

Under The Leafen Sky

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Teresa stood at the edge of the forest staring up at the overnourished sycamore trees. Tales had been told about those woods, hideous tales of goblins, ogres, witches, and even worse, damp underbrush that somehow always got your socks wet.

On the horizon night looked to be coming fast, and it seemed as if night had already arrived under the forest canopy. But she knew she had to go in to get her son back. So letting out the tension she held in her chest she stepped through the breach.

She stepped suddenly from an open village on the plains into a whole other world, just hidden away behind the tree line. Here the wind shifted the sky, a sky made of dark leaves, each leaf singing a song as it rustled against its brother. The ground was spongy and thick with grass and fallen leaves.

She only took a moment to admire the sheer amount of beauty that shone through even under the cover of dark before shaking her head and continuing on her quest. Gradually, but quickly, the fear that was ripped away returned to her, squeezing her chest and ribs. And as the fear returned it came back with a mix of sorrow.

Why had he wandered off? Her boy must be so scared and lost. Had she done something wrong? His clothes wouldnt keep him warm enough throughout the night. Or did he just get lost while playing?

Her father's sword bounced gently against her leg with every step, giving her mind something to latch onto. The forest darkened into blue as she journeyed deeper until orange light pierced the leaves and peeked around tree trunks.

She crouched and began stepping more carefully. She crept closer and closer to the light source, keeping in the shadow of trees. She smelled smoke, a campfire. Finally, as the light conquered the forest around her she saw who'd made the fire. Goblins.

Three little creatures sat on rocks around a campfire eating some type of cooked fowl. Each had grass colored skin, and huge bulbous noses hung off their faces flanked by sharp red eyes; their mouths revealed needle-like teeth as they chomped down, open

mouthed, on legs and wings. Some blood dribbled from the edge of their mouths, Teresa saw from a discarded leg that they had not cooked the bird all the way through.

The goblins had two tents set up and a clothes rack their boots sat under and their helms hung on. They still had most of their armor on. They all had chainmail legs, though unfastened, however the rest of their armor was less uniform. They wore a mismatch of boiled leather, tattered gambeson, some chainmail, and one even had a plate shoulder piece (he also happened to be the meanest looking of the three.)

“Ey, Glet, whatcha figure is creepin out there?” Asked the second smallest goblin to the goblin whose chainmail pants were unfastened.

Glet responded, “Whaddaya mean?”

“Oh y’know, like what creepy crawlies dooya think are in there.” The second smallest pointed his crooked finger into the woods, close enough to Teresas location to make her think she’d got caught.

Glet rubbed his chin, “well, we aint evah been out this far, but I can betcha there ahre wolves.”

The second smallest one nodded, “you know what, I bet there are also giant spiders.”

The mean looking goblin snorted.

“Whaddya mean by that!” Spat the second smallest him.

The mean looking one grinned, “That’s why you was named Wrong! Cause you’re wrong! There aint no giant spiderz ‘ere.”

Wrong frowned, “well how was I s’posed to know that! We aint evah been out this far.”

“You lot havent been out this far but I ‘ave. Been out ‘ere loads of times.”

“Why’s that?” Asked Glet.

“Yeah.” Reinforced Wrong

“Well, if you ‘ave to know-”

Absorbed in the story, Teresa leaned closer. Suddenly a stick cracked under her foot. The Goblins all shot up, Wrong pulled out a dagger while Glet clutched the spear laying next to him.

“Oo’s There?” barked the mean looking one.

What should she do? She looked around. Maybe she could just sneak away and they’d think she was an animal.

“You bettah come out! Or we’ll come’a lookin for ya.” Announced the mean-looking one as he looked in a different direction. So they didn’t know where she was. An idea came to mind that made her grin.

“Wait, we don't have to actually do we?” asked Wrong.

“Yes yoo idiot yah doo!” Snarled the mean one.

Teresa jumbled her hair into a big red mess then grabbed the branch and held it under her foot. She then let out the highest cackle she could muster, “Ehehehe!” then snapped the log. The wind apparently caught on to her plan and blew at the fire, almost killing it.

Wrong and Glet screamed, “Witch! Witch!” then took off into the woods.

The mean one stepped back with terror plastered on his face. He opened his mouth to command his comrades to come back, but then Teresa leaned around the tree. The fire caught back up and illuminated her hair, she stared at the goblin unblinkingly with a manic smile. He tripped over himself as he bolted into the dark woods.

The smile faded from her face as she fell against a tree for support. Good thing she was a redhead.

She leaned there for a good time, looking at the camp while her heart recovered. Then she pushed herself back up and decided to continue on before the goblins came back and realized she was not a witch.

After making it a considerable distance away from the goblin camp she put her hand up to her mouth and yelled, "Niko! Niko!" She went on like this for a good time, yelling out her son's name and waiting, only for there to be no response. Then just beyond her view she saw big eyes.

Big yellow eyes hovered just below the canopy line gazing down at her. As her hand shot for her sword a club near the size of a tree trunk swung just in front of her, smashing into a tree.

She leapt back, holding her sword in front of her as an ogre stepped into sight. It was massive, It was massive, not only being nearly double her height, but hugely fat. Its pot belly sagged freely with no shirt to hide it. The ogre swung again, she just barely hopped out of the way.

"Shut your big mouth!" yelled the Ogre.

Offended, she puffed her chest at the ogre, "No!" Immediately regretting her decision she dove forward to get out of the way of another blow.

"I'm tryna sleep, you-" The ogre's eyes widened as it finally took a good look at her, "Witch! You're a witch!" It backed away and pointed its club at her, "Now don't you cast no magiks on me! I've lived in these woods for years, the trees'll get upset if you do anything to me."

"Look here mister, uh, Ogre, I'm looking for my-" She stopped choosing her words more carefully, "A boy, have you seen any human boys come through here?"

"Uh, come to think of it-" The Ogre paused, "what am I gettin out of tellin you?"

She raised her sword at him, "Don't make me-"

“Hey hey, I’ll tell you where he went.” The ogre raised its hands in a sign of forfeit. “C’mon, this way.”

With great caution and reluctance she followed. The Ogre led her through the trees to a cave. The cave had a huge gaping mouth, far taller than tall enough for even the Ogre to walk through.

“I saw him brought through here,” said the Ogre.

“Yeah. Welp, I brought you where he went, now you can leave me alone.”

She stopped him as he turned, “Actually, come with me.”

“What!” It roared. “Can’t a witch handle herself?”

“I can, but I’m, uh, new to this forest. It would be nice to have a guide.”

The Ogre frowned, “Cruel witch! Fine!” Then stormed into the cave. She grinned then followed him in, hopping over a small pool.

The cave's ceiling hid behind a thick layer of moss that reached down. On the moss hung small droplets of water that Teresa swore she could see it sucking up. But when the ogre moved a large curtain of the stuff, bats flew off in a cloud, screeching and shooting towards the night sky.

“What a cave.” she muttered.

“Well it isnt a cave really.” commented the Ogre.

“What do you mean?” She asked.

“It’s more a pass, y’know, it’s a tunnel that cuts through the low mountains, leads into the deep forest.”

“The deep forest-”

“Yeh, where all witches come from. I thought.” There was just a hint of suspicion in the Ogre voice.

“Oh well, no, not all witches I suppose. What’s your name?”

“Batuhan.” He answered.

“Nice name.” After that they fell silent.

The cave fell dreadfully dark and Teresa took to navigating by listening to Batuhan’s footsteps. After a while of walking through the dark a light caught her eye. Through the darkness a red glow drifted to her from her right. She turned to see the light coming from a tunnel, something about it was mesmerizing.

“Hey, Batuhan, stop here for a moment.” Without bothering to check if he had, she went off into the tunnel.

The tunnel went a few feet into the wall then took a sharp right turn where there stood a yellow circular door. It was just barely cracked open to let a blinding amount of red light pour through the crack. When she pushed it open however the light seemed to even out and became gentle for her eyes.

It was a cozy little hovel, with a fireplace and a kitchen tucked away to the right behind an entirely clay counter, and to the left side of the room an old lady sat in a rocking chair over a cauldron.

Mist rose from the cauldron and drifted to her, gliding over her nose and eyes and into her ears. It whispered to her, beckoning her toward the couch in front of the fireplace. She drew nearer and the fire began to lose color. As she drew nearer, the fire began to lose color, growing more dull with each step. When she was almost sitting on the couch, it was nearly black.

Who was she? She’d forgotten all about her life or how she got here, but she felt good. There was a tingling all over her now and her saliva was warm, the spot just above her stomach tightened as she went to sit. But as she did a humongous hand flashed from the door and grabbed her.

Her senses came back and she saw behind the old woman a wall of jars on shelves. In the jars were manners of terrible things, flames begging to die, tiny demons dancing and cheering and cackling, muffled wails of roots shaped like human babies, to name a few.

Batuhan yanked her out of the witches lair, running as fast as possible away. “I thought you were a witch! Witches don't get mesmerized!”

“Well I never said I was one!” said Teresa as moss smacked her in the face.

Ahead moonlight, that before seemed so faint and now seemed so bright, raced toward them as they burst out of the cave. Batuhan ran a bit longer then finally stopped in a glade and set her down.

“I should eat you!” Batuhan loomed menacingly over her, frankly looking quite mad.

She stepped back a few paces then drew her sword.

Batuhan sighed, “Bah! I’ll just leave you to go back through yourself!” Then stormed off into the woods.

Filled with relief Teresa slid her dad's sword back into its scabbard. She took a moment to look around the glade. It wasn't large, just a small clearing, but at its center was a tree where pomegranates drowsily hung. She would have said the night turned their dark peel even darker but that simply was not the case, light from thousands of stars from above glimmered on their surface. The white light brought the magenta in their peels out more than the warm yellow sun ever could.

And as she looked to the source of this light all the fear from her encounter in the cave washed away, as the sublime beauty of the night sky poured into her eyes. It had been a long while since she'd been up late enough to see the sky in its full splendor, but even then she didn't remember it being this glorious.

As her face seemed to be locked in a smile, at the corner of her vision she saw something enter the clearing. She leapt away from it and once again drew her sword. Though when she saw who it was she almost dropped her sword. It was her son!

She bolted towards him, relieved to the point of tears that he was safe. But then she stopped. A dark figure stalked the tree line behind her son. She readied her sword then screamed, “Who are you?”

A deep, oily voice spoke from all around her, oozing out of the black shadows of the trees, “Oh don’t you remember me, Teresa dear?”

She could almost feel the words glide over her skin, “Symon.” The name leaked out of her mouth like poison.

“Ah ah, you do.”

“Give me back my son!” She growled.

“Oh Teresa, you know how important he is.”

She kept her sword aimed at his form, “Symon, leave me and my son alone.”

“My son.’ It takes two to make a child dear.”

“So help me God.” She stepped towards Symon, ready to run him through.

“Please.” He raised one hand for her to stop.

“Don't you cast any spells on me!”

“You know I wouldn't think of doing that.” He stepped forward enough for her to see his shadowed face.

She glanced at her son, his eyes were shut and his face relaxed. “Wake him up!” She commanded.

Symon didn’t speak.

“Please I just want my boy.” Teresa begged.

“Very well.” Symon waved his hand and her son woke up. He looked around confused then ran over to Teresa as he saw her.

“Oh Niko.” She hugged him harder than she’d ever hugged him before.

Her head snapped back to Symon. Ready to curse him to death she was taken aback when she saw him looking down at Niko sadly. Without saying a word he turned and left the glade.

Her eyes lingered a bit on the spot he had been then jumped down to Niko, “Did he hurt you?”

“No. We were playing a game, then I fell asleep, then I woke up here. We never finished the game.”

“Oh thank goodness. Alright c’mon, we gotta get home.” She stood up, leading him by the hand through the cave tunnel then out of the woods then across the fields back to their home.

