

Snow White - A retelling

What color is the forest floor? Green, you might say, from ferns and moss and saplings. Green like trees, and leaves, and stalks of flowers. Yet no, the forest floor is brown, covered in dead pine needles and cracked cliffs, in strange mushrooms and dead leaves, and the small critters and creatures of the forest leave but rustles, pine cones and bones the size of your fingernail behind. Watch your step, for the ground is treacherous; here a sinkhole the size of your foot, there a long-forgotten root of a tree long ago fallen.

But you are, of course, right, there is green also. The green ferns push through the ground in legions of hundreds, spindly arms reaching for the light. Moss, and algae, and lichen cover the cracks in the rocks. New leaves sprout in spring, and trembling saplings line the path.

And in this forest, a young girl takes her first steps; her pale eyes and skin milky, her long dark hair wet from the dew, sparkling in the golden sun that filters through the treetops far above. Her mother watches over her from the shade of the blood maple, hair just as dark, skin just as light, and red lips that cover sharp teeth drawn into a soft smile, but neither understands that they are both about to fall prey to the hungry gaze of a man.

The man in question is a king, handsome but burdened by his unhappy marriage to a woman who cannot give him an heir. He has ventured into the wild of the forest for it is the last vestige of the Old Kingdom, and it needs to be tamed to assert his rule of the realm. But as he watches the slender figure of the mother, brow unburdened and milky skin glimmering in the sun, he devises a plan. He will divorce his queen in all but law, and take this woman as his new wife. And, should she not give him heirs, he will call the child in the clearing his own.

And so it happened. The king's first wife cried and begged, but he went through with his plans. The child he called Snow White, for her skin never darkened in the sun, and her eyes remained a misty white. She was a silent child, and not even the death of her mother in childbirth brought tears to her eyes.

The king grew distant and cold, his old wife unable to bring him solace. The only thing that brought him joy was watching the little Snow White play, and in time her lips grew red and plump like her mother's.

The queen first grew jealous and then concerned, for she could see the hunger grow in his eyes, and his desire was written plain as day in her scrying glass.

One day, when the girl was but twelve years old, she went beyond the castle walls to walk through the forest. And on her walk she came across the queen and the royal huntress. The girl's lips curled into a wicked smile, for she had caught her step-mother kissing the huntress, and they had never got along.

But the queen opened herself up to the little girl and told of the loveless marriage, and the reason she had wed the king in the first place; she is a witch descended from the old folks, desperate to protect her people. The king, in his grab for power, raided her people's treasures, and among them was a magical scrying glass, a mirror the size of her palm, so smooth it shows more than the truth. Like all artefacts of ancient magics it is both a blessing and a curse, for it reveals the most coveted desire of others. The queen keeps it on her person, for were it to fall in the king's hands, he could tell her plans.

So she presents Snow White with the mirror, speaking her king's name, and she can see what he wishes. It is vile, and violent, and Snow White's smile fades in fear, for she cannot see a way to escape becoming his bride.

The queen tells her to run, deep into the forest, to appear as if she's dead; and she does. She runs as fast as she can, deeper and deeper into the forest. The further into the forest she runs, the larger the trees, the larger the ferns, the larger the strange mushrooms and bones of critters long gone.

But the forest floor is treacherous, and so, she falls into a hole. When she wakes, she's surrounded by seven dwarves. They are suspicious of her fine garb and prod at her tightly braided hair, but when she opens her eyes they recognize her as one of the old folks. They carry her to their home and nurse her back to health.

In the meanwhile, the king does not believe her truly gone, and threatens to burn the forest down to find his young bride. The queen grows cold with worry, for if the king goes through with burning the forest, the last source of magic is gone from the kingdom. So the queen looks into her forbidden tomes of magic for a way to trick the king. She finds a secret draught of sleep made from apple kernels, but it comes at a cost; only true love's kiss would wake the sleeper.

She brews the potion, and laces it across an apple to hide it in plain sight. And she rides, day and night, to reach the girl. She disguises herself as an old woman, but the girl's milky eyes see through her disguise at once, grateful for the reunion. But the queen's words worry her.

And once again, the girl listens to her, silent as ever, and she takes the apple that her step-mother offers her. The moment she takes a bite of it she falls down, as if dead.

The king is beside himself with grief and anger once word reaches him, and he vows to kill the old woman who stole his young bride from him. Ruthless and twisted cruel by his grief, he once again orders the burning of the forest to punish the dwarves who let the object of his desire come to harm, but the queen pleads and begs him not to burn it down. She confesses to knowing what ails the girl, and that a true love's kiss will wake her up.

And the king pales, but then grows confident, for surely, his kiss will wake the girl. He has her brought to the castle. He presses his lips roughly to hers, but nothing happens. She remains pale and cold, her lips drained of colour. And his wrath turns on the queen, and she's thrown in the dungeon.

And so it goes. The king grows anxious and grey with longing, but he has no way to wake the girl. And every night for weeks on end, the queen looks into her scrying glass, seeing his desire fade. And every day she watches from the small window of the dungeon how the forest burns, acre upon acre.

Until one day, his desire has changed. For the king has now set his eyes on the royal huntress, watching her walks on the castle grounds with hungry eyes. The queen vows to flee the dungeon, raging with anger. For

in her lonely years, she has taken the huntress as her lover. And she will not surrender her heart without a fight.

What she does not know is that the huntress is no prey, and has in fact been working with the dwarves to rescue the queen. She breaks into the dungeon in the dead of night.

The king approaches them, seething with rage, throws the queen aside. He corners the huntress, blade in hand. And so the queen breaks her precious scrying glass, and slits his throat with one of the shards.

They silently run through the castle, to not alarm the guards, and come across the crystal coffin in which Snow White is kept. The huntress tells the queen to hurry, but she cannot leave the young girl without goodbye.

She kneels beside her sleeping step-daughter, and presses her lips softly to her temple. And at once, her lips grow red again, her milky eyes open.

And so the three flee the castle in the last hour of night, taking the forest path. The huntress has secured them passage on a ship, but the girl shakes her head once they reach the edge of the forest.

And so they leave her in the forest where she was born, hair sparkling with dew in the golden light of dawn, milky skin and eyes white, red, red lips drawn into a soft smile over sharp teeth. And just like that, with but one more rustle of brown dead leaves, one stroke of green ferns, one tremble through red blood maple leaves, she is gone.

The End