

Dorholt: An Original Fairy Tale

A Study in Creative Fantasy

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Abstract

This thesis presents a study in creative fantasy by detailing plans for an original novel with the purpose of entertaining, instructing, and encouraging young readers. The novel will fall under the genre of fairy tale and will be set in a fantasy world, but will exhibit realism in the personalities of its characters. The story will appeal to middle school and junior high readers through its presentation of the first person perspective of a young girl grappling with issues relating to family, friendship, and forgiveness. This thesis will include the rationale for the project as well as chapter synopses and one complete sample chapter.

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Introduction: The Fairy Tale

It is impossible to pinpoint the beginning of fairy tales, for they have been told orally since prehistoric times as legends and folklore. Throughout centuries and across cultures, fairy tales have arisen and been expanded and adapted to suit the needs and whims of innumerable peoples. The very term “fairy tale” has developed connotations far beyond the idea of actual fairies; the term is now used to refer to many members of a broad spectrum that can include fantasies, wonder tales, folk tales and legends and more. Jack Zipes has noted that “it is nearly impossible to define the fairy tale as a literary genre because it has become more of a cultural institution than anything else” (7). Indeed, fairy tales are cultures’ ways of preserving their best ideas of what it means to be human, to experience wonder and loss, and to find personal identity through personal choices as well as uncontrollable circumstances.

There exists a common misconception that fairy tales are only for children, and that their contents are too childish for adults to bother with. However, the truth is that fairy tales were originally told for adults, and children just listened in. According to Zipes, the idea of fairy tales as being meant explicitly for children did not arise until the early nineteenth century (18-20). Once that shift occurred, however, fairy tales became widely used for children’s entertainment as well as instruction.

The popularity of fairy tales has only grown throughout time. From the story collections of Charles Perrault and the Grimm brothers to the fantasies of Lewis and Tolkien, fairy tales in all forms have met with great success. Fairy tales are loved and

valued for many reasons: they are enjoyable, they can impart moral instruction, and they encourage personal development.

The magical or imaginary elements of fairy tales are primarily what distinguish fairy tales from other types of stories, and they are also the main source of entertainment. Common in fairy tales are creatures, objects, and events that could never exist in the real world, such as talking dragons, magic mirrors, and thousand year naps. It is interesting to note that the unrealistic elements in fantasy do not cause any confusion or misunderstanding; readers generally have no trouble suspending their disbelief. Vanessa Joosen points out that “when we read fairy tales we enter ... magic mode... The very phrase ‘once upon a time’ signals to readers that they are entering a different world, a world where criteria of realism are irrelevant” (228-229). That other world is a place of wonder where anything is possible and where the imagination can be exercised in a way that no other type of fiction allows.

Fairy tales can also be valuable in giving instruction to young readers (or old readers, if they need it). Tales often show the consequences of wrong choices or selfishness, the rewards of diligence, the power of sacrifice, or any number of other important morals. Anthony Zehetner maintains that “through the telling [of a fairy tale], the child is exposed to ethical reasoning without being preached at... Without being explicitly told so, the child learns that hard work pays off and that sometimes delayed gratification is necessary” (161). The power of the fairy tale lies in its ability to circumvent the natural human tendency to stubbornly resist any dictated morality by delivering truthful instruction in a way that does not feel like a lecture.

In addition to entertainment and instruction, fairy tales can be an immense source of encouragement. Fairy tales can show children that a happy ending is possible despite difficulties and struggles along the way. Robin Goldberg argues that fairy tales “reassure children of the possibility of overcoming the worst circumstances. Because children's fears are taken seriously in fairy tales, children can take in the hope for recovery that the story offers” (302). The relatable characters found in fairy tales also help young readers understand that they are not alone in their worries and concerns. Readers can reason and explore vicariously through these fictional characters in a risk-free environment. Zehetner posits that “through the fairy tale narrative, the child makes sense of life's bewilderment. The imagery in fairy tales ... allows the child to explore their fears in remote and symbolic terms. The child is able to sort through their inner pressures and moral obligations in an environment that is not belittling to them” (161). By observing and relating to the struggles of the characters, readers can experience great personal growth through the reading of fairy tales.

The purpose of this thesis is to present a study in creative fantasy that will take the form of an original, novel-length fairy tale called Dorholt. The proposed story will combine the elements of entertainment, instruction, and encouragement commonly seen in fairy tales. Dorholt is set in a fantasy world and follows the life of a girl named Freyja. Freyja runs away from her abusive, drunkard stepfather and flees into Dorholt forest, which is rumored to be an accursed place. In the forest she joins a band of gypsies known as the Wídfaren and is reunited with Tyr, an old childhood friend. Freyja and Tyr work together to restore order to their land, which is being ruled by a corrupt usurper. The characters and settings are original, while their concerns and struggles are universal; the

goal is to present an entertaining, imaginative tale of growing up and being brave in a difficult world.

Writing

Writing Theory

The purpose of this novel is to exercise readers' imaginations and also invoke their sympathy by describing the struggles of a relatable protagonist. The emphasis throughout the narration will be on the main character's maturation from a child into a young woman. As Maggie Murphy asserts, "What any good story offers, regardless of its characters and setting, is an emotional core" (12). The aim, therefore, is an accurate presentation of emotional development.

Narrative Technique

The point of view in the novel is first person. It is narrated by the main character, Freyja, a teenage girl who does not think she is particularly pretty or brave. The limited omniscient stream of consciousness style of narration will show her thoughts and feelings as she observes and interacts with the world around her. The narration will simulate realistic human limitations of perception as Freyja tries to understand the actions and reasoning of the people she meets. The reader will see things from Freyja's perspective and hopefully relate to the sentiments she expresses.

Narrative Strategy

The narration begins with a scene of Freyja at sixteen years old and then flashbacks to childhood and continues forward chronologically with the key events of her life. Her dreams and imagination also contribute to the narration and will give further

understanding of her personality and humanity. The reader will walk, run, laugh, and cry along with Freyja as she experiences life, love, and loss.

Style

The writing style in Dorholt is personal in perspective and detailed in sensory description, using language that is easily understandable for young readers. Designed for a middle-school audience, the language is expressive of feelings and ideas that are appropriate and familiar to readers in that range. The narrative style will simulate natural thought patterns and will therefore consist of some fragments and run-ons to convey the often stunted and scattered nature of personal thoughts.

All of the place and character names in Dorholt will be derived from Old English and Old Norse words. Some will be names taken from ancient mythologies, and some will be combinations of other words; for example, the name Dorholt is derived from the Old English words *deorc* and *holt*, meaning “dark” and “forest,” and the names Freyja and Tyr are from Old Norse mythology. Every name, along with its origin and meaning, will be included in an appendix at the end of the novel, to give readers a brief lesson in etymology.

Target Audience

Dorholt’s target audience is young readers in middle school to junior high, or around ages ten to fourteen. A message of the endurance of love will be conveyed through the novel’s theme of family, friendship, and forgiveness. This theme will resonate with readers, for every human being has an innate need for these things. There will be instances of murder, illness, abuse, and injury in the story, but none will be so graphic or disturbing as to be inappropriate for young readers. The emphasis in these

instances will not be on the actual events, but on how the events shape and affect the heroine. Also, a great number of today's children and teens have experienced one or more of these types of events, and so the realistic portrayal of a girl dealing with these things may be encouraging to the readers.

Novel Summary

Freyja is the daughter of a baker in the village of Bannuc, which is bordered to the east by Dorholt forest. Dorholt is rumored to be enchanted, and the villagers are superstitious about it. Freyja befriends Tyr, the younger son of Lord Casere, the Earl of Cynea; the children play together in Dorholt with no fear of its dangers. Tragedy and treachery strike, and both children lose their families. Tyr disappears, and Freyja believes him to be dead. Almost two years later Freyja is in an abusive home, and she decides to run away to the woods where she played as a child. She finds Dorholt much more hostile than she remembered, but also discovers a band of gypsies, known as the Wídfaren, living deep in the forest. The leader of the gypsies is Tyr, who has been living with a great burden of shame for having fled when his father was killed. The friends are reunited, but neither is the same person they were as children. Freyja finds a home among the Wídfaren, but has difficulty reconciling with Tyr. The two must learn to forgive each other and themselves in order to restore their relationship and rescue their land from an evil usurper.

Characters and the Etymology of Their Names

ON = Old Norse

OE = Old English

Alden: variant of Ealdwine, from OE eald ("old") and wine ("friend")

Aric: variant of Eric, from OE *ei* ("ever") and *ríkr* ("ruler")

Baldern: from ON *Balder* (“prince”); in Norse mythology Balder was the son of Odin and Frigg.

Bannuc: OE, “small piece”

Casere: OE, “emperor”

Cenric: from OE *cene* (“bold”) and *ric* (“power”)

Cynea: from OE *cyne* (“royal”)

Dagnýra: from ON *daga* (“day”) and *nyr* (“new”)

Dorholt: from OE *deorc* (“dark”) and *holt* (“forest”)

Drihten: OE, “lord”

Freyja: ON, “lady”; name of the goddess of love, beauty, war and death in Norse mythology.

Froda: from OE *frod* (“wise”)

Fugul: from ON *fugl* (“bird”)

Georne: OE, “zealously”

Hlaf: ON, “bread”

Maera: from ON *mær*, (“maiden”) and *mæra* (“to praise”)

Meingrimm: from ON *megin-grimmr* (“terrible, loathsome”)

Orvara: from ON *Orvar* (“arrow”), name of a legendary Norse hero who is the subject of a 13th-century Icelandic saga.

Runit: from OE *runwita* (“counsellor”)

Sifa: from ON *Sif* or *Siv* (“bride”)

Trygur vines: from ON *tryggr* (“safe”)

Tyr: ON; in Norse mythology, Tyr was the god of war and justice. He carried a spear in his left hand, since his right hand was bitten off by the wolf Fenrir.

Útanlands: ON, “abroad”

Wídfaren – from OE *wídfarend* (“wanderer”)

Chapter Synopses

Chapter One

Freyja, at sixteen, is beaten by her drunken stepfather, and then the narrative backtracks to some childhood memories: At seven she begins to explore the village and the forbidden forest of Dorholt; at nine she meets her best friend Tyr, the son of the earl of the province. On her fifteenth birthday she is scolded by her mother for staying out late in the woods after spending the day with Tyr, which she remembers fondly before falling asleep.

Chapter Two

Three days later, Freyja goes with her father, the court baker, to the castle for the wedding celebration of Lord Casere’s daughter Orvara. During the party, Lord Drihten, the groom and the king’s closest advisor, stabs Casere in the back. Prince Baldern, Tyr’s older brother and the heir to the throne, rushes to help his father, but he too is killed by Drihten’s men. Lord Drihten’s soldiers begin killing at random, and Freyja’s father is one of the victims. Freyja searches for Tyr in the confusion but cannot find him. She escapes.

Chapter Three

Devastated, Freyja returns home to tell her mother what has happened, and they attempt to console each other. A herald comes down the street informing the village of the shift in power: Drihten has taken the castle, and the ruling family has been removed.

Freyja wonders what has become of Tyr. She scours the village and all their old meeting places, but can find no trace of him. She deduces that he has been killed along with his father and brother.

Chapter Four

Months later, Freyja and her mother struggle to make ends meet. Freyja's mother tells her the story of when she first met Freyja's father. Runit Alden, a wealthy village councilman, offers to marry Freyja's mother. She accepts out of financial necessity.

Chapter Five

Freyja's mother has become ill, having never recovered from her husband's death. She does not love Runit Alden, though he does love her and is kind to her and Freyja. Freyja's mother soon succumbs to her illness and dies of grief. Alden turns to drink at the loss of his wife.

Chapter Six

One year later: All the servants have left the house as a result of Alden's rages, and Freyja now acts as housekeeper and cook. She goes to the village market, and on the way back home she finds a little girl living on the streets. She recognizes the girl as the daughter of a poor family to whom Tyr and she used to bring game. She takes the little girl home with her and convinces her stepfather to allow the girl to stay in the house as a maid.

Chapter Seven

In a dream, Freyja sees herself as an old woman scrubbing Alden's floor. Freyja brings her stepfather breakfast in bed, a task usually done by the little girl Maera, who has fallen ill. Alden is displeased at seeing Freyja, for she reminds him too much of her

mother. Later in the day, Maera takes a tray to Alden, and he hits her; Freyja determines that she will not watch Alden abuse the little girl and decides that Maera and she will run away.

Chapter Eight

Freyja and Maera set out for Dorholt early in the morning. Freyja has not been in the forest since Tyr disappeared, and she finds it much different than she remembered. As they attempt to navigate the seemingly sinister woods, they soon become lost. They wander until dark and make camp for the night. Maera quickly drifts off, but Freyja is kept awake by the distant howls of the megingrimm. Freyja is startled awake in the middle of the night by a hooded figure who demands that the girls follow him.

Chapter Nine

The hooded man leads Freyja and Maera through the dark forest to the camp of the Wídfaren, which lies in a small clearing deep in Dorholt. He leaves them with an old woman named Froda, who takes Freyja and Maera into her tent and cares for them. They sleep the rest of the night in Froda's tent, and in the morning she tells the girls more about the Wídfaren, about whom rumors and legends abound. Froda also tells them that the hooded man who found them is the leader of the Wídfaren. Freyja asks to speak with him, and she takes her to his tent.

Chapter Ten

Freyja identifies the Wídfaren leader as Tyr, whom she thought had been killed nearly two years ago. She is overjoyed to find him alive, but quickly sees that Tyr is much changed. He is ashamed at having fled when his father and brother were killed, and he has become callous and detached. He tells Freyja that she should have stayed in the

village, so she fills him in on all that has happened with Drihten in control and tells of her parents' deaths and her servitude under her stepfather.

Chapter Eleven

Freyja and Maera acclimate to life in the Wídfaren camp. They become the primary cooks for the group of outcasts which consists mainly of former thieves, prisoners, and disturbers of the peace. Many of the men were declared outlaws by Tyr's father, who was a harsh ruler, yet they have become loyal to Tyr for his justice and fairness. Time passes and Freyja is happy with the Wídfaren, making friends among their number, yet Tyr remains aloof.

Chapter Twelve

The Wídfaren move their camp due to the roaming packs of megingrimm and the fear of discovery by Drihten's scouts. Freyja travels with them, seeing them as her new family. Froda teaches Freyja about the gramarye of the forest, and Georne, Tyr's second, teaches Freyja to defend herself.

Chapter Thirteen

Tyr notices how Freyja has won the hearts of the Wídfaren and finally begins to open back up to her. One summer night as the Wídfaren drink and dance around the campfire, Tyr and Freyja share a dance but are interrupted by a rainstorm.

Chapter Fourteen

Freyja ventures out into the woods alone to collect some herbs, but she is set upon by a pair of megingrimm who chase her through the woods. Tyr appears and fights off the beasts, but is severely wounded, his right hand mangled. They make their way back to camp, where Freyja helps Froda tend to Tyr's injuries. The next morning, Tyr's hand is

infected and he is fevered and unconscious. Froda determines that the hand must be amputated.

Chapter Fifteen

Freyja continues to visit Tyr as he recovers. In light of Tyr's near-death, they both realize and discuss their feelings, and Tyr asks Freyja to marry him. They foresee a peaceful life spent in the forest with the Wídfaren.

Chapter Sixteen

Tyr and Freyja plan a wedding under the trees. As they are talking, a woman stumbles into the camp looking battered and weary. It is Tyr's older sister Orvara, the wife of Lord Drihten. She begs Tyr's forgiveness and tells him she knew nothing of her husband's plans against their father. She informs them of the deteriorating state of Drihten's health and power, and of the correlative instability of the kingdom.

Chapter Seventeen

Although Tyr is hesitant to forgive his sister, Freyja encourages him to take his rightful place as head of his father's estate and set things right in his province. Since the Wídfaren could never amass a force large enough to take Cynea back by force, they decide that Tyr must challenge Drihten to single combat. This is risky, since Tyr has lost his dominant fighting hand, but Tyr is determined to make amends for his past cowardice.

Chapter Eighteen

Carrying a white flag, Tyr rides calmly through the castle gates and announces himself as the rightful lord of Cynea. Drihten mocks him, but cannot appear to be intimidated by a one-handed man and agrees to single combat. The fight is close, but Tyr

wins; he spares Drihten's life and commands that he be imprisoned for life. However, Orvara kills Drihten before he can be taken away.

Chapter Nineteen

Tyr goes about reestablishing order and justice in his court and in the villages. Orvara withdraws from public life but remains living in the castle. Tyr and she are reconciled. Freyja thinks that, as he is king now, Tyr should marry someone more suitable than herself, but he begs her not to leave him. They still get to have their wedding under the Dorholt trees.

Writing Sample: Dorholt Chapter One

Crack!

My stepfather's cane struck the side of my head for the second time, and the floor seemed to tilt even farther as I struggled to remain conscious. Many-colored stars swirled before my tired eyes.

It had been a simple mistake, a moment of clumsiness on my part, when I dropped the basket of supplies I had just bought from the market onto the kitchen floor. An accident, but he didn't care. I had been trying to hold the large basket in one arm while opening the cupboard door with my free hand. The basket tipped just enough to upset its balance, and my fingers, still numb from the cold wind outside, fumbled and lost their grip, scrabbling at the wickerwork. The basket seemed to hover in the air for a moment, just out of grasp, before falling to the stone floor of the kitchen. The fruits and vegetables for the evening meal tumbled out, the wrapped meat from the butcher fell *thump*, and the packet of fresh fugul eggs for tomorrow's breakfast landed with a crack that let me know none of them would be salvageable.

I froze for a second, listening—perhaps he had not heard anything—and hurriedly knelt to gather the produce back up, hoping the fruit were not bruised.

He had heard. I looked up from the floor as the kitchen door flew open and Runit Alden staggered inside. His hair, graying too early, had not been combed for several days and stood out in haphazard tufts.

“What have you done now, you worthless wench!” His words came out in a slurred growl. He had been drinking again. But I was used to that.

“I—I’m sorry,” I stammered out, “An accident—I’m picking them up—“

“Ruining the food I pay for... You’ll be s-sorry.” He sounded weary. His glazed eyes slid across the mess on the floor before struggling to focus on my face again. He lifted his cane, and I clenched my eyes shut against what I knew was coming.

He had swung the cane then, catching me across the cheek so hard that my face whipped to the side. I gasped with the pain and shock of it, but said nothing. Past experience had taught me that words were useless once he started swinging, and I honestly don’t think he knew what he was doing anyway. I braced myself through a few more blows, some of which luckily missed my face and fell on my shoulders. His aim was off, which meant he was even drunker than usual. Runit Alden said nothing more, but kicked a head of cabbage out of his path as he stumbled out of the kitchen, back to his study and his drink.

I lay crumpled, silent tears dripping across my face and onto the cold stone floor. I would undoubtedly have a black eye from the blow to my cheekbone, and I could feel new bruises springing up across my shoulders to add to the collection of multicolored spots covering my back. Some of them, from last week, were beginning to fade.

I usually felt safest in the kitchen, where he rarely came. Sometimes, on his docile days, I could even forget he was in the house. I understood why my stepfather drank so much—really, I did. It made perfect sense to me, and I could not hate him. He was not wicked. He was a miserable, broken man, and even as my head throbbed from his beating, I felt only pity for him. He had once been kind.

But that was before.



When I was a child, my mother told me tales of Dorholt forest. Dorholt bordered our village on the east, and everyone said it cast a shadow over our land. The lords of old planted thick trygur vines all along the tree line as far as the eye could see, and the vines had grown into a matted, snarly barrier that kept villagers out and other things in. People swore the vines were enchanted. There was one path through the forest that connected our little realm of Cynea with the Útanlands on the other side. Some said it was a hundred miles long, but none of the common folk had traveled so far.

Mama's stories were intended to make me wary of Dorholt. Some were legends of the Wídfaren, the wandering vagabonds, outlaws, and wildmen that inhabited the shadowy forest. These were lawless, fierce people who robbed merchants on the road and left them for dead. Other tales were of the megingrimm, the bloodthirsty, wolfish beasts who roamed the immense woods at night, said to be possessed by the souls of evil men who had died. Mama warned me, too, of twisted trees that could move on their own and ensnare you in their grasping branches. There were so many reasons I should *not* go near Dorholt.

At about seven years old, I lost my shyness and my need to maintain a constant grip on Mama's apron, and I started to wander. I began exploring the village, poking my head into the shops and bothering the shopkeepers, pestering the vendors at their stalls. I inquired into all that I saw, wherever I went.

"Too many questions, little girl," the butcher said. "And no, the poor beast cannot feel it anymore," he added as he hacked away at a slab of bloody meat.

"Dorholt! Of course my wood doesn't come from that accursed place," the carpenter said. Like most of the villagers, the carpenter was superstitious. "Mine is fine wood from across the river. Now run along, please do!"

"The fruit comes from where it comes from!" The grocer said. "Go ask your mother."

I was just curious. I wanted to see and understand everything in the world, and soon the village wasn't big enough anymore. I wanted to see inside Dorholt. Eventually my curiosity overrode any fear that Mama's stories had instilled in me, and I began to find gaps in the trygur and slip through to that other world. I never went too deep, always keeping the vine barrier within sight so that I still felt safe.

I loved the forest. I could not understand why the villagers feared it so. When I stood beneath those great leafy giants and heard the wind swishing through the boughs, I felt only the peace of the place. The forest was quiet in a way that the village never was.

Mama would get so worried when I was out, wondering about my whereabouts and imagining all the perils that could befall a young girl. When I got home, my hair would be windblown and my dress dirt-stained from my escapades. Mother would scold and chastise and lecture about all the grief and worry I was causing, but Father was quiet

in his worn old chair by the fire. After Mama's wrath subsided, I would go to the fireplace and sit on the floor at my father's knee. Father watched Mama until she disappeared into the kitchen or bedroom, and then he would lean forward and whisper conspiratorially, "And what did you discover today, my wild girl?" And I would tell him all my adventures, the village people I had talked to, the little animals I'd seen in the woods, the trees I'd climbed, the flowers I'd collected, the imaginary creatures I'd danced with under the leafy canopy.

When I was nine, my father was appointed Chief Baker for Lord Casere himself. Lord Casere was Earl of Cynea and lived at Cynea Castle, at the center of the province. Our village of Bannuc wasn't too far from the castle, and Father often let me accompany him when he took his daily delivery of bread for the earl and his household.

One morning, Father scooped me up and let me ride on his shoulders as he pushed the bread cart down the winding road to the palace. Once through the front gates, we made our way to the servant's entrance nearest the kitchen to deliver the goods.

"Freyja, I must speak with Cook about a special order for next week. Don't wander too far, I will return shortly," said Father.

I sat patiently outside the huge kitchen for maybe five minutes. Soon I got bored. I wandered around to the training yard at the back of the castle where the troops were sparring in fenced-off sections. I crossed my arms atop the fence and watched the soldiers practice. If I were a man I could join them one day. I wasn't afraid of anything. I could fight a thousand enemies at once. *Swish, clang* went their bright blades. After a minute, a tickle in the corner of my vision let me know I was being watched as well. A boy,

perhaps a year older than me and with unruly sandy hair and a keen expression, was peering at me from behind a tall rack of training weapons.

“Why are you watching me?” I demanded, fixing my best glare on him.

“You don’t belong here,” he stated. He picked up a sword off the rack and pointed it at me. It was far too heavy for him, and I could tell he was straining to hold it aloft.

“Nor do you! You aren’t a soldier. You’re much too skinny to be a soldier.”

“I’m the son of Lord Casere! So I can be wherever I want,” he said, lifting his chin. The Earl’s son! He seemed a bit haughty, so I gave him a good eye roll and turned to walk away. He dropped the sword, ran after me and caught my arm.

“Wait! Where are you going?”

“I don’t belong here, as you said, my *lord*.” I gave a mocking curtsy.

“Oh.” His shoulders drooped. “Please don’t go. I’m sorry I was rude. And you don’t have to call me lord because I’m the youngest. My big brother is the important one.” He paused, looking at me hopefully. “My name’s Tyr.”

“I’m Freyja.” I scrutinized him. He was odd, for a noble. The nobility don’t talk much with commoners.

“Freyja. I like that. Can I come with you? Please, I’ve no one to talk to.” His voice was eager, a smile spreading across his face.

“Well, I don’t know where I’m going. I’m just waiting for my father. He’s the baker.”

“Oh! Well then you come with me, I know where all the fun things are.”

Tyr grabbed my hand and dragged me around the palace grounds, showing me his favorite spots. The gnarled tree behind the stables was perfect for climbing, the cook’s

extra storage room contained years and years' worth of dried fruit for munching, and the hay loft was the best spot for hiding from tutors and his big sister.



“Freyja, tell me you haven’t been in Dorholt again.”

I try to put on a penitent face as I slip in the front door. I turned fifteen years old today. I might have thought that I could sneak in unheard, but years of experience have taught me otherwise. Somehow Mama always seems to know the exact moment that I will get home, no matter how late it is. And tonight, as always, she just stands there, arms crossed, looking disappointed, undoubtedly wondering why the Creator gave her such a willful child.

“Mother, I—”

“No, don’t tell me. You’ve been out all day. Your skirt is torn,” she adds, pointing at my muddy hem. With one hand I twitch my cloak more closely around my body in a vain attempt to cover the rip in my dress. The other hand grips a twine-bound bundle. I must be quite a sight. My hair is a tangled mess, and there are new scratches on my hands and arms from climbing through the snarly trygur vines.

“Caught it on a bramble,” I mumble, staring at the floor.

“Look at me.”

I force myself to meet her eyes. There is worry there, and the weariness that always accompanies it.

“You know the tales of what happens in those woods,” she snaps. “How many times must I remind you of the danger in that place?”

“But mother, that’s just the thing—they’re only *tales*. I know it. I...” I hesitate as the look in my mother’s eyes shifts from worry to anger. This is the one source of contention between us—the forest, which I love and she thinks is dangerous and full of dark enchantment. She doesn’t know how often I go there with Tyr, and have been going for years. Her eyes slide down to the bundle in my hand, and she opens her mouth, presumably to question me about it. I am mercifully rescued from the interrogation by the entrance of my father. I relax as he emerges rubbing his eyes from the back bedroom.

Thank you, Father. Now I am safe.

“What’s this? Trouble, Freyja?” His voice is always gentle, never accusing. His hair is mussed, and he looks like he’s just woken up. Having been up since long before dawn to take his daily delivery to the castle, he would have gone to bed soon after dinner. Which I missed. Again.

Mother doesn’t look at him but instead keeps her sharp green gaze fixed disapprovingly on me. Father looks me up and down, deducing the situation from my disheveled appearance.

“Dagnýra, dear, come to bed. It’s very late,” he murmurs, placing a hand on mother’s shoulder. His touch is magic, and she visibly softens.

Mother lets out a sigh, her glare melts, and she turns toward him. “Aric. We woke you.”

“Don’t think of it.” He kisses her on the cheek before she disappears into their bedroom, but he doesn’t follow right away. He watches mother’s retreating figure until the bedroom door closes. At the click of the latch, he turns a smile on me.

“So, Dorholt again. You know how your mother hates you going in there.”

“We got two big fat conies today,” I say, grinning. “Tyr dropped them by Sifa’s house on his way home. They will feed her and the children for a few days at least.”

Sifa, the young mother who lives a mile or so from my house, has two small children and hardly any income to speak of. Her husband Cenric was one of the castle guards. He was imprisoned for protesting his captain’s harsh treatment of a beggar who came to the gate asking for bread. The captain of the guard had beaten the old beggar bloody and thrown Cenric in the dungeon for insubordination. Sifa and the two little ones have been living on charity for nearly four months now.

Father lets me off scot-free, with only a “Just be careful, my wild girl,” and he heads back to bed. I pull off my worn leather boots which are caked with mud from the damp forest floor, and leave them by the door. Mother will love that. My stomach is growling, so I snatch from the pantry a thick slice of hlaf, the sweet bread for which my father’s bakery is famous. I devour it in just a few bites.

Back in my room, I strip down to my undergarments and burrow under the familiar pile of quilts on my bed, not bothering to find a nightdress. I am exhausted, but I smile to myself as I recall the events of the day. In a second my mind is back in the woods.



“Finally!” Tyr exclaims as I struggle through the wall of trygur vines from the morning light of the village into the greenish shade of my beautiful Dorholt trees. He is lying on the ground with his arms crossed behind his head, looking as if he considers himself king of the forest. Which he probably does.

“I thought you weren’t coming,” Tyr grumbles good-naturedly, hopping up to walk with me.

“I always come.” I glance up and smile at my best friend and link my arm through his. His sandy hair is as messy as ever, his blue eyes happy that I am here. I feel bad for being late. I was up early this morning because Mama wanted to make me a special birthday breakfast, but after that I still had to do all my chores and help Father get the bakery displays ready for the day. I rushed through my tasks in a fever, ignoring Father’s knowing glances, and raced out to the woods as soon as I was able.

“How long have you been waiting?” I ask.

“Forever,” he groans dramatically. “Come on, I want to check the traps.”

We amble along, arm in arm, down the trails we made as children. Not long after I first met Tyr, I offered to bring him here. He refused to come at first because he too had heard the stories and feared the dark trees. But I convinced him to come with me, and he soon loved the forest as much as I did. Together we ventured deeper than I ever would have done alone.

We check the traps we set last time and discover the fine fat conies.

“Aha!” Tyr crows in delight. “A pair! The poor things. Alas, but they will be tasty.”

Tyr ties their feet together with a bit of twine and swings them to and fro as we walk. After a while he ties them to his belt. The forest is our place. As children we would climb the trees and make up plays to perform for the birds, but as we got older, we started to just walk and talk more, and sometimes we set traps for small game to give to the

needier villagers. Time passes quickly when we are together. We talk of everything and nothing.

As the third child, Tyr is largely ignored by his father, Lord Casere, so he can easily get away with his frequent disappearances from the castle. Tyr's mother died giving birth to him, and his father never quite forgave him. Lord Casere is not cruel, but he is a hardened man and a strict ruler. If he ever finds out that Tyr has befriended me, a commoner, I daren't think what he would do. The sons of noblemen are not supposed to associate with simple bakers' daughters, but Tyr is different. I have no other friend like him. Not because he is noble, but because there is no one else who can make me laugh so, no one else who shares my secrets, no one else who loves the forest as I do. His light-heartedness never fails to lift me from my natural pensiveness.

"And then Orvara saunters into the breakfast hall, positively *saunters*, and she declares to the entire room," Tyr is saying. He pitches his voice an octave higher and ten degrees squeakier to imitate his sister and continues, "I simply cannot wear any of these *detestable* excuses for apparel! With my skin tone!' And Father, he just cringes, you know how he does. Oh Freyja, if only you'd been there...." He laughs. "What fun we'd have had, making sport of her airs." He throws himself down on the ground and leans against a wide tree.

I laugh too, and sit down next to him. I can picture it. Tyr's older sister Orvara is famous for being essentially vain. She is eighteen years old and preparing to marry Lord Drihten, her father's closest advisor, in three days' time. The issue of her wedding clothes has been a topic of discord for weeks, and now she has rejected the tailor's final attempt to produce something she would agree to wear.

“What does she want, a dress made of peacock plumes?” I joke.

Tyr chuckles, but his face grows thoughtful. “Actually, you may be onto something! I shall propose the idea as my own, and then perhaps she will forgive me for breaking her rocking horse when I was four. She can hold quite the grudge.”

“Goodness. If I ever marry, it shall not be such a troublesome affair! I would like to marry right here, in the forest, in a green dress and no shoes at all,” I say.

“In the forest! What would your mother say?”

“She’d likely faint at the depth of my perversity and refuse to come. She would say my wedding was cursed by the evil of this awful forest.” I am only half joking. She really might. I wish she would come here and see how the sunlight streams through the leaves in such beautiful dapples.

Tyr looks down at me. He is several inches taller than me now, even when sitting. He puts on his serious face. “I won’t allow it.”

“Oh, won’t you? I think this a perfectly lovely place for a wedding.”

“No, I mean I won’t allow you to marry.” A grin sneaks across his lips. “I won’t allow you to marry anyone but me, of course!”

“You! Ha! Oh please.” I shove his arm. He is such a clown.

“I mean it! Really though, where in this great wide land could you find a more gallant man than me?” He jumps up and assumes a heroic pose, fists on hips, chin high.

“Oh yes, so gallant,” I say, mocking him. “So gallant that you forgot the birthday of your very best friend...”

“Did not! I didn’t say anything so you would think that I had forgotten, so I could surprise you!” I am still sitting against the tree, and he holds out his hands to me. I take

them, and he hauls me up to a standing position. “I have a gift for you!” His eyes are twinkling.

Today is my fifteenth birthday, and I really expected him to forget. But he is still holding one of my hands, and he pulls me after him back the way we came, and soon we are at the spot where we met earlier. We always enter the forest there, because there is a gap in the trygur big enough to slither through. He runs behind a tree and emerges holding a wrapped bundle. He shoves it into my arms and steps back.

“Open up.”

Curious, I glance at his happy face and then begin to unwind the twine holding the bundle. As the twine falls away, the bundle unfolds into a long, dark green cloak, thick and velvety soft. It is fine, expensive material, which Tyr knows my family could never afford. It will keep me warm in our harsh winters. There are tears in my eyes as I look back up at him.

“It’s perfect. Thank you,” I say, clutching the heavy cloth to my chest.

He scuffs the toe of his boot in the dirt of the forest floor as though he is embarrassed, which I think is funny. He is always so certain of himself, so comfortable.

“Well,” he says with a shrug, “I thought it would suit you. Now, shall we return to the subject of our impending marriage?” Our serious moment over, we go back to the easy banter that I love more than anything. With Tyr, all of life becomes a grand jest.



And now, lying in my dark bedroom, remembering the easy teasing and confidence of our friendship, I am thankful.

I fall asleep and dream of the forest. Our place.

Marketing Plan

Once Dorholt is complete, I will consult the *Writer's Market* and find an agent who deals specifically with adolescent fantasy. I will write a query letter to gain their attention. Once I am connected with an agent, the agent will get in touch with potential publishers. I would of course love to be published by a big name house, but I am not opposed to working with a smaller publisher. My novel, which will hopefully be sold both in digital format and in print in major bookstores, will fall under the category of juvenile fantasy. I do not plan to have internal illustrations, to allow the reader's imagination to be exercised; however, good cover art is a must, to catch the eye of book hunters.

Marketability

Young mainstream readers have an insatiable appetite for fantasy, and this original tale will, I believe, be met with enthusiasm. Although the setting and other elements will be fantastical, the characters will display realistic attitudes and responses to their circumstances. The female protagonist learns to exercise bravery in the face of great loss and copes with emotional pain with the help of her vivid imagination. The novel celebrates the nature of family and the endurance of love in the face of time, distance, and social pressure.

Conclusion

Dorholt will speak to the concerns of many young readers, especially girls dealing with social pressures and personal insecurities. The reader will find in Freyja a relatable character who, although living in a different world, has much the same struggles and

concerns of modern adolescent girls. The themes of family, friendship, and forgiveness will resonate with everyone who encounters this new fairy tale.

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