

## The Brother That Never Was

Once Upon A Time, in a land far, far away, there lived a king and queen. The king was a good man. He was just, brave, honest, kind, and had an exceedingly loving heart. The queen was similarly wonderful. She was beautiful, both inside and out, the likes of which has never been seen. They ruled the kingdom for many years, loved and respected by all of their subjects.

But the king and queen were not happy. More than anything, they wanted a child of their own. Years and years passed and the kingdom continued to prosper and grow. Still, the king and queen grew older and feared they may never have their heart's desire.

It so happened that one winter, the snow fell faster and thicker than it had for a hundred years. As the queen enjoyed the snow in the garden, she noticed a rose bush with a raven on the brambles, and a solitary rose still a-bloom. "If I ever have a child," she thought, "I would hope that they are as resilient and strong as that rose." As the queen reached for the rose, intending to pick it and keep it next to her bed, she pricked her finger on a thorn. As a drop of blood fell onto the snow, the queen was startled by the stark contrast of the red blood on the white snow. "A daughter," the queen thought, "with skin as fair as snow, lips as red as blood, and hair as black as a raven's wing. If I could have a daughter as beautiful as that, and as strong as this rose, I shall never be sad again." Eventually, the queen grew pregnant, and soon after, a daughter was born. She was everything the queen had wanted, as so was named Snow White.

This is how the story starts, how every story of Snow White starts, and how the true story of Snow White started. It is a very well known tale, one of a charming, innocent princess and an evil stepmother. Throw in a handful of dwarfs (seven to be exact), a poisoned apple, and, of course, a handsome, young prince to kiss an enchanted princess and wake her up, and you have a perfect, royal pair riding off into the sunset and living happily ever after.

But it's all a lie.

It is true, the queen did prick her finger, she did wish for a daughter, and she was named Snow White, but what the story doesn't tell you is that Snow White was not an only child. No, when the queen became pregnant, it was not with one perfect daughter, for life is never that simple. When the queen became pregnant, it was with twins: one boy and one girl. Snow

White was indeed the girl, and as such her story remains very much intact, but the boy, no one ever mentions the boy.

Gregory, for that was his name, was an unusual child. Although the king and queen loved him very much, he was always second to the perfect Snow White. As a result, he grew up lonely, different, and frightened of much of the world. His tale is one of love, stoicism, and heartbreak, and as such I will try my utmost to do it justice.

When the queen became pregnant, the king and queen were both overjoyed. For years they had dreamed and hoped and tried to have a child, and, finally, their dream was coming true. The king ordered the finest artists, woodworkers, and tailors to make the perfect nursery for his perfect child. The walls were painted with the finest paints made from the rarest of sources, the crib and toys were beautifully carved with exquisite detail, there were curtains made of the finest cloths, and a closet full of magnificent dresses suitable only for a princess. Never before, and never since, has there ever been such a perfect and luxurious nursery. The nursery, however, was designed specifically for a perfect princess. The king and queen didn't even consider the possibility of a young prince, let alone a princess and a prince. As such, when the queen gave birth to a boy and a girl, twins, the king and queen were at a loss. They immediately set about ordering clothes and toys and furniture to match the splendor of the princess's belongings, but, as generally happens with last minute preparations, nothing of Gregory's was quite as wonderful to that of Snow White's.

Gregory grew up as any normal child would, for one born to a king and queen. He spent every day with Snow White and they quickly became best friends. Gregory and Snow White could always, rain or shine, be seen climbing trees, chasing each other, playing with the kitchen pets, and having fun. His favorite part of the day, however, were lessons. As royals, Gregory and Snow White were required to learn all that was needed to make them successful future rulers. They studied Greek, Latin, mathematics, history, drawing, and music, among others. Snow White loved stories and music, but was very restless during the other subjects. Gregory, however, loved them all. He was always hungry for more knowledge and was very bright. Whenever Snow White was busy, Gregory could be found in the library trying to teach himself or following his tutors around pestering them with questions.

As Gregory grew older and learned more, he started to realize that he wasn't happy, at least not as happy as Snow White or his parents. There was a hole, and he couldn't figure out how to fill it. His teachers told him that it was simply a part of growing up and would fill in time. Snow White told him that maybe he just needed to find his true love, like the princesses in the

stories did. Gregory, not knowing any better, accepted that perhaps he was being silly and imagining it. Yet he always felt different, unable to place why he felt like he didn't quite belong.

When Gregory and Snow White were ten years old, their lives were turned upside down. A plague hit the kingdom and the queen fell ill. After many weeks of suffering, she died, and the king fell into a grief so deep, he became blind to the world. He shut himself in his room and only a handful of servants were allowed in to clean and bring food. The people starved, and neighboring kingdoms threatened all sides. War was approaching and people were panicking. The king's advisors, desperate to revive the king, suggested he find a new wife, someone who could at least guide the kingdom while the king mourned his lost queen. The king agreed and soon married a widowed queen from a neighboring kingdom.

This new woman was beautiful, but menacing. She was conniving, manipulative, vain, and seductive. Many rumored that she had killed her previous husband in order to take the crown. Whether true or not, Gregory was scared of her. He felt a particular need to protect his sister, who the new queen had taken a great interest in.

This new queen forbade Snow White from continuing her previous lessons, making her learn how to cook and clean instead. Gregory was no longer allowed to talk to Snow White while she worked, and was forced to move into a room on the opposite side of the palace. Gregory did not give up, however. He refused to allow an evil woman to separate a bond between brother and sister and best friends. As such, he began leaving little trinkets he made around the palace where he knew Snow White would find them. It became a game, something to entertain Snow while she slaved away for the new queen and for Gregory to look forward to each day.

This went on for two years. As Gregory and Snow grew older, the king grew weaker in his everlasting sorrow for the loss of his beloved. At the end of the two years, the king died. Some say his death was caused by a broken heart, others the new queen killed him to secure his power. Indeed, less than a day after the death of the king, the queen proclaimed herself the sole ruler and began issuing new laws. Snow White, in particular, suffered from her father's death. Her stepmother acted with a renewed hatred and confiscated all but one of Snow's beautiful gowns and dresses. Snow White was forced to work as a servant, cooking and cleaning for hours before being able to play with Gregory. Snow was always so tired after her hours of work, however, she never had the energy to spend as much time with Gregory as he would have liked. Still, Gregory insisted on reading Snow White her favorite stories every night before bed. Sometimes, Snow and Gregory would talk like the old days, though that happened less and less as time went on.

Gregory, as upset as he was, was not entirely lonely. At his father's funeral he had met a prince from a neighboring kingdom, named Florian. As was the custom of the time, Florian remained at the castle to offer support after the funeral. Gregory and Florian became fast friends, debating everything from politics to weather. The two boys were constantly exchanging knowledge. Gregory would teach Florian how to play a lute, and Florian would teach Gregory how to joust. Still, every night Gregory would leave Florian to go read to Snow White.

One night, Gregory left a particularly compelling conversation with Florian over the merits of games such as chess to go read to Snow, only to be stopped by his stepmother.

"Snow has been working awfully slowly lately, and I fear it is because she has not been getting enough rest," she told Gregory. "As such, these little visits are going to have to stop for now. She needs her sleep and it really is quite unkind of you to keep her up so late."

Gregory was heartbroken. His night visits with Snow were the only time he spent with his sister, although he agreed his sister needed more rest. But Snow was not getting extra rest. In fact, the queen had sent her on an errand in the woods to fetch some rare roots.

Night after night, Gregory would go to Snow's room, and night after night, the queen would stop him. Gregory became quite irritated and took out his frustration by venting to Florian.

"I care about her," Gregory would say, "she's my sister. I want to help her and make sure she's alright. Stepmother works her too hard and doesn't even seem to care. I just miss her."

"Then why don't you rescue her," Florian would respond, "I could help. We could go to my palace and Snow would be free."

Gregory always had an excuse. "I can't leave my home." "I need to defend my kingdom." "Maybe tomorrow." "My parents would want me to stay."

One night, Gregory and Florian went exploring near the woods having their usual banter when Snow appeared. She looked exhausted and could barely walk. In her hand was a heavy basket filled with herbs and berries. Needless to say, Gregory was furious. While he thought his stepmother had been preventing him from visiting Snow for her health, she had been working Snow twice as hard, making her suffer twice as much. Gregory and Florian helped Snow back to the castle and hid behind a wall while she delivered the basket to the queen. Gregory wanted to know why the queen hated Snow White so much before confronting her, thinking it would possibly strengthen his case. Snow was so weak after coming back from the woods, Florian carried her back to her room and offered to feed her some food while Gregory

read her soothing stories. Once she was asleep, Gregory walked Florian back to his room and went to spy on the queen.

Gregory knew exactly where to find her. When the king and his stepmother first were married, she ordered a private room with many locks built, one only she had access to. That is where Gregory went first, and that is where he found her. He peeked through a hole in the wall and was confused by what he saw. The room was empty, save a mirror. The queen was talking to the mirror, or to herself, Gregory couldn't really make out who exactly the queen was talking to. I say talking, it was more like chanting.

"Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who is the fairest of them all."

"Queen, your loyal servant I will always be, but there is still one fairer than thee."

Gregory understood with sudden clarity. The queen was working Snow White this hard in an effort to subdue her looks and make her less fair. But Snow White already looked exhausted. She was as thin as a bone, she hadn't washed in weeks, her skin was pale and blue and purple. Yes, she was still beautiful, as natural beauty cannot be subdued, but she was by no means the fairest of them all. Gregory was terrified. The queen had done everything short of killing Snow to make her less fair. He decided the only course of action to save Snow would be to take Florian up on his offer and take Snow away from this place. But Florian was asleep, and this was a delicate matter, to be done with utmost secrecy. "Tomorrow," Gregory decided, "I'll take her away tomorrow."

When Gregory awoke the next morning, he ran to Florian's room and explained the situation. Florian, who, after seeing Snow White, wanted to help her as well, immediately started drawing up a plan of escape. Together Gregory and Florian went to fetch Snow White only to find her room empty. They went to the kitchen, the courtyard, the garden, all empty of Snow White. Finally they went to ask the queen.

"She is gone, and I'm afraid she won't return anytime soon."

"What did you do to her," screamed Gregory.

"I would be careful how you speak to the queen if I were you," was the response.

Gregory imagined the worst. The queen had finally figured out a way to solve her fairness issue. She had killed Snow White, his sister, his best friend. Florian, seeing Gregory overcome by conflicting passions of anger and grief, quickly ushered him away from the queen. Florian spent the next couple days consoling a weeping Gregory and preventing him from making any rash decisions out of anger and hatred. When Gregory had no more tears, he would sit in silence with Florian, grateful that he still had one person he cared about. In fact, Gregory cared quite a bit for Florian, a person he could always rely on, who was always there

for him, who he could easily converse with and laugh with. Gregory started to feel a sense of purpose he had not felt before. He felt whole when he was with Florian. As the days continued, he realized that even the thought of Florian made him happy, and he always caught himself smiling a little bit. He instantly felt a little better when he saw him and the loss of Snow White seemed easier to manage whenever Florian was around. 'I think I may be in love,' thought Gregory. But he couldn't be, because Florian was a man, and Gregory was a man, and men couldn't love each other, could they? It was wrong, wasn't it? Gregory had never felt any sort of attraction toward any of the girls, and there were plenty vying for his attention, nobles and servants alike. But the boys, the boys had always fascinated Gregory. They were all so similar, but so different. A puzzle just waiting to be solved. As Gregory thought all of this, he felt that hole from his childhood begin to fill slowly.

Gregory and Florian began to spend increasing amounts of time with each other. Florian was afraid of what Gregory might do without someone to stop him and Gregory couldn't stand to be away from Florian. So the two would spend the days exploring and talking. Once, the two came very close to the queen's private room and heard a frustrated scream. They crept closer and Gregory peered through the hole in the wall. There was the queen, once again talking to the mirror, but she was angry.

"That's not possible," she said, "Again! Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?"

"Queen, your loyal servant I will always be, but there is still one fairer than thee."

"But Snow White is dead! The huntsman killed her! I have her heart!"

"Your fairness is not seen by all, beware, my queen, your kingdom shall fall."

"It's the boy. It has to be the boy."

Florian quickly grabbed Gregory and the two ran as fast as they could. "We have to leave," exclaimed Florian. "We have to go. Now!" Gregory ran to his room, threw what he could into a bag and, together, Florian and Gregory fled the castle.

"Maybe she's alive," said Gregory. "Snow was the fairest of them all, maybe she survived."

"The queen has her heart," reminded Florian. "Fair does have two meanings. Snow may have been the prettiest, but you are the most just. You and Snow are both the fairest."

Together they galloped through the woods, headed towards Florian's castle, when they came across some music. It was hauntingly beautiful, and came from a collection of seven men playing instruments. Seven exceedingly short men. Seven short men surrounding a coffin. Florian and Gregory dismounted, intending to pay their respects. What Gregory saw, however,

stopped him in his tracks. There, in the coffin, was his sister. Not the ragged Snow White from after the king's death. His sister, a beautiful, wonderful, healthy person. Well, not quite healthy. Gregory's knees buckled as he realized that Snow had been alive all this time. There she was, in a coffin, looking as though she would sit up at any minute, chest intact, and lacking any breath. No words are adequate to describe the overwhelming sense of guilt, grief, and devastation Gregory felt at the sight of his sister. He was grateful, however, that Florian had the sense enough to open the coffin and kneel to pay his respects, since Gregory could neither move nor speak.

Here, I would like to take a moment to appreciate Gregory's strength. He is a man who has grown up feeling alone, losing his mother, his father, and his sister, twice. He has battled with an evil stepmother to keep control over his life. He has realized why he felt alone in discovering his love for his one companion. He has broken his vow to protect his sister and failed to go after her after he was told she was missing, leaving resounding feelings of guilt. Yet after all of this, he is still standing, still whole. That is what makes the look that Florian gives him, one of guilt, of apologies, of betrayal, so much harder to bear. Florian gives Gregory this look as he bends his head, closes his eyes, and kisses Snow White on the lips. A slow, sorrowful kiss. One of love and devotion, of goodbyes, of regrets, of missed opportunities. A kiss so powerful, it wakes Snow White from her eternal sleep.

Florian and Snow embraced each other, laughing, crying, ecstatic at the fact that they both loved each other, though they were both too afraid to say so.

"I've loved you from the moment you carried my basket of herbs and berries from the woods," proclaimed Snow White.

"I've loved you from the moment I first saw you at your father's funeral," laughed Florian.

While Snow and Florian were professing their love for each other and the dwarfs were celebrating, Gregory was there, frozen. The man he loved and the sister he lost. A happiness that was never meant to be, and a happiness that had long since ended. And when Florian and Snow both looked at Gregory, Florian with a look of guilt and excitement and Snow with a look of happiness and anticipation, Gregory said the hardest sentence he had ever said. A sentence known all too well by those who love people they cannot have: "I'm happy for you."

Snow White and Prince Florian were married soon after and Gregory was at the wedding. There he sat in the front row, trying to smile, with tears running down his face. Those who saw him must have thought he was simply crying for joy, but I know better. There is only so much strength that people can hide behind. There will always be a hole in the wall to reveal the truth, and Gregory found his.

The evil stepmother was eventually defeated. Florian loaned Gregory his kingdom's army and Gregory defeated the queen. The mirror was smashed and pieces were buried in seven different locations by the newly founded Seven Knights of the Dwarf Alliance. Gregory became king and there has been a strong alliance between the two kingdoms ever since. Gregory lived a long and prosperous life, a king so good he rivaled his father, but he never knew happiness and felt that hole until the day he died.

So Snow White's story does end with a happily ever after, but Gregory's doesn't. The king and queen did indeed get their wish, for Gregory did have skin as fair as snow, lips as red as blood, hair as black as a raven's wing, and was as resilient and strong as that rose in the garden one winter many, many years ago.