craved that stolen rampion. So be it. Ana was done protecting these fools from the garden’s magic, done sacrificing her life for people who feared and hated her. Her own daughter had cursed her and left her alone, to die.

Ana clapped her hands and said the words.

Where once a prince stood now flapped a bird, small and blue and chirping with outrage. As Ana approached, it fluttered and squawked around the room. Ana spoke loud enough for the bird to hear.

“Fly to your Rapunzel, little prince. Fly far. If you truly love her, and if you can find her, her touch will restore your form. Find your betrothed and bring her, and her child, the happiness I never could.”

The transformed prince fluttered to the window sill, glanced back. Then he was off and flying before Ana’s legs gave out, before she collapsed on the cold stone floor, exhausted. Her life drained.

Dame Ana Gothel would never see another sunrise. She had given everything for Rapunzel, and now her tower, her garden, and her legacy would crumble to dust. She would die alone, wrapped in her daughter’s hate, but Rapunzel would live on with her prince, happy and alive.

If Ana left nothing else to the world that hated her, she left that.

THE END

# The Three Billy Goats Gruff

## By Anonymous

Troll Luck.

The bridge is mine,

They shall not pass!

The bridge is mine,

They do not ask -

Just -

Trip trip, trip trip,

Above my head.

Trip trip, trip trip,

It never ends!

But....

I will stop this -

Scare them away!

I will stop this,

I will. Today.

Look -

Here they come,

The smallest first.

Here they come -

Act fierce! (No nerves)

"Back!"

"You cannot pass.

No trip trip trip!

You cannot pass -

This is my bridge!"

But....

He is so small,

I let him talk.

He is so small,

I let him walk.

Sigh

I can't do this.

(Goat two gets past)

I can't do this.

(Goat three looks fast)

"Arrrrgh!

He charged at me -

(Caught me off guard).

He charged at me -

Butted me hard!

So....

Now I'm floating,

Downstream awhile,

Now I'm floating,

Dreaming. I smile...

........Shhhh

# What's the Harm in One Little Drink?

## By Rukaio\_Alter

Today I learnt an important lesson about evil witchery. Never turn into a dragon. It doesn’t help.

“Ow! Ow! Shit! Ow!” I yelped as the young prince stabbed and sliced at my arms. “Cut it out! That really- Ow! Fuck! Look, I’m trying to help you- Gah!”

Unfortunately, dragons don’t exactly have well-formed voiceboxes. As such, my cries ended up sounding more like threatening growls and snarls. Which only made the prince stab at me more and more.

“Okay, that’s it you little bugger!” I screeched in some incomprehensible dragon language. “Stop it now or I’ll-“

Suddenly, I felt a rush of heat move up my throat. The prince’s eyes widened and he dived out of the way, seconds before a torrent of dragonfire erupted out of my mouth and incinerated the area near which he was standing.

“Oh shit!” I swore, accidentally exhaling another burst of flame. “Did not mean to do that! Sorry!”

Unfortunately, this particular sentence, in dragon language, came out as an incredibly intimidating roar. This only made the prince even more mad.

I let out a sigh, which came out as more of an ashy snort. This entire thing had been a shitshow from beginning to end. And a small part of it, I admit, might have been my fault. You see, it all started a few years back, during one drunken night in a bar…

“Gemme another bottle of whisky!” I mumbled as I slouched over a foul-smelling puddle. “Extra strong, this time!”

The bartender gave me an odd look. “Don’t you think you’ve had enough?”

“I’ll tell you when I’ve hadsh enough!” I slurred, casting a spell in his general direction. It missed, but hit a small bottle of fine aged bourbon and turned it into a hedgehog with wings.

The bartender glanced at the bourbon-hog currently flying around his head, shrugged and stepped out of the room, probably to fetch me another bottle.

“You know schomething, Diaval?” I said, cuddling my pet raven familiar. “You’re the beeeest familiar anyone could ever ask for. You’re like… a super familiar and stuff.”

*“Thank you, Miss Maleficent.”* Diaval squeaked. *“You’re awesome too!”*

“Heehee.” I giggled in a dignified and menacing way. “You called me Miss. I like that. Too bad everything’s so sad right now.”

*“What’s wrong, Miss Maleficent?”* Diaval asked.

“It’s this child thing, you see.” I said, sloshing around my empty cup. “Some bigwig king thinks he can invite everyone in the kingdom to see his pwecious infant daughter, but not me! I mean, what did I ever do that was so bad?”

*“What about that time you set the forest alight?”*

“Eh, those squirrels had it coming.” I let out a sigh. “But still, it’s really depressing, right? I’m not all that bad. The way people talk about me, they’d think I was some evil, malicious witch with only a tenuo… tenous… tennerus… with only a small grip on reality.”

*“That’s not right.”* Diaval agreed. *“You ought to take unholy vengeance on them with a curse.”*

I looked down at the little bird. Or at least, where I assumed the little bird was. My vision was really swimming at this point. “You think so? Isn’t that a bit evil?”

*“Of course not!”* The raven squeaked. *“After all, justice demands retribution on those who wrong you. You’ll be punishing them for justice. How can doing something for justice be evil!”*

“You’re right.” I nodded. “I’ll do it for justice. So what kind of curse should it be? Boils? Warts? Boil Warts?”

*“How about something deadly and painful?”* Diaval hissed. *“Something that will haunt all who witness it for years to come and plunge them into endless despair…”*

“Oh Diaval.” I giggled, hugging the raven closer. “You’re so wacky. But I need something better.”

*“How about you cast her soul to the fiery abyss of hell to suffer endless pain?”*

“Endless pain, huh?” I took a quick moment to think. “You know, one time I pricked my finger on a spinning wheel and it hurt for like a really long time. Maybe I’ll \*hic\* make it so that baby hurts her finger on the spinning wheel of… stuff…”

I had to stop talking at that point because some evil witch (not myself) had enchanted the room to start spinning around. Had nothing to do with the alcohol, I swear.

“Madam Maleficent?” A firm voice snapped me free from the spinning curse. I looked up to see a raven identical to Diaval perched on the window. “Who are you talking to?”

“Oh, hey, Diaval.” I slurred. “I was just talking to the other Diaval about… revenge and schtuff.”

The raven looked at the object I was currently petting. “Ma’am, that’s a shoebrush.”

I followed his gaze. Indeed, if you looked closely, the Diaval currently in my arms *might* have been a shoebrush. “Well, you both look *reeeeeeally* alike.”

Diaval didn’t look impressed. “Ma’am, I think you’ve had enough. It’s time to leave.”

“You’re right.” I said, springing to my feet. “After all, we have our \*hic\* revenge scheme to enact!”

“Precisely, we-“ Diaval blinked. “Wait, what?”

“Our revenge scheme! I was just discussing this with you.” I said, transforming into my dark, winged form. “We’re going to that castle and pricking that baby on… spinning things… For Justice!”

“Ma’am, that sounds like a terrible idea that I must discourage-“

“FOR JUSTICE!”

I took off out the open window, fluttering to avoid a tree some thoughtless lout had left in my path. I knew exactly what plan I had to enact. I would put a curse on that girl so that she would prick her finger on a spinning wheel at the age of 16 and it would really hurt. Nothing too harsh, but enough to teach them all a lesson.

Now, as long as I could remember that precise spell, we would all be fine.

“You idiot.” Diaval said. “You complete idiot.”

“Hrmpghm.” I groaned, clutching a pillow to my head. “Please stop with the… word things. My head hurts.”

“Oh really?” Diaval raised an eyebrow, which I did not know ravens actually had. “Your head hurts? Mine does too, because you put a bleeding death curse on the baby princess! One you can’t even undo! And you also threw up on the king.”

“Stop whining.” I muttered. “I’m gonna fix it. Why else do you think I summoned my Brains Council? Together, we’ll figure out a solution.”

“Brains Council?” Diaval looked around. “The only ones here are me and you.”

“And Diaval II.” I reminded him, patting our third, newly-renamed member.

“Ma’am, that is still a shoebrush.”

“But he has good ideas.”

"Ma'am, I really must protest-"

"It's either him or the bourbon-hog."

“......Look, let’s just get back to the problem.” Diaval said. “What are we going to do about the curse?”

“Well, it’s simple.” I said. “On the princess’s 16th birthday, I’ll prick her finger on a spinning wheel and that’ll fix the whole thing.”

Diaval blinked. “Wait, wasn’t the curse that she’d die if she ever pricked her finger before her 16th birthday?”

“No no.” I corrected him. “The curse was that she’d die if she *didn’t* prick her finger before her 16th birthday.”

Diaval stared at me uncertainly. “Are you certain?”

“Please, Diaval.” I rolled my eyes. “Have I ever been wrong about this before?”

16 Years Later

“You idiot.” Diaval said. “You complete idiot.”

“Well, it’s your own fault.” I said with a huff. “If you were clever, you’d have remembered that I had been wrong about this before and reminded me that.”

“I did! You ignored me in favour of that shoebrush!”

“Look, if you can’t handle your own feelings of jealousy in the workplace, don’t take it out on me.“

“i really don't want to talk about this.” Diaval sighed. “We’re just lucky that curse only put everyone to sleep instead of killing them. And since the three fairies arranged for that handsome prince to come and wake the princess up, we just have to sit back and not screw anything up."

“Hey.” I said. “You know what I think would help? If that prince had someone to guide him there. Something big and scaly so he wouldn’t miss it. Like a dragon or something”

Diaval’s eyes widened. “No. Don’t you dare.”

*“I think it’s a great idea.”* Diaval II squeaked from within my pocket. *“Burn him alive! For Justice!”*

I nodded in agreement as my body began to shift and change. There was no way this could possibly go wrong.

“SHIIIIIIIIIIIITTTT” I roared as my dragon body, impaled by the prince’s magical sword, plummeted off the cliffside, before landing with a painful smack.

I lay there, dazed, for a few minutes before I heard a flap of wings and Diaval landed on my snout.

“Well?” He said, raising an eyebrow.

I was silent for a moment. “You know, with the benefit of hindsight, I may have had a bit too much to drink.”

# The Magical Lamp

## By Lanko

An old man traveled across the desert and arrived at a small town. He asked for water and food, but no one helped him. A woman offered him shelter, and he accepted. She had three sons, all in their early teens.

“Who’s this dirty old man?” said the tallest one.

“A traveler in need of shelter, son.”

“Is he gonna pay us?” asked the youngest.

“To your rooms! Now!”

The boys begrudgingly obeyed and slammed their doors shut. The woman sighed. “Sorry about this. They lost their father in the war last year. I wish he had never left, so we could have remained a happy family.”

At dinner, the boys mocked the old man, despite the mother’s protests. One boy said that gold was the most important thing, the other it was power and the other said it was women.

This got the old traveler’s attention and he offered to tell the true tale of the magical lamp and about people’s greed. They mocked him again, but agreed to listen to the story.

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A long time ago, djinns and humanity fought a war and the humans won with the help of the gods. All djinns were killed, except for one. His wrists were locked in golden manacles and a lamp was his prison. He was sentenced to realize humans’ wishes, a mocking punishment for the attempt to destroy the gods’ greatest creation.

His first master was a rustic man. “Djinn, give me the most powerful weapon in the world so I can be the greatest warrior of all!”

The djinn then forged an unbreakable scimitar, it’s blade able to cut through rock and metal, and gave it to the warrior. He went to battle right away and was killed right away by his first opponent. The scimitar was gifted to the sultan and no one knew the name of the warrior.

Because he wished for the most powerful weapon, but not for the skill to wield it.

An scavenger found the lamp and summoned the djinn. “I want so much gold that I will become the richest man in the world!”

The djinn then dug a giant golden nugget from the mines of the gods themselves, a nugget taller than a tree and larger than a river; it shook the earth when it fell from the heavens. The scavenger embraced it, dreaming of everything he would have, but his treasure was too heavy and he could not move it. He spent days trying, and soon the entire kingdom knew about the treasure and fought for it.

The sultan had an army, easily claimed the gold and moved it to his palace. The scavenger died in the battle and another spent his wealth.

Because he wished for gold, but not for the strength to carry it.

The vizier came into possession of the magical lamp. “The sultan has the blade of heavens, all the gold in the world and his daughter is the most beautiful woman to have walked the earth. Grant me power, djinn, so I can take all that as mine.”

The djinn visited the guardians who watched over the volcanoes, oceans, mountains and skies of the world, received their blessing and granted the vizier command over the elements and inhuman strength and speed.

Now a powerful sorcerer, he attacked the palace with lightning and fire and fought dozens of men by himself. The sultan fled the capital.

On the first day ruling, the vizier married the princess and declared all the people were now his slaves. As he was taking the princess to his chambers, he felt a sharp pain in his chest and fell dead. The sultan returned, restored everything back to normal and the vizier was left to rot on the desert, as nobody cared to dig him a grave.

Because he wished for power, but not for the longevity to abuse it.

Now the sultan had the magical lamp. Barring sorcery, he was the most powerful and rich man in the world, also regarded by his subjects as just and wise. He spent a month talking to religious leaders, philosophers, teachers, doctors, soldiers and common people, and another month meditating on what he had discussed. Then he said his wish:

“Great djinn, I concluded that the greatest enemy of men is time. Gold, power, wisdom… all this and much more can be obtained by anyone, given time. I want to be free of this restraint. I wish to live forever, so I can see and known all the world has to offer, now and forever, and to also continue to serve and better the lives of my people and kingdom. I wish for immortality.”

The djinn searched the gods themselves for this request. Amused, they gave him their blessing and the djinn bestowed upon the sultan the gift of eternal life.

The sultan was elated, becoming even more generous with his people. He funded artists and scholars, doctors and builders, he himself became immersed in books and scrolls from all over the world.

But years, then decades passed and the sultan felt more and more tired, his sight grew blurrier by the day and his ears required great effort to hear the loudest of noises. He became ill of body and mind; he had difficulty feeding himself, discussed with viziers he did not remember appointing and slept alongside wives he did not remember marrying.

Finally, he could no longer take it, and asked to be killed. But even beheaded, he would not die. The viziers put his head inside a jar and hid it away in the dungeon. Then they waged war upon each other. With the kingdom weakened, a foreign king invaded and razed it, and it would never rise again.

Locked and buried even further beneath the sands of the desert, the sultan despaired at his eternal damnation.

Because he wished for immortality, but not for the youth and health to enjoy it.

During that war, a slave fled the kingdom and carried the magical lamp. He was not born a slave, but was the prince of a kingdom the sultan conquered. He asked the djinn’s story, the first to do it. Learning of what happened to those who had wishes granted, he asked the djinn:

“What is your own wish, granter of wishes?”

“To be free, to avenge my kin and enslave your kind as you did to us, to control this earth, as you, creatures of mud and dirt, are unworthy of it.”

“But then you will be no different than us.”

“You dare compare me, born of the smokeless fire, to you? Why is that?”

“Because you wish for freedom, but only to imprison the whole world.”

The djinn raged, but admitted the hypocrisy. The prince had no land to return, no family or loved ones still alive and so, he traveled to distant lands, doing his best to show the good side of the humans. Slowly, the djinn’s fury quenched and even started liking the humans. They were not all hopeless.

“I was a slave, but that would not last forever. You, however, are bound to eternal servitude. My wish is for your freedom, and you will remain free as long as you never harm a human being.”

The djinn accepted, and his golden manacles fell to the ground, and he flied with joy. The gods allowed this, but forbid him from ever approaching the prince again. The djinn was sad, but learned years later that his golden manacles were sold and that allowed the prince to build a home, a family and live happily until the end of his days.

As for the djinn, he traveled the land, some said he still granted wishes, but only to good people he liked, for he was now a master of his own life.

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The boys all thought the story was ridiculous, mocked the old traveler and went to sleep. The mother apologized on their behalf and prepared a place for the old man to sleep near the fire.

At morning, the woman gave him supplies and wished him good luck. The youngest son gave him a spare set of clothes. The oldest gave nothing, but said he was going out to look for a job. And the other brother was cleaning the house. The mother furrowed her eyebrows at this.

When the old traveler turned a corner, he looked back at the house, and saw a man approaching it. The woman and the children ran to him.

“Father?”

“Husband? I thought you were dead.”

The man shook his head. “I got lost in the desert after the battle. Had no idea where I was going, but today I woke up and the town was right ahead of me. I can’t believe I didn’t saw it before.” Then they hugged each other and cried.

The old man resumed his path, satisfied with himself.

Because he wished for hope, and repaid it with kindness.