

Snow White Gets Her Say

chris
Wind



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Magenta

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“Snow White Gets Her Say” is available in print as part of chris wind’s *Satellites Out of Orbit* (2nd edition), titled “And We All”.

* *Satellites Out of Orbit* contains the four books listed above it as well as this book.

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Gretel

We read fables in school to teach us a lesson. And we read fairy tales at bedtime to put us asleep. And indeed they do: especially those of us, a full half of the human species, who are lulled lower and lower into a semi-conscious state by their lessons.

Remember “Hansel and Gretel”? The one about a little boy and a little girl. Who was me. Not particularly proud of it, but there you go. I didn’t write the story. I didn’t intend those lessons.

That, first, women are deceitful. There are two women in the story, the stepmother and the witch. And both of them lie to us. When Hansel and I are taken into the forest to be left there to die, my stepmother says “We’ll come back for you.” And later, when we meet the witch, she assures us she will “do us no harm”. But of course they didn’t and she did. Both women used deceit to achieve their goals.

That, second, women aren’t very intelligent. It was my stepmother’s idea that a good solution to the food shortage was to leave us in the forest. Why not kill and eat the pigeon or the cat first? Why not hunt for squirrels and rabbits? The witch, as well, wasn’t too brilliant when she climbed into the oven to give a little demonstration.

That, third, little boys are competent and resourceful (and therefore can, and do, take care of little girls, like me). The first time we were taken into the forest, it was Hansel who thought to unravel a spool of thread behind us so we could find our way back. The second time, again he planned for our survival, leaving a trail of crumbs to mark our path. Clever though this was, he didn’t think about the birds, who ate the crumbs. I was quite resigned to our fate; it was Hansel who refused to give up so easily. Well, as you know, we found our way to a house, but it belonged to the witch and she locked Hansel in a cage. Still using his head, he held out a bone instead of his finger each time she checked to see if he was fat enough to eat.

However, if you’ve read the story, you’ll know that, notwithstanding this glowing portrait of my brother, *I’m* the real hero: it was *my* cleverness that saved us. You’ll remember that the witch told me to creep into the oven to see if it was hot enough to bake the bread. I knew, of course, that she was going to slam the door shut and bake me instead. So, I said, ever so sweetly, “I do not know how I am to do it, how do I get in?” You know the rest, I’m sure: she showed me, I shut the door on her, and then I rescued Hansel and together we escaped.

What bothers me is that I had to be clever in *that* way. To this day, I resent having had to resort to that ‘dumb blond’ ploy. To begin with, because it’s just that—a ploy, a disguise, a deceit; and it teaches us that pretence is our best method of operation. So we pretend to be something we’re not to get what we want, be it life, love, whatever. But more than that, I resent the ploy because it teaches us that for a woman, ignorance is valuable: it is her defence, her weapon, her salvation.

Why is that so dangerous a lesson, since my ignorance really is just a ploy, and not genuine? Because habits of behaviour become habits of thought which become habits of belief. If I spend most of my life acting like I’m stupid, people will think that I am. And then it’s just a short step to actually becoming what people already believe I am.

But if we wake up, we all will live ever after.

[Appendix entry for "Gretel"](#)

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Cinderella

Poor little Cinderella! Who more deserving of finding her prince and turning into a princess! Yeah, right.

First off, Cinderella did *not* have to do all the hardest work in the house. Our stepfather was a man of rank, remember, and my mother no peasant; we had fine rooms and beautiful clothes, and status enough to be invited to the King's ball. So we certainly had maids and servants to scrub the floors and wash the dishes. Cinderella *offered* to help with the work. Probably because she had nothing else to do; she didn't seem interested in much besides pleasing people. Drove me crazy.

And she did *not* have to sleep "in a straw bed in a poor room at the top of the house". Think her father would put up with that? Certainly not. She had a perfectly good bedroom just like the rest of us.

The story goes that my sister and I were proud. True enough. What's wrong with that? What's wrong with being proud of what you can do, of what you've worked hard to learn well? All those gorgeous clothes people kept talking about were of my sister's making—she was into fashion design. And as for me, well, it was known I could ride a horse to win most competitions in the land. So sure we were proud. But vain? Yes, we spent a lot of time in front of that full-length mirror: my sister had to see the effect of her creations (and so I suppose she's as vain as one gets in that line of work), and as a favour, especially on days too wet or too cold for the horses to be out, I often modeled her half-finished pieces for her. But that's it. I wasn't even good-looking, by contemporary standards, no peaches and cream in my complexion!

And it's true, Cinderella wasn't invited to the ball. But only because the King thought she was too young. And we certainly didn't snub her like you think. We called her into our rooms and asked her for advice on our clothes, to make her feel part of the excitement. She liked that, you know how younger sisters are, she wanted to iron this and mend that—we even let her do our hair.

But we *never* called her Cinder-wench, or actually, even, Cinderella. Her nickname was Kinderella (little child), and somehow the 'K' must have gotten changed to a 'C'.

As for what happened at the ball, that's true too. She was very beautiful, our new little stepsister, we never denied that. And when beauty and wealth come together, most people fall over themselves like asses. Those at the ball were no different: to them, appearance is everything. My sister was stunned by Cinderella's gown, and she gawked, it's true. But out of professional interest, not jealousy as most people think. I wasn't jealous either—I just wanted to ride one of those impressive silver stallions she came with.

And as for that bit about the yellow dress, the story goes that Cinderella asked my sister if she could borrow it to wear at the next ball, and my sister said no way. Well, I don't know, that might've happened, I wasn't there. That yellow dress is one of her favourites, one of the first dresses she made. But I think that if my sister *had* said no, she would've offered another instead. Then again, Cinderella's tone can be so sweet and self-effacing sometimes, I can imagine my sister saying no out of sheer irritation and leaving it at that.

The rest of the story is pretty much accurate. All three of us went to the second ball, Cinderella forgot about her curfew, lost her slipper on the way out, and—there is one thing I want to set straight: I did *not* try on the glass slipper. Quite apart from the fact that I didn't want to marry that prince (or any prince, or anyone at all, actually)—a glass slipper? You've got to be kidding, that'd be worse than wearing high heels! Not only would it make walking difficult, but with the obvious risk of broken glass, cutting, embedding, it would discourage movement altogether. No thank you!

(But as I said to Cinderella, if the shoe fits, wear it.)

(And we *all* will live happily ever after.)

[Appendix entry for "Cinderella"](#)

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The youngest princess
(c/o The Enchanted Pig)

My story's pretty much the way it's been told. Except—remember how every night the pig turned into a man? Well they got that backwards.

[Appendix entry for “The youngest princess”](#)

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Little Red Riding Hood

Once upon a time, I went to visit my grandmother. She'd been mugged recently on her way to sell herbs at her streetcorner stall—some guy wrenched the knapsack right off her back. She wasn't hurt—not physically; she was just a bit disconcerted and low on confidence—at fifty-eight she didn't see herself at all as a little old lady (probably wouldn't at sixty-eight or seventy-eight either), so the attack kind of threw her. I tried to convince her that the same thing could have happened as easily to a man of fifty-eight, but neither of us was fooled for a minute—because it just wouldn't have.

Anyway, there I was, around suppertime, making my way through the park, to the other side where she lived. I always came this way, instead of staying on the streets; it was a short cut, and I like the relative quiet and dark.

Sure enough, suddenly this guy is walking along beside me.

"Hi," he says, in a friendly voice, relaxed, hands in his pocket.

"Hi." It is so sad that I have to suspect every guy who approaches me.

"Didn't your mother ever tell you not to talk to strangers?" He grins.

"Yeah," I answer. "And I've always wondered how many neat people she therefore missed meeting."

He doesn't say anything.

"Besides, not talking to strangers doesn't seem to stop them from attacking you." There, I've put it out in the open.

He looks at me then, as we keep walking. "Yeah, aren't you afraid to be walking alone at night through here?"

"Afraid of what?"

"Well, of some guy attacking you!" His hands lift out to vaguely gesture.

"What are you suggesting, that I always walk with a buddy, come out only when it's light, and stay out of parks for the rest of my life?"

"Well, walking with a buddy isn't a bad idea." He pauses and slows to turn toward me. "If you want, I could walk with you—"

"You're offering to escort me?" I ask.

"Yeah," he smiles, putting his hands back into his pockets.

"But you just finished telling me I should be *afraid* of men, so why should I—"

"Well—" he laughs nervously, and turns to resume our pace.

"Seems to me," I continue, looking ahead, "if *men* are dangerous, then *they* should be restricted. Maybe *you* shouldn't be allowed in the park, at night, unguarded." I look at him.

He casts his eyes down, at the ground ahead of our steps. He is uncomfortable now. I turn away again and continue.

"Look, if there's a good reason to be afraid, then yes I'll be afraid. And I'll deal with the fear, not run away from it." I stop and confront him then. "Should I be afraid now? Here? Of you?"

He looks at me then looks away. "No," he says and just stands there, as I keep walking, alone, in the quiet, in the dark.

Bitch. First she thinks I'm going to attack her, then slaps me in the face when I make a perfectly decent offer to walk with her. Who the hell does she think she is, pretending

not to be afraid? Doesn't even know what's good for her. Serves her right—I warned her. She's out here alone at night, she's asking for it. And she knows it too, she could've stayed on the street where it's safe.

About a hundred yards from the end, there's a drinking fountain. He's waiting there for me—as I expected.

“Listen, I'm sorry,” he falls into step beside me. “Back there, I didn't mean to be rude—”

“You weren't. It's okay.” Shit.

“That's a nice red sweater,” he tries again to apologize. I look at him like he's crazy. “It's a sweatshirt,” I say. “It has a hood. Sweaters don't have hoods,” I add.

He tries to explain then. “It's just that, well, you know, I was raised to be polite to girls, you know, open their doors, look after them—and I just didn't want you to get hurt, that's all—” He's nervous.

“Yeah, okay, it's alright, alright? No hard feelings.” Go away, please.

“Look, here's a short cut,” he says, as if he were making a final peace offering. “This path here—” he nudges me toward an overgrown path. *Come on babe, we'll have a good time. Don't fight it, you don't stand a chance. I'm bigger than you and—*

“No, it's not. That path stops just after it turns.” I call him on it, facing him.

That caught him by surprise and his first blow was a bit off the mark, easy to deflect. I retaliated with a quick kick to his shin. For a second I saw the incredible pain and anger on his face—I wondered if it was from the blow to his shin or to his ego—and his next hit caught me right on. I fell to my knees, the wind knocked out of me. He dragged me up, his arm around my neck. I found my feet—and a knife at my throat. As I lifted my foot to crash down onto his instep, I felt a dull thud and he fell away from me. I turned to see my grandmother, her leg rebounding from the blow to his kidneys. He had twisted and was staggering to stay up, the knife still in his hand. My grandmother's hand sliced down to his collarbone, my foot shot out to his kneecap. We heard two distinct snaps, and he collapsed into a heap.

We fell to each other's hug. Grinning and crying, we babbled, are you alright, yes are you alright, yes, I went to my stall today, was on my way back, saw the struggle from the gateway, I was coming to visit you, how are you, I have some cake and butter, you never buy butter—I found my knapsack on the ground a few yards away, she groped for the knife and put it in with her unsold herbs. And we started to walk home, feeling strong, and safe.

(Who the hell needs the green archer? After all, he might have saved me—for himself. And, really, if Peter can do it, hell, if three little pigs can do it—then we can too.)

[Appendix entry for “Little Red Riding Hood”](#)

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Snow White

I just *told* you who I am! Why are you standin' there smilin' like I'm on somethin'? Don't you give me that look. I am *sober* and I sure as hell know my own name.

The story goes she was "as white as the snow, as red as the blood, and as black as the ebony window frame". It doesn't say what was white, and what was black. Well as you can see, my skin sure is black. As coal, honey. And my teeth—well they's as white as snow, dontcha think? And since I'm standin' here in this station talkin' to you, I don't need to tell you what part of me is red. On the streets they call me Rosebud. (You thought what? That that was Sleeping Beauty's other name? Well it doesn't surprise me, we got a lot in common, her and me.)

Yeah, yeah, I know what you thought. But what else does a runaway girl do to survive? Especially if she's coloured. There are some lucky enough to be called domestics. The rest of us, well we're called a whole lotta names.

According to the records, nothin! I was maid, mother, *and* mistress! Everything every man wants in a woman. They *all* want someone to clean their house, make their dinner, and wash their underwear; look after their health, and take care o' their hearts; and then suck this, stroke that, and open up there. Nothin' but pick up, pat away, and put out. But smile while you're doin' it, honey, oh yeah, we *gotta* have that service with a smile. Otherwise they might get the idea that you don't like what you're doin', that just maybe they're 'forcing' you. And why that might ruin their sleep at night, y'know?

Let me tell you, *every* man's a dwarf expectin' us to make 'em a giant. That's what we *do*. How's that for a 'job description'? (Kinda fits *every* woman, doesn't it?) And I'm not just talkin' physical. Sure, there *is* that, why do you think there's so many stories 'bout young girls having to kiss ugly things—Beauty and the Beast, The Frog Prince, The Enchanted Pig—it's great 'career training'. (Though a lot of the time Little Dick stays little no matter what we do. Don' bother me none.) But there's *more* to it than that. We also flatter the man, we listen to him, we obey him—those are the other 'essential job skills'. An' we learn this real quick, see, on account of we get in shit every time we listen to a *woman* because god knows most of them are witches or wicked stepmothers—my own story shows that plain enough!

What? You mean you didn't know the prince was a pimp? Oh come on. He took one look at me and offered to *buy* me! What does that sound like to you? (Good thing I came to when I did, ain't no tellin' what he woulda had done to me comatose—)

So why did I choose to go with him? Sugar, one of these days we're going to have to discuss your understanding of 'choice'. For now, let's just say that bein' in the employ of one man is a helluva lot easier than answerin' to seven.

Hell no, why should I call *him* for bail? I left him long ago, he was just a means to an end, that's all. I'm in business for myself now.

'Course I can take care of it, I belong to a union just like you. We got us a bail fund, don't you worry 'bout it.

What is it you're whinin' about now? The moral of the story's all changed? Well, that depends on what you look at. The way I see it, Snow White is all about resurrection. Always was. Ain't no mistake, the phoenix is female! Three times I rose against the odds of death. The corset and comb sure enough was gonna kill us, but we lived through it—

we bust the whalebone and tossed out the tiara! And we learned. What we found out with each bite of that apple was 'bout enough to make us lie down and die. And maybe for a while some of us did. But hell, I'm here ain't I? And honey, let me tell you, I will live ever after!

[Appendix entry for "Snow White"](#)

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Alice

There was once a fisherman who lived with his wife in a ditch, close by the sea-side. (His wife's name was Alice.) The fisherman used to go out all day long a-fishing (maybe that's why they lived in a ditch); and one day, as he sat (on his ass) on the shore with his rod (his rod?—uh-huh—maybe that explains why he liked fishing so much), looking at the shining water and watching his line, all of a sudden his float was dragged away deep under the sea; and in drawing it up he pulled a great fish out of the water.

The fish said to him, "Pray let me live: I am not a real fish; I am an enchanted prince." (Of course.) (No, wait a minute: 'And now *you*, fisherman, must kiss every one of my slimy scales so that I can turn back into the handsome noble prince that I am'—nah, nah, your turn.) (Wait, there's more: 'And then we will marry and the whole kingdom will burn us alive for being faggots...' No? Alright, let's go on.) "And since I am a prince, put me in the water again, and let me go."

"Oh," said the man, "you need not make so many words about the matter; I wish to have nothing to do with a fish that can talk; so swim away as soon as you please."

Then he put him back into the water, and the fish darted straight down to the bottom, leaving a long streak of blood behind him.

Then the fisherman went home to his wife (Alice) in the ditch.

"Husband," said the woman (said Alice), "have you caught nothing today?" ('Again?')

"No," said the man, "I did catch a flounder, who said he was an enchanted prince, so I let him go again."

('You what?!') "Did you not ask for anything first?" said the woman (Alice).

"No," said the man, "what should I wish for?"

('What should you wish for? You don't know? We've been living in a ditch—a *ditch*—for twenty years—and you don't know what to ask for?!') "Ah," said the woman (Alice!), "it is surely hard to have to live in this little ditch; do go back and tell him we want to have a small cottage. He will certainly give us that."

The fisherman did not much like the business; however, he went to the sea, and when he came there the water looked all yellow and green (that he had just pissed into it may have had something to do with this). And he stood at the water's edge, and said:

"Oh man of the sea!

Come listen to me,

For Alice my wife

The plague of my life,

Hath sent me to beg a boon of thee!"

Then the fish came swimming to him, and said, "Well, what does she want?"

"Ah," answered the fisherman, "my wife says that when I had caught you, I ought to have wished for something before I let you go again; she does not like living any longer in the ditch (can't for the life of me figure out why, suits *me* fine), and she wants a little cottage."

"Go home, then," said the fish, "she is in the cottage already."

So the man went home, and saw Alice (!) standing at the door of the cottage.

"So what do you think—nice, eh?" she asked her husband (him).

“It’s alright,” he said, as he grabbed a beer and sat down to watch the game.

She went into her new kitchen and started peeling the potatoes. And as she did so, she began thinking (no, this isn’t the magic part). Here I am thirty-five years old, it’s nice to finally have something to show for it. When I think back of all the work I’ve done—I’ve *earned* a cottage. No—she kept thinking back—I’ve earned a *castle*!

She got a pencil and a pad of paper (forget the potatoes) and began to figure. I’ve looked after four kids (they’re all gone now—she married at fifteen, and that’s about the age they took off—), that’s eight hours a day at—how much does a childcare worker get paid?—and then time-and-a-half and overtime to make 24 hours a day, times 365, times 15. And I taught them (kids who live in ditches don’t go to school)—how much does a teacher make?—let’s say six years of that, no, eight, I think they got as far as grade eight, and then job training, I spent at least two years with each of them to get so they could *do* something. Okay, now what else? Twenty years of housekeeping—how much does a maid charge per household per month?—times 12, times 20. And cooking, no before that, gardening—or shall I call it farming?—I’ll average the two wages—now what would a caterer charge to provide three meals a day to five people (and two dogs, three cats, and—no don’t count them)?—times 365, times 20. And part-time nurse, part-time psychiatrist—that’s a big one. What else? Oh, sexual services—that much for twenty minutes?—times, times, oh my god—

“Husband, I should like to have a very large stone castle to live in, with central heating, and plumbing, and electricity, and a hot tub, so go to the fish again...”

It was so refreshing to have ambitions—realized. And, well, thirty-five is still young, the kids were gone, and the husband required little tending (the castle came with a big screen tv). She knew what she wanted, and her pencil and pad of paper told her she had the qualifications: experience and expertise in resource management (human and other), communications, health and welfare, education, economics (especially deficit budgeting), defence, and foreign affairs (any interaction with her husband could be counted here)—

“Husband, I should like to be King, so go to—”

And so it was that Alice became King of the land.

One of the first things she did was replace private income with a guaranteed income; everyone henceforth would get paid—she consulted her pad of paper, which was covered with wage figures from her previous calculations—the range was sizable, and puzzling—would get paid ten squishes an hour, and everyone had to work (she looked at her tallies) just eight hours a day. *And* everyone could work at whatever job they wanted.

Well. Amazing things started happening. Most people quit their present job. It seemed a lot were doing what they were doing because they were forced to or because of the money. For instance, almost all of the doctors quit (and a great number of med students). But since the medical schools were immediately flooded with new students (mostly women and people of colour), and the current doctors agreed to continue until replaced, there was no problem. Almost all of the secretaries quit too, but not too many others wanted their jobs, so people in administrative positions had to do their own typing and filing. This slowed down business, considerably, and clientele had to be decreased. But since a lot of people wanted to start their own business, to be their own boss, (interestingly, a lot wanted to be bank managers), there was no shortage of services. So what happened was, for instance, there were ten little banks in a town where there used to be one big one.

There were some who predicted certain problems. “What about the people who don’t work eight hours, the ones who slack off, they still get the income, and that’s not fair!”

“You’re quite right,” Alice answered, “that’s not fair. But people slacked off before too, and still got paid.” And, as it turned out, there were fewer slackers now, because people had chosen to do what they were doing.

“What about the people who want to be something and they just can’t—I mean this idealism thing is great in theory, but face it, not everyone can be what they want.”

“Again, this is true,” Alice replied. “But maybe as soon as they’re given the chance, they’ll realize just what they can and can’t do—people *can* do what they *want* if they *want* to do what they *can*.” And this is exactly what happened. One person had always wanted to be a pilot, but when he was given the chance, when he realized exactly what was involved, what he’d have to learn before even getting into a plane, well, he realized he didn’t really want to be a pilot after all. This happened a lot with jobs that used to pay a lot of money: a lot of people wanted to be lawyers, for instance, but when they were told that they’d be getting (just) ten squishes an hour for it (and that probably any special ‘status’ to the job would then disappear), they changed their minds, no they really didn’t want to study all those statutes and cases for four years. And generally speaking, no one wanted to do what they weren’t very good at, so it all worked out, people *could* do what they wanted.

There were some jobs that no one wanted to do. If the job needed to be done (“No one wants to do waste disposal”), then Alice figured out how many hours per year were needed to get the job done, and then divided that by the number of people in the land, and every one would have to spend that much time at that job during the year. So for the example mentioned, everyone had to spend four hours per year picking up garbage, or driving it to the site, or operating the disposal equipment. Oddly enough, the next year it worked out to be three hours.

And if the job didn’t need to be done (“No one wants to work in the electric toothbrush factory” “Do we need electric toothbrushes?” “No!”), then it just didn’t get done. Production of nuclear weapons came pretty much to a halt this way.

By and large, things worked out. People changed jobs whenever they finished with what they were doing or whenever they got tired of it. Which was nice. And since many changed by ‘trading’ with someone else, there was no problem with job training (they simply told each other what to do and how to do it—people seemed to learn more quickly than they used to) or with the overall balance (which was reached rather quickly).

There were many other things Alice had planned to do as King of the land, but she discovered that after this, none of the other things needed to be done. Somehow, when people were guaranteed a standard of living, which was neither less nor more than everyone else for the same amount of work, and when they spent their time and energy doing what they wanted, well, everyone lived happily ever after!

[Appendix entry for “Alice”](#)

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The Wicked Stepmother

Rumour has it that I was cruel to my stepdaughter, kicked her out of the house, and tried to kill her. All because I was jealous of her beauty. As usual, rumour is somewhat exaggerated. And somewhat incorrect.

I did *not* try to kill her. (However in one case, I did send her away. But not because of the king's decreased attention to me, no, it was because of his increased attention to her—I was trying to protect her).

As for beauty (that is, sexual attractiveness), at my age she'd realize it doesn't last. And if that's all a woman has, well, when she loses that, she loses everything. An old man can keep his wealth; women don't have riches to keep. An old man can keep his title (king, duke, knight, nobleman, priest, minstrel, blacksmith, cobbler); women's titles (whore, madonna, or mother) go when menopause comes. An old man can be a sage; women do have knowledge, but no authority to use it (we become witches, not wise men). So, men have replacements for their sexual potency; women don't. So men remain powerful without sexuality; women don't.

Knowing all of this, I never put much store in sexual attractiveness. So no, I was not jealous of her beauty. If anything, I was jealous of her youth: she had more time to develop other resources, other reasons to be valued and respected.

And so yes, knowing all of this, I insulted her looks, I made fun of her, I was cruel to her: I discouraged her pursuit of beauty, hoping she would then pursue those other resources, those other reasons—those alternatives! Don't you see? To be feminine is to be beautiful; I thought if I denied the beauty, she'd have to redefine the feminine.

(For all of us to live happily ever after.)

[Appendix entry for "The Wicked Stepmother"](#)

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Greystrands

Once upon a time I had pretty little golden locks. Now all I have are grey strands. And as I was walking along one day with my cart full of all of my things—if you didn't take it with you, somebody would steal it—and I had a lot of things people would—well, they'd *kill* for my plastic bags, great big green ones with no tears at all, just a little one in the corner, still keeps you dry though don't you worry, and I've got a big long stick with a nail stuck in the end, one of the city workers fell asleep on the bench next to me one afternoon, you know those old geezers ready to retire that they put on the Parks Sanitation Crew, well that stick sure is good at sticking things, I can't reach down anymore, my back is falling apart, and you miss a lot of good stuff at the bottom of the bins if you can't just reach down and grab it, well, see, now I just poke in my stick, a few times, 'cause my eyes aren't so good these days, and there, I've got it. But do you know what people most want to grab off me? My little black book. That's why I keep it on my person, it's too precious. I have a list, all written down of all the places that give away their leftovers—*good* leftovers—and I've got a star beside the ones that do it without making you feel like a beggar.

What was I saying? Oh yes, I was walking along, feeling right smart in my new rubber boots—yesterday's find—a bit big but if I wear all my socks—and suddenly I smelled this delicious porridge. Now you have to understand that hot food is a real treat for most of us. How are we ever going to make ourselves a hot meal on the streets in our corners—plug in a hot plate to the nearest parking meter?

So I checked my list quick to see if this address was on it. (I forget easy, that's why I've got them written down—it does no good to go the same place three times to ask when they said no the first time, they'll think you're being a pest. They don't realize how easy it is to just forget day to day where you've been. Why I hardly remember where I *am* sometimes). But no, these people weren't on the list, under the yes's or the no's. So I knocked on the door, politely, to ask if they could spare some of their nice hot porridge. No answer. Well, the door was open a bit, so I peeked in. No one there. But I saw the porridge steaming in bowls on the table. Brown sugar in a little dish even. Well I was hungry and so I confess I went straight to it. Serves me right, I burnt the whole roof of my mouth! Ooh, I yelled! Then I laughed! I haven't burnt my mouth since, well since I was a lot younger, but—eating pizza! Yes, that's it, the first slice from a box when it was just delivered... I tried the next bowl—too hot too, darn! But the smallest bowl was cool enough, so I ate it all without another thought. Then I felt awfully sleepy. Again when was the last time I ate so much I got tired? Well I headed for a comfy chair, but then I saw a bedroom—sure enough, there were beds! I mean—oh, this one is too hard—I knew they'd have beds, it's just I haven't slept—this one's too soft—in a bed—but this one is just right—since...

Delivered pizza! Can you believe I was once rich enough—can you believe I once had an address they could deliver it too? So what happened? How did I get from a little apartment on King and Third with flower pots on the balcony and a cat that knew its name and a cup of tea in the afternoons with “Cheers” reruns and Gus snoring in the lazyboy, his pipe fallen into his lap—Gus died. Gus who loved my golden locks, my prince charming for fifty-five years—died. So his pension stopped. And of course, as a

homemaker for most of my life, and a part-time this and that, here and there, I had no pension of my own. The government—well, the government pension is based on how much you earned and how long you worked, so in my case it didn't come to much. The OAS and the GIS together came to about \$450 a month. Well, what do you think my rent was? \$400. That leaves \$50 a month for food and—and some of the pills I was on weren't covered, and there's extra billing every time I—Sure, we had savings, but that was running out. Of course I looked for a cheaper place to live, the shared accommodation column had some pretty good possibilities, but no one wants to live with—There were a couple months I couldn't make rent—Boots got sick once and that cost, and I dropped my glasses and they broke and I had to buy another pair—I can't see at all without them—and I splurged, God knows why, and went to the dentist after all about that pain in my tooth, and, well I was evicted: I found myself out on the street with all of my things (what I had left—by this time it wasn't much, I had sold the radio, the tv of course, and my good set of dishes, things I didn't really need). And then I soon found out that if you have no fixed address, you get no fixed income. The OAS and GIS stopped. I woke up.

I mean these people came back into their house and found this smelly old lady asleep in one of their beds and they woke me up. As soon as I remembered where I was, I got all embarrassed. And then I felt the bed, oh my God, I didn't—I stumbled up, hoping they wouldn't notice, but they'd seen my cart and of course they'd called the hospital already. They apologized, I apologized, I tried just to be on my way, bundling up my big coat trying to hide the holes under the arms, thank you, I'm sorry, I—I couldn't get away, the attendants were there already—Is this a happy ending?

[Appendix entry for “Greystands”](#)

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Catherine

That you don't recognize me by name is but the first of my complaints about my tale. Oh you know *me* alright. I'm the main character—in a tale titled with the name of one of the men in the story. But what's in a name? A lot. Especially if it's a man's name. This man's name is the answer to the question upon which rests the fate of myself and my newborn child. So his name is very powerful, it is very important. My name apparently is not.

Nor is my life. For whether it is to be filled with joy and delight from being with my newborn, or empty with grief and loss from separation is *to be decided by a mere guessing game*.

Nor are my words important. I denied my father's boast. I told the King I most definitely could not spin gold out of straw. But he didn't believe me. Of course not. He chose instead to believe the words of an immature, egotistic, vain *man*. And I suffer the consequences.

The consequences. To pay for my father's ridiculous lie, I lose my sanity, my freedom, and my dignity for three nights—and almost my child, forever. (And one sentence—*one sentence* in the whole tale is devoted to that 'choice', that decision to give up my child in return for my life.)

Because I 'succeeded' on the third night, I was 'rewarded' with marriage to the King. Thus, for all intents and purposes, I also lost my life. Can you imagine what it is like to be married—legally bound to honour and obey until death, and socioeconomically bound with little option but to stay and make the best of it—to a man who didn't believe me, a man who locked me in a room for three nights, a man so greedy that he said three nights in a row he'd kill me unless I did as he wanted? And that was *before* he owned me.

But as the tale says, I am shrewd and clever. And I have learned the force of threat, and the importance of a name—especially if it is male. Proud fathers want very much to pass it on. But *royal* fathers—dear husband, aging Highness, what would happen to your precious lineage if my, your, only son were to suddenly—

Since I am not dead, and am living still...

[Appendix entry for "Catherine"](#)

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The King's Daughter (the one with the frog)

You want to know what part of my story seems to get forgotten? No, besides my name. And besides the fact that I was blackmailed (in return for getting back my ball, he asked to be loved and befriended, to sit beside me at dinner, to eat off my plate, to drink out of my cup, *and* to sleep with me—all for a tiny little ball). Besides all that. You want to know what gets forgotten? The fact that I whipped him against the wall. Yes! Go read it and see for yourself!

Well, he went splat. And that was that.

[Appendix entry for "The King's Daughter"](#)

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Sleeping Beauty

“Is it you, my prince? I have waited for you a long time.” Give me a break! My hundred years were up! It wasn’t his kiss at all. That was just coincidence, an illusion of timing. Isn’t it always? Men rescuing women—it merely looks that way! More often than not, the damsel works through her distress long before the guy even arrives. But not surprisingly, they get—and take—all the credit. The whole idea of men bringing women to consciousness is ludicrous. Who initiated consciousness-raising groups? It’s more like *our* kiss brings *them* to life. Just ask Snow White. It’s womb envy, that’s all, desire and greed for power and control, over birth itself—it’s a creation myth. Waiting for my prince? Sorry. I was just waiting for my time, my sentence, to be up.

Restlessly waiting, I might add. I was getting pretty tired just lying there. Oh I know, that’s what women are supposed to do. We’re supposed to be quiet, we’re supposed to be patient, we’re supposed to be vulnerable. We’re supposed to be gentle, humble, meek, submissive, docile, good-tempered, self-sacrificing, dependent. We’re supposed to be good little girls: perfectly passive. And, of course, we’re supposed to be beautiful—another ‘passive’. Try as we may to improve our looks, generally either you are or you aren’t ‘beautiful’, there’s nothing you can do about it. There’s nothing you can do, period.^[1] Well except sing, and dance, and play an instrument—my ‘gifts’.

And to make sure we *are* what we’re supposed to be, only good little girls get rewarded. But wait just a minute—rewarded? Yes. For a start, with attention. Good little girls don’t get ignored, they get taken seriously. Well, they get taken. Then they get married. Marriage is a reward?^[2] The wedding maybe (odd, that’s all we ever see), but marriage? A husband? Well, the status—The status of Mrs.? And money—*His* money.

Listen, I’ll tell you what the real reward is for being perfectly passive. Or shall I let the Goose Girl tell you? Or Felicia, Rapunzel, Rosette, Mayblossom? Or The Girl Without Hands, the sister of The Twelve Brothers, Bluebeard’s wife? According to the stories, these women are rescued, and then glorified.

Not quite. Not by a long shot. Two were murdered by their husbands (one of them was burned to death); two of them died from their injuries and beatings, and another from starvation; one never did recover her mind from being locked up in the tower so long; and the other two are still helping each other recover their confidence and self-esteem, they were the ones who started up the shelter and crisis line.

No, being a good little girl does not a happy ending make. Just look at what happened to me!

You mean you thought—No! He was an undercover cop. He arrested me for soliciting! Said I was being “provocative, lying there like that, all beautiful, just waiting, teasing, seducing, inviting....” Yes, I explained to him.

But, well, seems if you’re a woman, you don’t have to *do* anything to be guilty.

[1] What really bothers me is after a while (a hundred years?), you believe it. See, that’s what struck me most about the prince. He started through the impenetrable thicket “*not doubting* that he would succeed.” I envy that.^[3]

[2] I never could figure out whether Cinderella *got* the booby prize or *was* the booby prize.

[3] But if you read on, you see that “strangely enough a way seemed to open before him.” Strangely, my ass. Paths are always opening for men. Women not only have to wrangle our way through, we have to do it with our bare hands. My christening gifts did not include a machete.

[Appendix entry for “Sleeping Beauty”](#)

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Thumb

Once upon a time, there was a tiny little person named Thumb. And that tiny little person was me. Most people thought it was unfortunate to be so small—but not me, I didn't mind a bit! There are several advantages to being small—I mean really small, like me.

Webweaving. Not everyone gets to learn straight from the horse's mouth—or rather, the spider's legs. I know all about cobwebs, orbwebs, and sheetwebs; I can tell you when to use a curled thread and when to use a crossed thread or a straight thread; I can describe the important qualities of the different grades of spidersilk; and I know all about radiant lines, spiral lines, parallel lines, and guy lines—in fact, I spend as much time designing as I do weaving. I have one intricate pattern that's very, very beautiful; if it proves to be functional as well, I'm going to enter it into next year's Spinneret festival.

Not only can I webweave, I can webwalk too. The Theridiidae taught me how to step along from one strand to another—like on a tightrope or a balance beam. It's kind of tricky with only one pair of legs, but if I fall, no problem: a web underneath catches me and bounces me about—like a trampoline. Sometimes I fall on purpose because it's so much fun!

What else can I do that big people can't? Well, I can explore the pond for hours in my leafboat. Or if I feel like it, I'll just drift about, lying in the sun. I take dance classes at the Centipede Studio. An ant is teaching me subterranean architecture. And birds take me for rides all the time—a swallow is like a glider, a sparrow is like a small plane, and a hummingbird is kind of like a helicopter.

I have to be careful about the wind (and the rain and the snow), but because I'm so small, I can fit almost anywhere, so I have lots of cozy hideaways. All in all, it's not bad being a tiny little person named Thumb. I've been pretty happy just being me.

That is, until recently. A little while ago, people started getting very concerned about me—and very confused. I got concerned—and confused—too. You see, suddenly my sex was very important: everyone wanted to know if I was a girl or a boy, a man or a woman. So I thought and thought and thought and finally I came up with the reason—marriage! Suddenly my sex had become important because I was expected to get married! And I was expected to marry someone of the other sex! So! You see? They had to figure out what sex I was.

Well, now that I understood, I thought I knew what to do. I simply told them that I had no intention of getting married. I figured then my sex would become irrelevant and everyone would leave me alone. Not so! Some said 'Oh, that proves he's a man—he wants to sow his wild oats first!' Others said 'No, she's one of those stuck-up feminists—they all think they're too good to be a housewife and mother!' Then someone else said 'No, don't you see he's got no time for a wife and kids—he must be someone very important or very intelligent'. I told them none of it was true. But their curiosity grew into anger. 'You must be a lesbian then—and you hate men!' and 'You must be one of those faggots—you don't want to settle down and be responsible like a real man!' I turned away and tried to ignore them. 'If only he were bigger, we could see at a glance', I heard someone say as they finally left. 'Or *she*', someone added.

Things kept getting worse and worse. People kept bothering me with the most

ridiculous strategies. Once a group of them came to ask me if I was pretty or not. I asked them why they wanted to know. They stuttered and mumbled, then one said ‘If you say yes, then you’re a girl!’ ‘And if I say no?’ One laughed and said ‘Well I’d change my mind about proposing!’ Then one of them tried a slightly different approach: ‘Is it important to you—to be pretty?’ I said no. One immediately declared with victory, ‘See—he’s a man!’ but at the same time another stated ‘See, I tell you she’s one of those lesbians, they don’t care how they look!’ They began shouting at each other then, and continued to badger me with questions—what was my complexion like, what was the shape of my face—I finally asked them to leave. As they were doing so, I heard one say ‘She *can*’t be pretty, with a tongue like that’, and another, ‘Speaks his mind, reminds me of my husband, that man.’

Another group pestered my tailor. ‘What kind of clothes does she wear?’ ‘He orders trousers, doesn’t he, never dresses?’ They were told I always wore loose-fitting pants with pockets and loose-fitting tunic tops. The truth only served to irritate them. ‘She must not have a good figure, wants to hide it!’ ‘Typical man—baggy, frowsy clothes.’ ‘No, she *asks* for loose-fitting—don’t you see, only a woman would be attracted by the way loose garments drape and fold over the body.’ ‘Practical dressers, that’s us—you women can’t move, everything’s so tight.’ After a while, someone tried again: ‘What colours?’ My tailor told them. ‘Browns, blues, greens—’ ‘Ah-see!’ ‘—reds, oranges, pinks.’ ‘No—see!’

One time, someone asked what I did for a living. I told them about a few jobs I’d had: feather stylist at a bird salon; assistant at a watch repair shop; social worker for an exterminator business (a humanitarian approach—far superior to fumigating—I simply helped the unwanted tenants relocate); official at the grasshoppers’ high jumping meet. Then I told them what I hoped to be one day: a chief microsurgeon or a pioneer in *petit-pointe*. My answers were clearly not too helpful. They asked then what I did in my spare time. I told them about my dance lessons and my architecture lessons. I told them about exploring the pond and basking in the sun. They went away more frustrated than ever.

Unfortunately, there were a few who didn’t stop at asking. They started telling. Telling me what I should and shouldn’t do. Those who had decided that I was a woman reprimanded me for being overly ambitious, outspoken, bold, arrogant, mixed-up, immature, and irresponsible. Some, however, complimented me on some of the webs I’d woven and encouraged me in my dance lessons. Those who had decided that I was a man accused me of being an underachiever, lazy, a sissy, a coward, mixed-up, immature, and irresponsible. A few, though, had good words to say about my drive and independence, and one even offered to pay for my first year at medical school.

Over the next few months, the people became more and more divided in their opinions. Quite a rivalry developed between those who thought I was a man and those who thought I was a woman. Many let me know that I was responsible for splitting the town into two warring factions.

One day, I found that someone had left a microfilm of the local newspaper for me. That day’s issue featured two stories, written by two of the townspeople: one was called “Thumbelina” and the other was called “Tom Thumb”. I read them both. They were amazing.

The first one was about a tiny little girl. Who was very pretty. (This was mentioned eleven times.) She had a soft and sweet voice. The second one was about a tiny little boy.

Who was very clever. He had sharp and sparkling eyes. Thumbelina was kidnapped twice—first by a toad and later by a cockchafer. Tom Thumb was never taken against his will—he allows himself to be sold so his poor father can get lots of money. The first time, Thumbelina is freed by fish, and the second time, she was eventually abandoned (because all of the other cockchafers thought she was ugly). She sat and cried a lot. Tom Thumb, on the other hand, escapes on his own. Again and again, from several situations. All escapes reveal his cleverness, and, interestingly enough, they all involve his making a noise, his shouting, his crying *out* (instead of just crying). Eventually a mouse takes Thumbelina in (she didn't go looking for the mouse; she was "wandering" and "all at once came across" the mouse's door), and he arranges her salvation through marriage to a rich mole. Thumbelina didn't like the mole at all, so a swallow (whom she had nursed back to life earlier) offered to take her away instead, but she declined—the mouse would be sad if she left, she said. But just as the marriage was about to take place, the swallow reappeared and Thumbelina accepted his rescue this time. The swallow takes her to a tiny king; he proposed, she accepted, and they lived happily ever after. Tom Thumb also lives happily ever after, having eventually found his way home.

When I had finished reading the stories, I realized how very serious the situation had become. The entire town had developed a split personality: not quite a good-bad split, like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, but rather a male-female split. There was clearly a great deal of unhealthy repression going on. Which resulted in grotesque distortions: the only time Thumbelina shows any resourcefulness or intelligence is when she hitched her lily pad to a butterfly, and the only time she wasn't passive was at the very beginning when she passed the time rowing a tulip petal around in a bowl; Tom Thumb shows no remorse at all at having a cow and a wolf killed for his sake (when the cockchafer carries Thumbelina from the lily pad, she worries about whether the butterfly will starve or manage to free himself), and the closest he comes to kindness, gentleness, compassion—indeed, any kind of love—is the initial bargain he consents to, which gives his father money. The polarities were disturbing, to say the least.

But what could I do?

Since we are not dead, and are living still...

[Appendix entry for "Thumb"](#)

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APPENDIX

Alice

Alice is from “The Fisherman and his Wife”. The story begins pretty much how I’ve told it (without the parenthetical comments) (though his wife’s name really was Alice, and he never calls her that to her face). However, starting with the moment he grabs the beer and sits down to watch the game, I’ve changed things a bit: in the original story, she does go on to want a castle instead of a cottage, and then to be king, then to be emperor, then pope, but we are not given much in the way of reasons, and for each desire, the fisherman goes to the fish, makes the request, and is granted the wish. But when she wants to be “lord of the sun and moon”, the fish puts them back into the ditch, and the story ends.

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Catherine

Catherine is the name I’ve given to the woman in “Rumpelstiltskin”. One day a vain and proud miller boasted about his beautiful and clever daughter to the king, telling him that she could spin gold out of straw. The poor maiden denied it, but the king locked her in a room full of straw and insisted that she spin it into gold or else she’d lose her life.

Once in the room, she began to cry; then “a droll-looking little man” appeared and, after hearing her story, offered to do it for her if she’d give him her necklace. When the king returned and saw that the straw had indeed been spun into gold, he locked up the maiden with another roomful of straw. This time she paid the little man with her ring. The third time, the king added the promise of marriage if she succeeded, but she had nothing left with which to pay the little man. He asked for her first child, and having no other option, fearing death if the king returned to find straw and not gold, she agreed.

So she was married to the king, and when her first child was born, the little man came to collect. Appalled, she offered him instead “all the treasures of the Kingdom”—but he wanted the child. Eventually he softened his terms and said that if within three days she could tell him his name, she could keep the child.

For the next two days, she guessed all the names she knew and sent messengers all over the land to gather new ones. Finally, on the third day, a messenger returned with the name ‘Rumpelstiltskin’—which was indeed the little man’s name. She was therefore able to keep her child, and everyone laughed at the little man, Rumpelstiltskin, as he made his way away.

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Cinderella

Angry because Cinderella's sweetness and goodness made her own proud daughters appear the worse, Cinderella's stepmother made her do the hardest work and sleep in a straw bed. But Cinderella did not complain; she helped the two sisters prepare for a ball even as they insulted her. However, as soon as they left, Cinderella began to cry. Her fairy godmother appeared and granted Cinderella her wish to go to the ball, turning a pumpkin into a carriage, six mice into beautiful horses, and Cinderella's shabby clothes into a gown of gold and silver; she also gave Cinderella a pair of glass slippers to wear. There was one condition: if Cinderella didn't return before midnight, all would turn back as they were. So Cinderella went to the ball and all the guests were impressed—especially the king's son, who invited her back to the next evening's ball.

That night, the sisters told Cinderella all about the beautiful, mysterious princess who had been at the ball (they hadn't recognized her), and Cinderella asked one of them if she could borrow her yellow dress to go to the next night's ball to see this princess, but the sister said no.

The next evening, with her fairy godmother's help as before, Cinderella went to the ball—but she forgot the time. Leaving in a terrible rush as the clock struck midnight, she dropped one of the glass slippers. The Prince picked it up and declared that he would marry the person whose foot fit the slipper. Well, all the princesses and duchesses and great ladies, and the two stepsisters, gave it a try—all in vain. But of course, the slipper fit Cinderella perfectly. So she was married to the Prince (and forgave her sisters, taking them to live with her in the palace) and presumably lived happily ever after.

Of interest, in the original story, the slipper was fur, but along the way the word for 'fur' was mistranslated to 'glass'.

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Gretel

In the story "Hansel and Gretel", two children are taken into the forest by their father and stepmother, to be left to die because there is not enough food to feed them; this solution is the stepmother's idea, and her "We'll come back for you" was simply a lie. The story unfolds exactly as I've described it—the spool of thread, the breadcrumbs, the witch's house, Hansel in the cage, Gretel and the oven, their escape—and they find their way back home to live happily ever after. (The mean stepmother had died.)

[RETURN](#)

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Greystrands

This one is my “Little Goldilocks and the Three Bears” of course. There were three bears (Great Rough Bear, Mother Bear, and Little Wee Bear) who lived in a forest. One morning they made porridge, and then went for a walk while it cooled. Coming upon their house and smelling porridge, a little girl named Goldilocks, who had beautiful golden hair, knocked at the door. There was no answer but since the door was open, she went inside. The porridge was too hot, so she decided to wait until it cooled. The first chair she sat in was too big; so was the next; but the third was just right (well, actually, it wasn’t because it broke when she sat in it). After a while, she tried the porridge: the first bowl was too hot; so was the second one; but the third one was just right. Then she went to lie on a bed and rest: the first one was too hard, the second too soft, the third just right. Eventually the three bears came home and after finding the broken chair and the empty bowl, they found her in bed, sleeping. Startled and afraid when she woke, she sprang from the bed and ran all the way home.

Another version titled just “The Three Bears” features an old woman instead of a little girl. The old woman was “impudent”, for instead of knocking first, she simply checked to make sure no one was home, then walked right in. Also, she cursed when the chair broke and complained about the little bowl being too little. When the three bears came home and found her, she ran out the window: “Whether she broke her neck in the fall or ran into the wood and was lost there or found her way out of the wood and was taken up by the constable for a vagrant as she was, no one can tell.”

“OAS” and “GIS” refer to government supplemental assistance programs for pensioners.

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The King’s Daughter

This king’s daughter is from “The Frog Prince”. She was playing with a ball one day and it fell down a well. A frog retrieved it, then named his fee: he asked to be her friend, to sit beside her at the dinner table, to eat off her plate, to drink out of her cup, to sleep beside her in bed, to be loved by her. Since she had already accepted her ball back, he began to ‘collect’ his fee, accompanying her everywhere. She often asked him to go away, but he refused. She set him outside, but he came back. Finally one day, out of frustration at his insistent and constant closeness, she threw him against a wall. But that wasn’t the end of it: the impact changed him into a prince, they married, and lived happily ever after. (And that was the end.)

[RETURN](#)

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Little Red Riding Hood

Little Red Riding Hood is sent by her mother to visit her sick grandmother with cake and a pot of butter. As she walks through a path in the wood, a wolf approaches her and offers to carry her parcel for her; she says ‘no thank you’ since her destination is only on the other side of the wood. The wolf leaves her then, but runs ahead to the grandmother’s house and gets in her bed, hoping to deceive and entice Little Red Riding Hood so he can eat her. When she arrives, he asks her to lie down beside him to rest; she does so and begins to comment on how the sickness seems to have changed her grandmother so much. When the wolf leaps up to eat her, a wasp stings him, then the door flies open and an arrow “pierced him through and through”. Standing in the doorway was the Green Archer, keeper of the forest.

In another version entitled “Little Golden Hood”, the girl’s hood is magical and burns the wolf as he moves in for a bite; and the grandmother “who had risen early to sell herbs in town” returns in time to catch the wolf in her sack and dump him into the well, where he drowns.

The mention of Peter is a reference to “Peter and the Wolf” (though all the hunters have failed, a little boy named Peter succeeds in catching a large and ferocious wolf) and the ‘three little pigs’ are the “Three Little Pigs” (a little pig succeeds with his cleverness in defending himself against, and eventually killing, a big bad wolf).

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Sleeping Beauty

Angry at not being on the guest list, a “withered old fairy” showed up for a christening feast at the palace; and after the other fairies had given gifts of beauty, grace, charm, and so on, she declared that when the child was sixteen years old, she would prick her finger on a spindle and die. Fortunately, another fairy had suspected something like that and had hid so she could give her gift last: she changed the death of the withered old fairy’s ‘gift’ to a deep sleep that would last until a king’s son would come and awaken her. In spite of precautions (all spindles were removed), the child, sixteen years later, pricked her finger and became unconscious; a thick forest grew all around the castle.

A few generations later, a prince saw the distant castle, was told the story, and “not doubting that he would succeed, he galloped off at once”; “a way through the thick tangle of trees and thorns seemed to open before him, ” he found the princess in one of the rooms, and kissed her hand. She awoke, saw him, and said “Is it you, my prince? I have waited for you a long time.” They married and “lived happily ever afterwards.”

In another version, entitled “Rosebud”, the revised curse was that the child would fall asleep for a hundred years, and the day the prince set out for the castle was “that very day that the hundred years were completed.”

With regard to the other fairy tales mentioned, in “Beauty and the Beast”, for the sake of her father, the heroine devotes herself to the Beast, who responds favourably to her presence; in “The Goose Girl”, the heroine is pathetically passive; in “Felicia and the

Pot of Pinks”, the heroine submits to ill-treatment; in both “Rapunzel” and “Rosette”, the heroine is locked up in a tower; in “Mayblossom”, the heroine starves herself, giving her food to the man who abuses her; in “The Girl Without Hands”, a father is encouraged by his daughter to mutilate her in order to save himself; in “The Twelve Brothers”, the heroine offers herself as sacrifice to save her brothers and later her husband burns her; in “Bluebeard”, Bluebeard makes a habit of killing his wives.

[RETURN](#)

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Snow White

Both “Little Snow White” and “Snow-Drop” tell the same story. One day when the queen asked her mirror who was the fairest of them all, the answer was Snow White, her stepdaughter. So she arranged for a hunter to take Snow White into the forest and kill her. Instead, he allowed her to run away.

Eventually she came upon a little cottage, the home of seven dwarfs. They allowed her to stay as long as she agreed to do the chores and meet them at the door every day with a smile.

Meanwhile, the queen’s mirror implied that Snow White was still alive. After a couple of failed attempts (corseting stays that suffocated and a poisoned comb—the dwarfs revived Snow White both times), the queen managed to kill Snow White with a poisoned apple. Unable to revive her this time, the dwarfs put her in a glass coffin.

A passing prince was shown Snow White in the coffin; “he fell in love with her at once” and offered to pay any amount for her. The dwarfs agreed to give Snow White to him and as his attendants lifted the coffin, the piece of poisoned apple fell out of her mouth; she opened her eyes and tried to sit up. She was then freed from the coffin and she and the prince were married.

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Thumb

This is a reaction to “Tom Thumb” and “Thumbelina” (and a bunch of other things!). These two fairy tales are accurately (and sufficiently) summarized in “Thumb”, so I will say no more.

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The Wicked Stepmother

This one is not based on any single fairy tale. The wicked stepmother figure is common throughout the genre (though perhaps she is remembered most in “Snow White” and “Cinderella”), so I thought she should get a chance to have her say too.

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The youngest princess

This one is based on the story, “The Enchanted Pig”. In it, a princess is married to a pig, as was prophesized; she accepts her fate. The pig, however, is a prince under a spell: for a certain length of time he is to be imprisoned in the form of a pig by day, to be himself only at night when no one can see him. One day, a witch tells the princess that the spell will be broken if she ties a magic thread around his toe at night. She does so, but the thread breaks and he awakes. Extremely angry since the spell would’ve expired in three days, but now it would linger on and on, he leaves, telling her to search for him until she wears out three pairs of iron shoes. She performs this penance (and more—the ladder she climbs that leads into his house is just a bit too short, so she cuts off her little finger as it’s just the right length to make up the difference) and they live happily ever after.

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REFERENCES

Since many fairy tales exist in several versions, some with important differences (see “Thumb”), I often read more than one version and used a conglomerate as my starting point.

My main source books were the following:

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