

Dark & Darker Faerie Tales

By Two Sisters

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We dedicate this book to our family, friends and pets.

Thanks to all our friends who helped proofread and edit our stories.

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A Dark Faerie Tale

In a rather strange forest, in a world unknown to humans, lived a fairly small faerie called Daena. Like most faeries, Daena was kind, considerate and always happy to help.

As you probably already know, faeries possess magical powers. Tales say faeries can create gold from nothing, summon monsters and even change history. I don't know how much of that is actually true but even from exaggeration, you can imagine faeries are powerful creatures despite their lack of height.

However, it's important to note that faeries were not selfish with their magic. They healed sick mothers, gave courage to heroes, led starving folk to food, tricked devious trolls and also helped lost children find their way home.

Faeries were particularly helpful and caring towards children. Not for vindictive reasons but because they have a natural desire to protect the small and innocent. During times of hardship and war, the presence of a magical faerie had life-changing effects on children. The faeries never asked for anything in return, all they wanted was to help, and bring smiles to children's faces.

As you can see, faeries are incredibly kind-hearted. Throughout history, they have been a divine presence. A bright light in a dark world. But times have changed since then. For the last century, faeries have been forbidden from leaving their home. Instead of helping children, faeries were expected to be content with just helping other faeries.

However, Daena was not content. When she was a youngling, barely the size of a bean, she dreamed about venturing out to help humans. She did not see why faeries stayed hidden in their sanctuary, keeping their powers to themselves, when there were people out there in the beyond who would benefit from her gifts.

Every day, after she completed her tasks, Daena would fly up the tallest tree and sit on the tallest branch where she would gaze out into the distance. She would imagine what it'd be like to fly out and assist needy folk.

In the past, as soon as a faerie's wings were strong enough, they were expected to leave their home and travel the world. Daena's precious wings flickered with excitement at the thought of leaving but she knew it was not possible. Faeries were not allowed to leave.

At sunset, Daena began the flight to her family's house. On the way, she came across Mother Faerie who was the wisest and strongest, and perhaps the plumpest of all faeries.

"Daena, why do you look so glum?" Mother Faerie asked. "For a long time now, I've seen you plagued by unhappiness. Tell me what troubles you so I can help."

"Dear Mother," Daena sighed. "I yearn to go out into the human world. My ancestors brought happiness to children and made their greatest wishes come true. I want to do the same, I want to help."

Mother Faerie took Daena's hand, sympathy glittered in her eyes as she said, "I understand the unrest you feel. It's in our nature to act as guardians to those in need but it's not safe to leave."

“Why isn’t it safe? I know I’m forbidden to leave but I’ve never been told the reason why. Please, tell me.”

A spell of sadness overcame Mother Faerie as she decided to share the truth with Daena. She hoped the truth would expel the young faerie’s desire for the outside world. Mother Faerie floated around Daena as she told her tale.

“The world changed and it became a dangerous place for faeries, and as the world changed, so did the children. They no longer had any need for our magic. We decided it would be safer for all faeries to remain behind our walls.”

“But that was centuries ago!” Daena said. “Perhaps the world has changed again and there are children waiting for our aid. I could go and...”

“Certainly not! I forbid it,” Mother Faerie tapped her staff on the ground like she was announcing a proclamation. “I won’t risk the life of a faerie just so you can quench your curiosity.”

Daena held back her tears. Mother Faerie held an arm around her,

“I understand. I was like you once. I wondered and yearned for the world outside but you must accept the truth, the world has changed and we have to change too. Use your wonderful wings and your marvellous magic for the good of our kind. Your desires will ease away soon, I promise.”

Mother Faerie smiled and Daena smiled too until Mother Faerie flew away. Daena wished she could forget her dreams and be like other faeries but she was convinced that this dream and desire would never leave her.

That night as Daena watched the fireflies and listened to the songs of the forest, she knew she had to go to the human world. Even if it was only for a day. In one, single day, she could see the world for herself and finally silence her whispering temptations. If she were able to help one child, she knew that one good deed would make her content forever.

So, that’s exactly what Daena did. Before the sun rose, she flew through the land of the faeries and made it to the border. She didn’t even glance back to say farewell. Daena knew she would be back before anyone noticed she was gone.

Spreading her wings, she soared over the walls and through the veil, within an instant she felt the fresh wind breathe upon her face and she flew into a bright blue sky. She did not dare blink; she did not want to miss a thing.

Tears streamed down her cheeks as she gazed at the green fields, the trees, the rivers, the paths and the houses.

She had seen old drawings by faeries, depicting what the human world looked like but those drawings now looked amateur in comparison to the grand world she saw around her. There were some things she did not recognise, such as, strange metal towers and long, ugly lines hanging through the air which seemed to crackle like the beginning of a thunderstorm.

Daena flew for almost three hours before she remembered her purpose. At the next house she found, she glided down and landed on a painted fence.

Playing in the garden, surrounded by wooden toys, was a small boy. Daena watched him. He was certainly different than the pictures she had seen before. His cheeks were round, pinkish in colour, his belly bulged out the sides of his pants and his hair was cleanly combed. From his height, he was probably seven, eight or nine. Daena tried to guess. He grinned as he played with a toy soldier. He held it up in the air like it was flying.

As Daena sat, perched on the fence, she wondered if there was anything more she could do for the boy. He already seemed happy and content. She was about to fly again when she decided to fly over to the boy. She wasn’t sure how far it would be

until she found another child. It would be a shame to not at least say hello and see if there was anything she could do to help him.

She landed on top of a tulip, straightened her clothes, tidied her hair and cleared her throat. This was her first meeting with a human, she wanted this moment to be perfect.

“Hi,” Daena said, aloud. “Hello, child.”

The boy did not turn around. Daena guessed he had not heard her. He laughed as he threw the toy soldier up into the air. It hit the ground with a loud thud. The soldier’s arm landed a few feet away. Daena grimaced at the soldier’s scratched and faded face, its smile was almost gone.

Daena looked at the child. This time she spoke louder, making sure she was heard.

“Excuse me? Hello! Hello, there.”

The boy stopped playing and slowly turned his head. He looked around the garden, confused. He failed to see Daena standing on the flower. She giggled, lightly.

“I’m down here.” Daena waved, she smiled as the boy looked down. While the boy stared at her, utterly confused and slightly afraid, Daena’s heart swelled with warmth. She could not believe she was talking to a child. A real, human child.

“What are you?” The boy demanded. Any fear had now disappeared.

“My name is Daena. I’m a faerie,” Daena curtsied, politely.

“A fairy?” The boy scoffed, “Fairies don’t exist. They are made up stories for little kids.”

Daena smiled. She wanted to tell him he was only a little kid too but she thought against it, she didn’t want to upset him. Instead, she said,

“If they are made up, then why am I standing here? I am as real as you are.”

“Really?” The boy crossed his arms as he frowned. “Maybe I’m asleep and this is all a dream.”

Daena did not really know what to say to that. She presumed all children knew faeries were real, she never expected she would have to persuade them otherwise. The boy wiped his nose on his sleeve and mumbled,

“Mum says things are only real if you can touch them. That’s why the monster under my bed isn’t real. If I touch you, I can see if you’re real or not.”

Daena shifted uncomfortably, the boy was so much bigger than her, she did not like the idea of being poked or prodded but if it persuaded the boy, she was real, it would be a temporary discomfort.

“Very well,” Daena nodded.

So, the faerie reached out her hand. The boy stared at her for a moment then lifted his arm and pressed the tip of his chubby finger against her hand. Daena smiled as the boy’s eyes widened and so did his smile. His face was alight with wonder and amazement.

“You really are real!”

“Yes,” Daena laughed. “I really am.”

The boy chuckled, “Wow! This is amazing!”

Before Daena could say another word, the boy snatched her from the tulip. Daena froze with terror, his fat fingers squeezed around her body.

“Please! Let me go, you’re hurting me,” Daena squeaked, tears fell down her cheeks.

The boy suddenly opened his hand and Daena collapsed onto his palm.

“I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to hurt you,” the boy watched her worriedly. “I only wanted to have a closer look.”

“It’s fine,” Daena gasped, her entire body ached but she knew he didn’t mean to cause any harm. She stretched her wings, the boy had bent them accidentally. Her precious wings slowly returned to their natural shape. She stood up and smiled, “See, no harm done.”

“Those are beautiful,” the boy gaped at her wings.

“Thank you.” Daena blushed, she was proud of her wings, they were her constant companion. A faerie’s wings made it possible to soar through the sky and venture to different worlds. Like a bird, a faerie’s life depended on their wings. Without wings, a faerie would just be a tiny speck in a vast, dangerous world.

“Can I touch them?” The boy asked and before Daena could even respond, he reached for her wings. Daena leaped out of the way and pressed her wings against her back.

“No,” Daena said firmly. “You cannot touch my wings. They are fragile and precious to me. A faerie only ever has one pair of wings, if I lose them even my magic cannot bring them back.”

“Okay, fine,” the boy sulked.

While he pulled his hand away, his eyes remained fixed on Daena’s wings. She tried to ignore it.

Remember, he’s only a child, she said to herself.

Standing on his palm, Daena looked up at the little boy and said,

“I have travelled many miles with a single hope, to make a single child’s wish come true. Is there anything I can do for you?”

“You can make any of my wishes come true?” The boy asked.

“Yes, indeed,” Daena nodded. “If you are hungry, I can summon food. If you want to be smarter, I can improve your intelligence. Anything you wish.”

“Anything?”

Daena nodded.

“So...” the boy pressed his lips together. “If I wanted to have your wings, could I wish for them?”

Daena flinched, she took a step back on the boy’s hand, “Well, no. They are my wings. I need them to go home.”

“But you said, I could wish for anything I wanted,” the boy glared at her.

“You can wish for anything else,” Daena said, nervously. “Look, I can bring you the bestest cake you’ve ever eaten. I can give you the bestest clothes or perhaps I can...”

“I don’t want any of that,” the boy snapped. “I want your wings.”

“No!” Daena was surprised by the anger in her tone. This wasn’t how it was supposed to play out at all. She said, “I’ve already told you, you can’t have them.”

Before Daena could react, the boy grabbed her wings and hauled her body up into the air. Her wings flapped and struggled like a fly caught in a web.

“I said, I want your wings!” The boy yelled as he tore Daena’s wings off her back.

Bones snapped, flesh tore and blood spurted out. Daena did not scream but something inside her did. The boy let her fall down into the cold, harsh grass. She lay still, not moving, barely breathing. The toy soldier, the boy had thrown earlier, seemed to stare into her eyes with a familiar broken emptiness.

The boy ignored Daena as he gazed and prodded at her wings, he murmured, “They’re so pretty.”

Suddenly the wings cracked and shattered into thousands of glittering pieces. Daena watched as the shards fell into the grass. The wings she had worn since her birth were gone. She would never be able to fly again. She would never be able to soar

beside the birds. She would never be able to go back home. The last thought burned her spirit.

“Oh, no!” The boy screeched, “I broke them.”

He stamped his feet and cursed, saying words, inappropriate for any child. As he suffered his tantrum, Daena watched the wind drift through the grass, carrying the tiny shards of her wings away until nothing remained.

Nothing.

Absolutely nothing.

Daena struggled to her knees, her body felt cold but something terrible burned inside her. Something truly terrible, something she had never felt before. It burned her heart. It burned her eyes. It burned everything. She thought the grass would set alight if she were not careful.

“It’s not fair,” the boy spluttered as he kicked the ground.

As Daena slowly rose to her feet, the boy snapped,

“I want another pair of wings!”

“I already told you,” Daena’s voice was soft, surprisingly no anger or frustration was there. “A faerie can only ever have one pair of wings in their lifetime and you broke mine.”

The boy swore and crossed his arms madly. His furious features softened as he realised, “That didn’t count as my wish so I still have one wish to use, right?”

“Of course, child,” Daena said, she lifted her head, her eyes gleamed with an unnatural violet, “Tell me your deepest wish and I’ll give it to you.”

The boy closed his eyes and thought about it, if he only had one wish, he had to think carefully.

“I’ve got it!” The boy said, triumphantly. “I don’t want to be afraid of the dark anymore. At night, I have to sleep with Mum and Dad because I’m so scared. I want to wish my fear away.”

“That sounds like a terrible fear,” Daena said, she stood straight, wincing in pain. “Do you know that most fears gradually disappear when you have to face them every day?”

“I don’t want to face mine every day,” the boy piped. “I want it gone now.”

“Very well,” Daena smiled, “But first, I must tell you one thing.”

“What’s that?”

“As a faerie, I must make your chosen wish come true. It’s the rule. However, I can decide exactly how your wish will play out.”

“Yeah, so what?”

Daena chuckled, her body shuddered slightly, “Are you sure, you don’t want to be afraid of the dark anymore?”

“Yes! That’s my wish. Are you deaf, faerie?”

Daena smirked, she beckoned him closer. “Because you took my wings away, I can’t reach you. Please kneel and lean down towards me.”

The boy knelt and lowered his head, he asked,

“Like this?”

“That’s perfect. I can reach you perfectly from here,” Daena grinned. “Now, I’ll make your wish come true.”

With a flash of magic, a needle appeared in Daena’s hand. She stabbed each of the boy’s eyes, plucking them out and throwing them into the grass. The boy shrieked, clutching his empty sockets as blood dribbled down his cheeks and chin.

“Why?!” He screamed, hysterically. “Why did you do this?”

“You didn’t want to be afraid of the dark anymore,” Daena said coolly, she wiped the blood off the needle. “If you live every day in the dark, your fear will eventually dissolve. In time, you will no longer be afraid.”

“You took my eyes!” He wailed. “You took my eyes!”

“Yes, I did,” Daena scowled. “You should be careful what you wish for, little boy.”

By the time the boy’s parents ran outside to see what all the fuss was about, Daena had limped to the fence. She passed one of the boy’s bloody eyes and nudged it down a hole. She hoped it would make a tasty snack for a pest.

She watched the parents try to comfort the boy whose eyes were lost. Now, Daena understood why faeries never travelled out anymore. In centuries past, children appreciated the appearance of a kind faerie. Faeries could cure their hunger, loneliness or misery. The world had changed and it seemed as though children did not suffer such ailments anymore. Instead they possessed an insatiable greed. A greed that had cost Daena everything.

Without her wings, Daena knew she would never be able to return home. It was doubtful she would ever see another faerie again. She was trapped here.

She closed her eyes and accepted her fate. If she was going to be trapped in the human world forever, she would simply have to remind children that faeries were to be respected, or they would have to be taught a lesson.



Oh, Red, Look How Big You've Grown

Everyone knows the tale of Little Red Riding Hood. The story about a kind and gentle girl who travelled through the woods to visit her sick grandmother. During her innocent journey, she was stopped by a foul wolf called The Big Bad Wolf.

The wicked wolf could have gobbled her up there and then but he cunningly decided to overtake Little Red and reach her grandmother's house first.

When he arrived, he ate the old woman in one bite and he put on her favourite nightgown, hoping to play a sinister trick on the girl who would shortly follow. When Little Red arrived, she quickly saw through the wolf's disguise but before she could shout for help, the Big Bad Wolf gobbled her up too.

Luckily for Little Red and her grandmother, a huntsman happened to be walking by. The heroic huntsman killed the bad wolf and, miraculously, the little girl and her gran climbed out of the creature's belly unharmed.

Ten years after Little Red Riding Hood was almost eaten by the dreaded wolf, she had grown into a kind, young woman. She still wore a red cloak and people still preferred to call her Red rather than her birth name.

Despite her awful and near-death experience a decade earlier, Red continued to travel through the woods to visit her grandmother. In fact, every day, no matter the weather.

On one particularly cold day, Red entered the cottage, her wet crimson cloak clung to her shivering skin.

"Morning, Grandmother," Red called.

"Good morning, dear," Grandmother smiled warmly as she sat by the fire with her knitting. "Be careful, you're dripping water on the floor."

"I'm sorry! I'll clean it up."

"It doesn't matter, dear. I only mentioned it because I didn't want you to slip and fall. With my bad back, if I tried to help, we'd both fall down." Grandmother chortled cheerfully to herself.

Red smiled, her grandmother hadn't changed at all. She took off her boots and cloak, and put them by the fire to dry. Then she mopped the rain spatter on the floor.

"Did you sleep well?" Red asked.

"Not really," Grandmother tried to make herself comfortable in her chair. The seven cushions did not seem to help. The old woman sighed, "My pains are giving me a lot of bother. Don't worry. I imagine they will pass soon."

Since she was gobbled up by the Big Bad Wolf, Grandmother's health had only declined. Red had faced the same terrible ordeal but people presumed her young heart had helped her to recover quickly.

In the last couple of years, her grandmother had barely been able to rise from her bed without help. Her cottage had become a prison and only Red made the effort to venture into the woods to help her.

As Grandmother continued knitting, Red started the day's chores. She made her grandmother's breakfast, tended to the fire, dusted the house and washed all the dirty laundry. She also baked a meat and vegetable pie for her grandmother's lunch and dinner.

When all the jobs were done, Red attended to her grandmother. She helped her into the bath, dressed her into some fresh clothes and then half-carried her back to the armchair. Red sat on a stool and massaged her grandmother's swollen foot. Along with her other pains and aches, Grandmother also had gout.

Red and Grandmother talked for hours. Red talked about the latest news from home while her grandmother shared some of her old stories. The two were laughing by the time the sun was turning the sky crimson.

"Red, there is something I must speak to you about," Grandmother said. Her tone was rather serious. "I have been working on my will."

"Gran, I don't want to talk about wills," Red avoided her gaze. "Can we please talk about something less somber?"

"I know it's not a happy topic but you're not a little girl anymore," Grandmother smiled. "I hope you weren't expecting to be looking after an old hag forever."

Grandmother put her knitting needles aside and held her granddaughter's hands.

"You have done so much for me over the years. Your kindness has kept this old heart beating far longer than it should have." Red smiled, tears filled her eyes as Grandmother continued, "In my will, I chose you to inherit my home and everything inside. After everything you've done, I thought it was a worthy reward."

Red could not quite believe what she was hearing. Many people believed Red would be the one to inherit but she had never let herself believe the rumours. She was so touched, honoured, her grandmother had chosen her.

"Oh, Gran..." Red began but Grandmother raised her hand. She had not finished.

"But I've decided to change my will. You've spent so many years in this house because of me, I would hate for it to be an anchor on your life. You have so much potential. I would not want you to waste your life here. I am going to leave my cottage to the forest. The animals and faeries can use it as they wish."

Red lost her voice, she stayed quiet for a few seconds before she finally smiled.

"I understand, Grandmother. I am happy with whatever you choose. After all, I would not have spent these years caring for you if I didn't care." Red squeezed her grandmother's wrinkled hands, "I think the forest would be honoured to receive such a splendid gift."

"Thank you, my dear. I have many other treasures to give you in my will. I'm sure they will help you start a new life anywhere you choose."

"Thank you, Gran." Red rose, "I will brew us a new pot of tea but please can we talk about happier things?"

"As you wish," Grandmother chuckled. She smiled, glowing with pride as she watched her granddaughter prepare the tea. She was so thankful to have Red in her life.

Red stayed a little while longer with her grandmother until the disappearing sun beckoned her to start the trip home. She made sure her grandmother had everything she needed, bade her farewell and then left the cottage.

Red knew the path well. She had walked it thousands of times but this time, something made her uneasy. She could not tell what it was that caused her to feel so on edge.

Perhaps only five hundred steps from her gran's cottage, Red was sure she heard something. She stopped and listened. Every sound, the tweeting of birds, the rustling leaves, the whistling wind, everything sounded rather sinister.

Suddenly, Red heard it. The sound you never want to hear when standing alone in the middle of the woods.

Heavy footsteps.

She knew these weren't the heavy footsteps of a heavy man. They belonged to something bigger. Something feral.

Her heart seemed to slow as she looked around. She pulled her red cloak around her like a protective shield.

Suddenly, a large wolf prowled slowly across the path. His thick, dark fur barely concealed the muscles beneath. The wolf seemed to not notice Red at all as he walked by. Red tried to retreat backwards, she did not want to give him a chance to notice her.

A very unhelpful twig snapped beneath her boot.

The wolf's ears flicked in her direction and so did his yellow eyes. He rose onto his hind legs, he stood nearly three meters tall. He reached into a small hard pouch from a belt around his waist, took out a pair of small glasses and put them on his snout. The grey hairs colouring his jaw twitched as he grinned.

"Is that you, Little Red Riding Hood?" The wolf gasped. "My eyes might not be as bright as they once were but I'd recognise your cloak anywhere."

"It cannot be possible." Red's breathing was short. She feared she might faint from fright, she managed to ask, "Are you the Big Bad Wolf?"

"Me? Oh, no." The wolf shook his head, "That was my brother. We do look alike but apart from that we have nothing more in common." He blinked at Red through his spectacles, "Do you not remember me? My name is Henry. We have met before."

Red started to remember the wolf called Henry. After news spread about the Big Bad Wolf and his demise, Henry called on Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother to apologise for his brother's evil deeds.

While the Big Bad Wolf preyed on any poor folk he prowled upon, Henry was a scholar, more interested in putting his snout in a book than a carcass. Even though Red knew Henry was harmless, she could not forget the fact he was a wolf. Everyone knew what wolves were capable of.

"Yes. I remember you, Henry," said Red. She anxiously stepped aside, eager to carry on home. Henry gazed at her with his large wolfish eyes.

"The last time I saw you, you were no larger than a cherub! What do they call you now? Or are you still Little Red Riding Hood?"

"A name like Little Red Riding Hood is hard to forget. Some people think I'm still the same little girl," Red said, slightly irritated. It was true, she was almost eighteen and many people still treated her like an infant.

"It's such an innocent name," the wolf nodded. He looked over her shoulder to the path leading towards her grandmother's. "I hear you visit your grandmother daily. It must be tiresome work."

"Not at all. I love my grandmother's company," Red said.

"Well, if you ever want to take a day off, I would be happy to help," Henry said. Red watched his eyes behind those small spectacles. They remained in the direction of her grandmother's house for far too long.

"I think it would be inappropriate," Red said. "Especially with your brother's history."

"Oh, I'm sorry," the wolf grimaced as he realised how wrong it would be. "But if there is anything I could do to help you, please let me know. It's the least I can do."

"Thank you," Red bowed her head politely.

She watched the wolf drop onto his four paws and prowl towards the darkness of the woods. He gave another fleeting glance towards grandmother's house before finally trotting away.

Red did not move. Even though Henry the Wolf seemed sincere and didn't act particularly wolfish, there was something bothering Red. She wondered whether she should return to her grandmother's house just to make sure the old woman was safe. Red shook her head; she knew she was being paranoid. Her grandmother's door was firmly locked and Red was sure Henry was nothing like his brother.

So, without any further delay, she ran all the way home.

When Henry the Wolf opened his eyes, he could not quite believe where he was. The last he remembered was being in his den. He was sprinkling pepper on his stew and reading a journal about astronomy when soldiers barged through the door and clouted his head.

Now, his body was wrapped in cruel chains. Henry whined in agony as he was dragged along the rough ground towards a clearing in the forest. It was still night, the moon was only beginning its descent. Animals and townsfolk stood around him, glaring at him like he was a despicable monster.

Without his glasses, Henry struggled to see his surroundings clearly but his fantastic sense of smell helped him figure out where he was. He was in the Judge's Circle. Many creatures and folk had died here, after the swift stroke of justice. Henry could see the judges and he knew, without a doubt, he was the one on trial.

An owl wearing a wig and cloak sat as the head judge, he hooted, "Henry the Wolf, you are accused of a terrible crime," he snapped his beak. "Murder."

The crowd murmured between themselves. Henry could not believe it. He had never murdered a man or beast. The owl drawled on,

"You've been accused of the brutal murder of Sera Forrest. Little Red Riding Hood's grandmother."

Henry's jaw fell open, he wanted to retch.

"I'm not guilty!" Henry howled. "Not guilty!"

"The accused claims he's not guilty," the owl ruffled his feathers, he looked to his fellow judges, a badger, a hare, a goose and a field mouse. "May the trial commence."

Henry looked into the heckling crowd, some of the creatures and townsfolk present had once claimed to be his friends but the way they cursed him, he doubted they would admit it. The owl bashed his gavel.

"Order!" He commanded. Once the crowd was silent, he began,

"Yesterday in the late hours, the woman we all know as Grandmother was found dead in her cottage. Her body ripped into pieces. Only the claws of a beast could cause such dreadful harm." The owl pointed his gavel at Henry, "A witness claims they saw you near Grandmother's house before nightfall. Bring forth the witness!"

"I was never there!" Henry cried, "I'm innocent. I have done no crime."

Nobody listened to him. A soldier, holding his chain, bashed Henry's face. The wolf winced, blood filled his nose and his vision fought against the darkness.

The crowd parted and a young woman wearing a red cloak stepped forward. Red's bright cloak burned through Henry's dark vision.

"Little Red Riding Hood," the owl screeched. "Tell us, dear. Tell us what you saw."

Red stood with her hood low over her face, she slowly brought it down. Her skin was ghost white and her eyes red from the tears she had cried. She sniffed, her lips quivered as she glanced at Henry. She avoided his gaze. Henry knew the girl was terrified, she thought he was a murderer.

“I-I-I...” Red paused and wiped away a fallen tear with her cloak, “While I was travelling home after seeing my grandmother, the wolf crossed my path. We spoke a little. I was afraid at first because he looked very much like his brother the Big Bad Wolf.”

The crowd whispered among themselves. The fact that the wolves were brothers was not common knowledge. It seemed some of the judges did not know either. Henry did not want to be associated with such a terrible creature. He bit his tongue, he promised himself he would be fine, he was on trial for a crime, not for who his sibling was.

“I thought Henry seemed like a kind wolf,” Red continued. “After he left, I set off home, thinking my gran was tucked up and safe in her cottage but I worried for her safety, so I went back.”

Red covered her mouth with a trembling hand as she wept. A red squirrel scampered forward and gave her a tiny handkerchief, barely big enough to dry a single tear. Red took it politely and patted her cheeks. Owl hooted softly,

“Red, please continue.”

“Yes, yes, of course,” Red murmured. “So, I went back to my grandmother’s house. The front door was wide open. Her comfortable chair had been torn to shreds. When I went to her bedroom, I found... I found...” Red cried, tears fell again. “My dear, old grandmother was dead, in her bed, in pieces!”

The crowd gasped in horror. A pheasant collapsed from fear.

“I think I either fainted or blacked out but when I came to, I found this upon her remains.” Red reached into her cloak and brought out a clump of dark fur. Hair exactly the same colour as Henry’s. Animals from the crowd stepped forward to sniff the hair in her hands.

“Yes, that is indeed wolf fur!” A duck quacked. Other animals nodded in agreement.

Henry couldn’t believe it. Wolf hair could be found anywhere. There must have been another reason why hair was found in the cottage. The blood clogging Henry’s nose made it impossible for him to smell the fur from a distance. As a wolf, his sense of smell was greater than any of the other animals but nobody was interested in hearing his opinion.

The owl and the other judges talked quietly until the owl finally looked at Henry with his sharp tawny eyes.

“The evidence is damning. Only a wolf could cause the damage that we saw and the fur proves you were at the scene of the crime, Henry. It seems you and the Big Bad Wolf have more in common than we thought. Do you have anything to say?”

Henry wheezed, his ribs tightened around his lungs. He was innocent. Innocent! Then Henry remembered, he cried,

“My friend Fox! I saw him after the sun fell. He can support my whereabouts and prove that I wasn’t at Grandmother’s house. He can prove I’m not guilty.”

“A fox!” The goose judge honked.

“How can we trust what a fox has to say?” The badger judge snarled.

“Foxes are the very definition of sly,” the hare judge cried.

The field mouse judge squeaked as mice are obviously incapable of words.

“This is unfair!” Henry howled. Before he could utter another word, a gag was forced into his jaws.

The owl spread his wings, he had come to a decision. He snapped his beak together.

“From the evidence and witness testimony, it is clear to me that a wolf will always be a wolf. It does not matter if he is a scholar or a gentleman, for beneath the mask, a wolf’s nature remains the same.” The owl glared down at Henry, “Oh, how I’m disappointed with you, Henry. I thought you were more.”

Tears filled Henry’s eyes, he wanted to scream his innocence but the gag held him silent.

“The court finds you guilty, Wolf. The only suitable sentence is death.”

Henry cried as the crowd called for his head. Through his tears, Henry saw his executioner. It was the huntsman, the same huntsman who had killed his brother. As the man sharpened his axe, Henry noticed Red approaching the judges.

“Please sirs, may I speak to the wolf? I wish to speak to him before justice takes him.”

“Of course, Little Red,” the owl hooted. “But, be careful.”

The crowd stepped back to give Red some time with the wolf. Henry couldn’t move, the chains were relentless. He could not draw his eyes away from the huntsman’s axe. In a few minutes, he knew it would be dripping with his blood.

“I am sorry this had to happen to you, Henry,” Red whispered, she wiped away his tears with her hand. “You appear to be a kind and considerate wolf but at the end of the day, you’re still a wolf.”

Henry watched Red as she softly scratched the white hairs around his jaws.

“I didn’t have much choice, you see,” Red said, her gaze did not flicker from his. “The old woman was going to take everything I had worked so hard for.”

“Why else would I spend every day tending to her? I knew she intended to give me her most prized possessions in her will. Then suddenly, she decides to take it all away from me. She thought she was being kind.” Red scoffed, “So, I had to do something about it.”

Henry stared at her, he could not believe what he was hearing. Red leaned in closer, her breath made his ears twitch.

“You did say, if there was anything you could do to help me, all I had to do was ask,” Red smiled. “I’m sorry, I didn’t ask beforehand but there was not a lot of time. I thought you would be happy to help.”

At that moment, Henry smelled it.

Blood.

The smell clung to Red’s cloak. The scent of soap tried to hide it but it could not trick Henry’s extraordinary nose. Of course, Red’s red cloak concealed the stains.

“Again, I am sorry, Henry,” Red pulled back. “Just know, your death will be swift. If the huntsman is as skilled as he was killing your brother, I am sure you will feel no pain.”

Against his better nature, Henry lunged for Red. The gag stopped his snarl but everyone heard the growl rattling in his throat. Red cried, she stumbled back as the soldiers leapt upon Henry. They dragged him towards the chopping block.

Henry watched Red hide her smile beneath the collar of her scarlet cloak. His fury died as Henry realised there was no point in fighting. Why? Because to everyone he was nothing better than the Big Bad Wolf. Nobody would believe a wolf over such an innocent and gentle girl like Little Red Riding Hood.

And with that final despairing thought, the wolf lost his head.

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