

OMNIVISUM

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who we are

Aschenputtel

Written by Grace Crouthamel

Once there was a rich man who lived happily with his wife for a long time, they had one little girl. The wife became ill, deathly ill, and called upon her daughter and said, "Dear I must leave you now." And she did, as one did in these hard times.

Soon the little girl's father took a second wife. The woman was beautiful but did not love the little girl or her father. She married the rich man so she and her daughters would not starve that winter. Her husband was lost to the same sickness that took the rich man's wife.

Spring came and so did the illness. It swept over the countryside taking the peasants first, then the very good townspeople, clerks and merchants, and then the nobles who thought they were safe in their very big houses far away from town.

The little girl's stepmother left with her daughters, fleeing the corruption and sickness that filled every crevice of the home. Four mouths to feed was one too many. So she left the girl alone in that big house on the hill. The townspeople burned the body of her father and all the clothes and all their possessions, and even the house- to prevent the spread of the sickness. The little girl danced in the ashes, dirt, and dust as the fire blazed. She looked as if slept in the cinders, one townspeople remarked.

No one thought to take the little girl with them, they figured, "Of course someone else will help the poor girl." As one did in these hard times.

So the little girl was now alone. She grew and grew until she was little no more. She did not wear rags; nor scraps of clothing or worn hand-me-downs. She stood there naked, her body bare, her

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hair in knots akin to a bird's nest, her pubic hair beginning to grow in like patchwork. Her teeth were as yellow as dandelions and rotten to the core. Some were missing. When they hurt, naturally, she reached into her mouth and pulled them out. She was not beautiful. She was wild and fierce having grown up in the wilderness alone. The townspeople gawked from afar, thought her to be a witch or half-beast of some sort. She was not beautiful but they looked at her all the same.

She could not sing to the birds- like the other stories will tell you. Instead, she sang a song of the woods, growls and hisses gurgling in her throat. Although inaudible to most humans, the beasts that roamed the hills at night understood her. They knew her. Crows followed her through the woods, scavenging the remains of her caught fowl and fish. The fish were easier than the birds who could take flight. The girl would reach her hand into the stream, grab the wriggling fish, and tear its head off, with what teeth she had left, in one fell swoop. Of course, it had to be quick, she couldn't bear the sounds of their screams. In her twenty-first winter, the ground grew cold. It was cold enough that her toes turned purple and her lips blue. The girl longed to dance again in the cinders of her father's blaze. She remembers that it was warm. Still, she could not get a fire to start on that windy night. She grew sick and ill, just like her mother and her father. And she died. As one did in these hard times.

Rats came by morning, gnawing at her body, then the vultures, then the other smaller creatures, and at last the worms and maggots. The crows did not partake in the flourishing feast, as they were her friends. There were no pumpkin carriages, just the pumpkin patch they found her in. No talking mice, only the rats found with bits and pieces of her flesh in their mouths. No grand ball or fairy godmother, or glass slippers and pretty princes. It was surprising, yes, to the townspeople but not uncommon in these hard times.

