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Fairy Godmother

Madison Knoll

"The Fairy"

The trees bent and twisted away. The flora shriveled like dried berries. Creatures scuttled away as the drying grass tried to ignite their tails. A crow trilled, a long musical sound, and landed at the feet of a child. The child themselves stood on a brittle tree branch, their iridescent eyes wide and scanning the forest floor.

"Did you find her, Vel?"

The crow chirped, its black eyes reflecting the child. The child grinned and hopped off the branch to the burnt grass below. They held their arm out and the crow settled itself there.

"Let's go, Vel!"

The cottage was in ruins: some of the stones were missing, many were broken; webbed cracks lined the windows; the wooden door was on its last hinge and was broken in the corners. The grass surrounding the cottage was brown and dead, the trees surrounding the little clearing overbearing and leafless.

The child walked past all of the destruction and knocked roughly on the door. The wood groaned under the force, but it stayed. The crow clucked and the child stuck their tongue out.

"Oh quiet, Vel. It wasn't *that* hard."

A soft shuffle, then squeak of the floorboards alerted them. "She's here!" the child whispered to the crow, eyes wide and bright.

The door creaked open slowly. The child's smile faltered. An old woman stood before them, hunched shoulders and the lavender aura

dwarfing her. Her white hair was pixie-like and shot up in odd directions. Her eyes were a dull green.

Unlike the pictures they had seen, this woman was worn. Her wings reflected as much. They looked like they were shredded, and the feathers had dulled to a washed-out gray instead of the vibrant black they once were.

"How can I help you, child?" Her voice was brittle, raspy.

"I want you to be my teacher!" the child shouted, bowing their head low. They lifted their head to see her motionless.

"...I think you've made a mistake. I am no teacher. The Academy has the finest professors for young fairies like you."

"No! You're the only one that can help me!"

The lavender color surrounding the woman darkened into plum. The child stared in wonder. A sigh passed through the woman, and she shuffled further into the cottage.

The child stood there.

The woman headed towards the kitchen and called over her shoulder: "Come in for some tea. We'll need some refreshments before we talk about this further."

The plum had softened to lavender, and the child's shoulders relaxed. The woman stood at the counter. She picked up the teapot, her wrinkled hands clasped firmly around the handle. She poured tea into the chipped teacup, then poured some into a sturdier teacup. She handed the second one to the child, who took it with a slight bow of the head and sat down on the stool next to her. The woman settled herself into the chair next to the stove and sipped the tea. The child sipped theirs as well.

"Why are you here, child? It's not often that I have visitors. Especially young ones like you."

The child took another scalding sip of the tea, then set the cup on the floor. The floorboards were old and starting to rot.

They straightened and faced the woman. "The Academy won't accept me. They say my magic is too dangerous. But when I heard the

stories about you, I knew I had to come find you. You're the only one that can understand me!"

The woman set her teacup down on the rotting floor. She folded her hands in her lap and said softly, "That may be so, but I will only cause misfortune for you. It's best that you try the Academy again. They are more equipped than I to help you."

The air seemed to still around the child, the blue surrounding them darkening to almost black. The woman looked over in alarm.

"I can't go back." Their voice cracked. "They don't want me there. No one does! This is the only place I can go!"

She rested a hand on the child's shoulder. Her wings spread out, the dull gray feathers changing into an abyss-black. Her wings covered them, sheltering them from the decay and the Academy. The child visibly relaxed, their black aura returning to its natural cerulean.

"They're beautiful." Their voice was barely a whisper. The woman smiled and sat down beside them. Her wings stayed in place. The child watched as her appearance slowly changed as well: the deep wrinkles in her skin softened; the veins weren't as prominent; her pixie hair became white and brown with an ombre effect.

She looked just like the pictures they had seen before searching for her.

She smiled, laugh-lines scrunching her eyes and mouth. "Are you feeling better, child?" Her voice was still raspy and rough.

They nodded, their eyes bright. "How—?"

She looked around her, her eyes widening slightly at her wings. "It seems that my magic was affecting me as well, not just the house."

"What do you mean?"

"My magic is...unique. It reacts with my emotions. For years, it's been tearing apart this forest and house. I never realized that it had affected me this much as well." She looked at the child. "It seems that your magic behaves similarly as well. If that's the case..."

The child bounced up, their iridescent eyes alight. "Does that mean you will teach me?!"

The woman held up a hand. "Please be calm. I haven't said

anything like that. For me to consider teaching you anything requires a test on your part.”

“What? A test?” Their shoulders slumped.

She nodded. “I suppose it’s not quite a ‘test,’ per se, but it’s important that I tell you these tales.”

“Like the Fairy Tales?”

“Yes. However, the tales they teach the children now is not what truly happened. They twisted the stories to fit their needs. You need to hear the truth of them before I teach you anything. So please, listen carefully.”

Cinderella

I remember the first time I saw the child. She was born prematurely, her blonde hair matted, her voice trilling. Her mother, fatigued but bursting with life, had asked me to watch over her daughter should anything happen to her. So, after her death, I watched over her child, Ella, for many years. The girl was painted in so many vibrant colors, just like her mother; her smile shown yellow, her anger a dull pink, her sadness a faint blue. But after her father remarried, the yellow dimmed and the blue grew darker until it overtook her. She was forced into slaving after her stepmother and stepsisters, or else be destitute.

There was little that I could do for her, lest I broke the rules that governs our world and the mortal realm. I could not intervene in her life, no matter how much I wanted to.

I wish I had broken every rule.

The only solace Ella found in that house was the youngest daughter. She pitied Ella, and soon their relationship transformed into something akin to familial love. The daughter would do what she could for Ella, stealing extra rations and scraps of fabric to fix her clothing. She was the only blessing that marriage had given Ella.

There was one night, a month after the child turned sixteen years old. An invitation was sent to the family. The royal family was holding a ball in the prince’s honor, the underlying purpose to find him a bride.

The prince was a lovely mortal: he was so full of life and ambition. He wanted to travel the world, and he reminded me so much of my dear girl. She would have given everything to leave that dreadful house and live freely.

Of course, the stepmother banned Ella from attending, and even had her daughters ruin the poor child's gown. She was in tears, the blue slowly engulfing her. I could no longer stand by and watch that wretched woman destroy her. So, I helped her. I gave her what she would need to attend the ball: a beautiful gown, a carriage, her animal companions as chauffeurs so they could accompany her. I gave her until midnight to enjoy herself, to experience something new and thrilling. She was ecstatic, the blue gone and replaced by a shining yellow. She was truly happy for the first time in years.

I stayed at the manor, waiting and waiting for her to return. The stepmother and daughters returned, and I hid. The wretch dragged Ella in after her. She threw the child down and ripped every last gift I gave her to shreds. She laid there, trembling, taking every hit and venomous word that woman slapped her with.

She refused to cry. I cried for her.

After that, the woman kept Ella confined to her bedroom—now a prison. I could no longer intervene, as my master had learned of what I had done and forbade me from any further contact. He forced me to watch as that sadness darkened to an almost pitch black, swallowing her until she could no longer take it.

Her sister was the one that found her that night. I will never forget the scream that tore through that house, though it is hard to remember if it was hers or mine.

She was the only one to prepare and attend the funeral, the only one to try and seek justice for the girl.

That's what you get for meddling, my master hissed. Your heart will be the death of any mortal that crosses your path.

Zinnia

After Ella's death, I was given a second chance. I was only to be a guardian—watch over the babe, but never to intervene, lest I injure us both. This seemed more like a punishment.

But that's what I did, for years. I was tasked with watching over a young girl, a fairy named Zinnia. She was a part of a tribe of fairies that left for the mortal realm. They were kind people, and very curious about the mortals. This child was no different. A bright, vibrant purple enveloped her, tinged with a hint of green. Her joy was contagious, her smiles bringing light everywhere she went. My broken heart was slowly mended as I watched over her; she was supposed to be the hope this world needed.

As she grew, she slowly learned the cruelties of the world. When she was ten years, a mortal boy had stumbled upon her hidden grove. She was wary at first, as she was taught to be distrustful of strange beings, but his innocence and bright smile relaxed us both, and they fell into an easy friendship.

Years passed. The children grew into tentative teenagers. Love was blossoming between them, and my heart swelled at the thought of Zinnia achieving her happily ever after. Of course, that did not last long.

They were stargazing and picking out their favorite constellations. I was retired in a tree, content, knowing that he would protect dear Zinnia at all costs. Until I heard that blood-curdling scream. The smell of blood filled my nose and I flew instantly to her side. The boy was gone, and so were her wings.

Black and a forest green enveloped her as she cried, her face contorted into absolute despair. I reached for her, to comfort her, but an electric shock passed through my body and I jolted away. Even in her time of need, I was punished for caring.

That black and green cloud followed her as she grew older, colder. She decided that if she was damned for what she was, she would punish those that would wish for her downfall. She cloaked herself in black, hoping to strike fear into anyone that crossed her path. My heart broke

all over again as I watched this young woman, this child, try to protect herself in the only way she knew how.

I've no idea how much time passed. I only knew that I could never leave her side.

Word reached the tribe that a new king was crowned, and he was already expecting his first child. When I heard that news, my stomach churned. It was the boy. He stole Zinnia's wings so he could become king. That had to be it. Why else would he commit such a heinous act on a beloved friend?

Zinnia must have known, too. Her smile, cold and dark as it may have been, disappeared and she bided her time until the birth. When the day came and everyone received an invitation, save for her, she plotted. I tried to send her a sign that what she was planning would be the death of her, that it would end tragically for all involved. She ignored it. The day of the Christening, she cursed the babe, Aurora. On the eve of the child's sixteenth birthday, she would prick her finger and fall into an eternal sleep. I cried, knowing how this would end.

Zinnia watched over the child as she grew. I believe she hoped to see the child's downfall, to see firsthand that boy's—no, that monster's—downfall. But her heart softened, at some point. I think when the babe smiled at her, and only her, did a light break through that black cloud. And as the child aged, from babe to young girl, that cloud dissipated, inch by inch, and it was returning to its vibrant purple.

I felt herself shatter when she could not prevent the girl from pricking her finger. She tried everything to wake the girl—convincing the prince to end the spell, true love's kiss, and when that failed, and when the king ordered for Zinnia's death, she wept by the girl's side. When the knights came to steal her to the guillotine, she kissed the girl's forehead, then willingly let the guards shove her into handcuffs and take her away.

It was when Zinnia's head was on the chopping block that we saw the girl, frazzled and tear-stained, run through the crowd, screaming for Zinnia. When she saw the child, Zinnia's black cloud disappeared. Her purple, her colors, were gone, but she was content. She smiled for the girl, a true smile I hadn't seen in years, before the guillotine dropped.

The girl was inconsolable.

Godmother

"I left my home after that. They were right. I only brought death wherever I went. It's why I live here now, in this rotting cottage. It's why everything around me dies, why my own body is decaying. If I mentor you, you will suffer just as I have and I refuse to do that to you."

They looked at the woman, *the Fairy Godmother*, and said, "But it wasn't your fault. You wanted to help them. You didn't want any of that to happen. You did what you could for them, and honestly, that sounds more like a true Fairy Godmother than any of the others. You were there for the humans and you truly cared for them. You were probably like a mother to them."

The Fairy Godmother smiled and she aged once again. The wrinkles came back, her hair lost its color, her feathers dulled. She retracted her wings, and the cottage was in full view in all of its brokenness.

"I do not know about that," she said softly. She seemed to hunch more than before. "They suffered from my actions. They should have survived; Ella was supposed to leave that wretched house and live freely, like she always wanted. Zinnia was going to change everything—she had such high hopes, and so much love. If I had not been there with my vile magic, they both would have survived. *They all should have survived—*"

She stopped herself, her eyes glassy. The child placed their hand over hers. She took a deep breath, then continued. "I'm sorry. I do not know what came over me. Please, excuse me. I think it is time that I retire for the night. I think it is best if you leave, and do not return. There is nothing good for you here."

The child focused on the Fairy Godmother. They blurted, "Can I come back tomorrow?"

She glared at them. "Child, did you not hear me?"

They puffed their chest. "I don't care if you teach me or not. You're the only one that's cared about what happens to me. Can I please come

back?"

A long silence stretched between them. They eyed each other, the child's tiny wings fluttering every so often. Eventually, she heaved a sigh.

"Do as you wish. You will not listen to me anyway."

The child brightened and threw their arms around her. "Thank you! Thank you so much!"

The Fairy Godmother's body stiffened, but after a moment, she returned the hug. "Of course, child. Just be safe. Please."

The Letters

After the child left, I went to the fireplace and knelt on the cold floorboards. I brushed my hand against the bricks until one moved slightly under my palm. I pulled the brick out, and two letters—pristine despite their age—fell. I picked them up, my hands trembling. I struggled to my feet, then sat down at my desk. I carefully opened the envelopes, taking care not to crinkle or tear the rich parchment. The curling script of Ella's and rigid script of Zinnia's letters were so familiar. Even a slight glance at the letters forced emotions to rush through me.

A heavy sob reverberated in my chest as my hands trembled fiercely. I forced myself to read the words:

Dear Godmother,

Thank you so much for everything that you did for me. You gifted me a night of pure bliss; I met the most amazing people, and I will be forever thankful for that. I know you couldn't do much for me, and I saw the pain that it caused you. I'm sorry I worried you so much, and I'm so sorry for the pain that I am going to cause you now. I can't live in this house anymore, but I don't see a way out. This is the only way. I am so, so sorry. Please know that I have always loved you, and I always will.

Your goddaughter,

Ella

Tears settled on the parchment, and when I waved my hand, the

stains disappeared. I gently set aside Ella's letter, then took a deep breath. I unfolded the second letter, my heart pounding painfully in my chest. The tears were already gathering, and I had to steady myself. I took a deep breath.

Dearest Godmother,

We have never met, but I know you, dear Godmother. You were there, watching over me since I was born. I could always feel a warm presence, one that made me feel safe. Thank you for that. I truly believe that if you were not there in my darkest years, I would not have survived this long. Thank you so much for all that you did for me. I know how the laws are. Please, do not blame yourself for my death. I know that it is imminent, and it is my choice to go along. I wish I did not have to leave Aurora and you, but I think it's time for all this hatred to end. Know this: even without your physical presence, knowing that you were watching over me and caring for me all these years was comforting. Thank you for your love.
Zinnia

The tears spilled down, and I covered my mouth to stifle the sobs. How could they care about me so much? All I did was bring them misery and was the catalyst for their deaths. If they had never been exposed to my magic, they would still be alive—

I bit into my lip. The child's words played through my mind. Is this what they would have wanted me to do? Read their letters and continue blaming myself? They said they loved me, that I was a safe place for them. That even if I could not do anything, they still felt a kind of peace. They were such vibrant, genuine women. It was not in their nature to lie, especially to an invisible entity.

I folded their letters gently and slid them back into the envelopes. Those women were so—are so precious to me. Even being the Fairy of Death, they felt peace around me. They loved me, just as I loved them. I just never realized it. I smoothed the letters into place, then shut the drawer gently.

Ella, Zinnia...

Please know, I have always, and will always love you both. Give me strength to guide this child into a happier life, like what we had always deserved.

***Madison Knoll** is a second-year English masters graduate student. She plans on pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing in the future while working on her current project, which is also inspired by fairy tales.*