

## Supplemental Materials – Fantasy Treatment

[Blurb: This is another one of those test cases. This one is probably the grossest and goriest since I was trying on the contemporary “everything-is-terrible high fantasy” outfit – basically if G.R.R.M. adapted fairytales, I guess? The story of the blinded princess is the origin of the magic tree that protects all of the fur cloaks (retcon, I wrote this way before we had any of anything but a crazy dream).

Obviously the mother figure is a big thing for us, but our idea of the mother figure is almost exactly the opposite of almost every version of the “All Fur” story. Most of the time, the king wants to marry his daughter because of a promise the dying mother extracted from him: “Don’t remarry unless she’s as beautiful as I am.” I hate that and I didn’t want to do it. Before throwing it out altogether and going with the “inexplicable/force of nature” thing I tried out a version where the dead queen hated the king: she cursed him, rather than engaged him in a sacred promise. I think it’s pretty gross and fun, if “fun” is the word here.

Everyone loves an origin story...]

The queen had hated the king with a commitment that beggared nature. She had never wanted to marry him or leave the kingdom of her girlhood. She missed its cloud plains and crystal fountains. She missed seeing the fire-stories and hearing the cries of the warwitches.

The king stole her when she was still a young princess. She had traveled to the edges of her kingdom to scale the Border Mountains and prove herself and complete her womanhood rites. The king saw her leaping from peak to peak and envied her strength; he wasn’t used to wanting what women had – like the land and sea, their kingdoms were very different – because she was a woman he misunderstood his envy to be covetousness.

He saw her gleaming silver in the mountain sun and wanted such beauty and power for himself, but he and his men were heavy and slow. They couldn’t flit among the rocks and clouds like she could. They couldn’t fly, but they were clever hunters, and kept clever birds.

The king called for his best golden hawks. Each of the pair was as sleek and long as a beautiful woman and faster than the finest stallion. They were starving and hooded, so when the king set them loose they flew faster than the men’s eyes could follow.

Meanwhile, the young princess knew that there were foreign men below her, but she was young and foolhardy and she felt no fear. She was a sovereign on her own land, free, and safe, and joyfully in command of her own body. She couldn’t

imagine that anyone would dare to attack her – or for that matter that anyone could catch her at all.

She didn't fear the men, and so when she saw the men's hawks flying fast for her back she only felt anger at their audacity. She raced up and around the mountains through thick trees and jagged rocks, but the hawks were so hungry that they dared not relent. They kept pace and as they closed in the young princess began to feel afraid. She led the hawks on a great chase but at last her fear made her foot falter and in that instant the hawks were upon her.

Each seized a sleeve of her fur cloak. She hissed and snapped like a bird herself. The clever hawks knew that they could not hold her for long and so they acted almost as one – they bent their wicked beaks to their face and put out her eyes.

She screamed and fell from their grasp. Her agony and fury were so great that her mother, the queen, felt the pain deep in her womb. At that moment she knew what had happened and began to grieve for the bright young princess.

It took the king all day and night to find his hawks where they waited patiently by the young princess's fallen body. Her fur cloak was soiled with blood and rent from her tumble down the rocks, but her body was strong – strong even against the princess's own will.

The king lifted his blinded, captured prize onto his horse and carried her home to his seaside fortress.

The blood from the princess's eyes fell not only upon her cloak but into the earth as well. The soil drank up her desperate loneliness and on the spot where she lay for a day and a night grew a tree which gave comfort and solace to most desperate of travelers. The trees are said to grow to this day, but those who see the Traveler's Tree rarely speak with a voice that historians hear.

The young princess, like a hooded hawk, found her will to escape unequal to the task. Within a few weeks her struggle for freedom seemed to collapse all at once: on that day her silvery hair turned brittle and white and she requested a blindfold for herself in a halting and guttural accent. The king gifted her with a length of cloth-of-gold from his own hands. With her empty sockets covered she seemed to vanish as well, her self buried deep inside herself.

Only when the princess submitted did the king congratulate himself on a good catch and arrange a lavish marriage. No one from the young princess's home country attended, but no warwitches stormed the fortress either. A woman lost abroad is lost for good, according to the law and custom. The young princess had known she was lost as soon as she felt her eyes run out over her cloak.

She was married in silence and carried a child in silence. When it died she birthed its corpse in silence. And so again, and again. Three sons dead, starved in her womb.

The king thought perhaps his bride wasn't so well hooded after all. He threatened and shook her, demanding a living heir. She answered with nothing but her resentful silence. That evening she slipped out from under his smothering arm and crept into her dressing room, the only room where he would seldom go. She loosed her golden blindfold and dipped her fingers into the remains of her eyes – a wound that never closed. She parted her clothes and touched her belly with her bloody fingers. When she returned to bed awhile later the king stirred, although she made no sound.

Soon the queen became pregnant again and remained as sullenly silent as ever. Shortly after the king made the fourth public announcement she stopped eating almost altogether. Soon it seemed as if all her flesh was fleeing to her swollen belly. She went to childbed too soon and, as ever, silently. The tiny girl came forth living and noisy; the king was so glad that he forgot to regret her girlhood. He decided that she should be called Ona, and so she was.

The queen, silently, prepared to die. Eventually one of the midwives noticed and told the king. He resigned himself easily to her death, all things considered, and went to say goodbye to her with composure.

She was laying all alone in her birthing- and dying-bed. As soon as he sat by her side she drew him close and pulled away her golden blindfold. He tried to pull himself away from the horror of her face but she held him fast with the last of her power.

“I curse you,” she whispered in his man's language. Her breath stank with the power of her hatred. “I curse you ever to marry only women who hate you as I do, and I curse them to die rather than bear your seed. I curse you to be drawn to their hate as to the most bewitching beauty.” She dipped into her empty eyes with the steady fingers of her free hand. As he opened his mouth to express his disgust she thrust her blood in past his teeth and onto his hot, recoiling tongue. As he gagged on her blood and hate she gathered up her strength, and died.

The king tried to forget her dying curse as soon as he spat out her blood. He preferred to think instead that he was well rid of a troublesome woman. He tried to forget, but the midwives had heard the queen as well, and they remembered.

The baby princess was nearly forgotten in the spectacle of the queen's death but her noisy cries were soon taken up by a wet nurse named Naj. She was newly arrived from the queen's home country, she had even spoken to the queen before she was carried away when she was a girl serving in the Old Mothers' Palace. Naj didn't like this sea kingdom and had sent her little child back to her home to grow

up in the mountains as soon as the baby could drink goat's milk, and so Naj was a wet nurse with none of her own to feed: ideal for a newborn motherless princess.

The king was happy to leave his daughter to Naj; once the mourning was over he busied himself right away with finding a new bride, one more agreeable than the last. He made the rounds about the nearby kingdoms (excluding his dead queen's) and was gone for several years. The trip was a resounding failure: every princess and duchess he met seemed to repulse him. The sweeter her smiles, the faster he wanted to get away. In his stubbornness he refused to return or consider his curse, instead he blamed the women and extended his trip.

While her father was gone Ona lived well. She loved Naj and grew up laughing and shrieking. Her hair was the same color and texture as gold wire. She thought it was very ugly compared to Naj's fat grey braid.

The princess's education was a very limited one – in fact the things that she was permitted to learn could scarcely fill a cheap book. Of course anything to do with the queen was strictly forbidden. During the day Naj gave the princess the correct lessons, but at night she taught Ona about her mother's people.

Naj knew a little story magic. On very quiet nights when they were sure not to be discovered, the princess and the nurse would huddle around the stone fireplace and the Naj would make fire-stories in the old way. In this way Ona learned about demonesses, cloud plains, battle magic, and her mother.

It took a long time for Naj to feel safe enough to tell Ona about her mother. General ignorance was state policy, but the king himself had threatened every servant in the household that the little princess was to learn nothing about her mother – indeed, not even that she had one. For a long time Ona did not know even enough to ask how she had come to be.

In the secret fire-stories, though, Naj made a tale of a glowing-bright princess who could run faster than any horse and climb mountains better than any shaggy goat. Almost every time they huddled around the fire Ona would have a story about her adventures – and every one was as true as stories can be. Fire-stories can't be made with the intent to deceive. Ona came to love the glowing-bright princess like a dear friend.

After a few years Naj ran out of stories about the queen. Ona noticed right away and demanded more. She was almost a woman by then; her gold wire hair was starting to look almost beautiful, but she was grown up too wild for local tastes – not that local men ever saw much of her. Her father wasn't at home enough to officially bring her into court.

Hidden away or not, Ona was a princess and she wore it well. Soon Naj had to give in to Ona's demands for more stories. She showed the glowing princess's womanhood rites and the big man with the golden hawks who saw her and wanted

her strength for himself. Naj was weeping as she made the hawks put out the queen's eyes all over again. Ona was weeping as well when her favorite hero put on the dull gold blindfold. Naj wanted to skip the deaths of Ona's brothers, but she hugged herself tight and showed them. Ona covered her mouth with her hands. She was unmoving and silent by the birth of the daughter and her dying curse.

When it was all told Naj gathered her courage and looked at her charge. Ona looked like a little girl again; she looked afraid of what Naj was going to say. Naj opened her mouth but found that she still couldn't say the forbidden words. She turned to the fire again and summoned the image of the evil man from the story, this time bearing the little bundle that was the daughter. She made another figure – a young woman with a fat braid. The young woman took the bundle and nursed it. She rocked it and held it close as it grew. Fire-Naj set the fire-Ona onto the ground and, finally, the story-nurse led the story-princess to a small fire, a perfectly miniature version of the fire by which the two had sat for nearly ten years. Beside the fire Ona grew into a woman and the image faded.

There was a long moment of stillness before Ona broke. Her hands were still pressed hard to her mouth. Naj forgot her fear and gathered her girl into her arms as if she were a child again. They didn't speak. Ona seemed to have been struck dumb by the horror of it.

“I hate him,” she said finally. “I hate him so much.”

Naj felt a chill and a stab of awful fear. After a moment she pushed it aside.

After that evening Ona was dull and pale. Naj regretted telling her, but she knew Ona already resented every day she'd spent in ignorance.

Eventually Ona's body adjusted to carry her shame and horror. Other servants thought she was the better for it – she seemed more stately now and less wild. Naj dreaded the day her father would return.

He was gone for several more years, but even he couldn't stay away forever. Ona was fifteen when Naj told her that she would see her father in less than a month. For a moment Ona almost seemed beside herself as she prowled their tower with a fury that frightened even her oldest friend. Naj begged her to calm down and felt that cold fear clawing up her throat.

The king arrived too soon. He was bitter and irritated that he remained single. His last queen's words hung around his neck like a millstone that he couldn't acknowledge. He was in no mood to entertain, but the palace held a feast whenever he returned home. Generally it was the only time when he saw his daughter for more than a few moments. He was passingly interested in how she was growing up, but even as a child she looked rather more like her mother than he'd like.

Ona entered the hall and took her seat in advance of the king's arrival like she always did. Her hair was braided up and around to keep it under control, but she felt like it was almost rising up off of her head with the strength of her disgust. She kept her eyes downcast and wondered how she would eat without vomiting. Her own body felt like the site of an awful crime.

The king entered and everyone stood, as usual. He glanced around briefly and his eyes came to rest upon his daughter at the high table. He felt a thrill and an awful hot sinking. Ona looked at his face and felt fear as she never had before. She'd almost forgotten her mother's dying curse in the midst of her own pain. The king crossed the hall like a man possessed: he didn't look at all where he was going but never wavered on his path to his daughter's side. She felt herself shrinking and recoiling as he paced closer.

Finally he was within earshot. "My daughter, we must marry."

Ona gasped out a little shriek and ran from the hall.

Within moments she was shut up within her tower chambers. She tore off her courtier's clothes and put on the scratchiest, ugliest thing she could find. It was still damnably soft and fine.

Naj was waiting in the next room for Ona's return. She knew what had happened even before she opened the door and saw how the princess reared back in a panic. After a moment Ona realized who it was and crumpled again.

"Cursed. I'm cursed."

"Oh, Ona," the wet nurse crooned. "Don't say it." She didn't ask what happened. She knew had had happened because she knew that the girl was, indeed, cursed. She got up to bolt the door and barricade it, and then returned to hold her princess until she fell asleep.

That night Ona dreamed of her mother. She was made of fire like in the stories but the flames were silvery blue. Her empty eyes were dark points of purple.

"My poor monster," the glowing-bright princess murmured. "Even you don't deserve this. I wish I had found the strength to spare you as I did your brothers, but it hurt so badly...but not as badly as this does. It's time to claim your inheritance. I have only one thing of my own to give to you. My fur cloak is stained with my eyes' blood and it is mine alone. I've hidden it; it's buried under a dying yew tree along the fortress wall. Take it and return to my home. Your father can't reach you there, and maybe you'll find some peace."

Ona woke up with a wet face and aching bones. She turned to her wet nurse who was guarding her door and told her that she was getting away.