

The Deathly Harp

by Tisya V

The whole place felt alive; it had a beating, thriving heart. The trees leaned over the small stream, as if they were concerned parents, hovering over a small child. There were large gray and brown rocks with corners that had been smoothed over time, bordering the stream.

Merlyn had been exploring the woods late at night, when suddenly she heard a tantalizing tune. The soft music had multiple layers of complexity and there was an unattainable quality about it. It sounded like a little pixie was waltzing on a piano, though it also sounded like there was a guitar and the vibrations from the strings were giving the music a much deeper, richer sound.

The sound took over her mind, and she felt herself settling into a cloud of calmness. Suddenly finding the music was the most important thing to do. She quieted her thoughts and followed the tune through the trees desperately.

That's how she reached the place with the trees and the stream. One of the rocks had a flat wide surface and on it was an exquisite harp. The strings were golden and it was mahogany wood. The strings were being plucked but no one was playing it.

Merlyn took a step forward filled with uncertainty and trepidation. The rock was on the other side of the stream and the stream was too wide for her to jump over. She saw a spot where the stream narrowed a bit. Merlyn got an idea. She started looking in the grass and looked behind the rocks. Finally she found what she needed.

Merlyn collected 6 strong sticks and tied them together with the hair ribbon she had. When she was finished making her “plank,” she laid it across the stream. It was just the right length. She was directly above the stream and her heart felt like it was an acrobat, jumping, twirling, and doing dangerous stunts. She tenderly put her left foot ahead of her right foot, and finally she made it to the other side of the stream.

She made her way to the rock on which the harp stood and stroked the firm dark wood.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?” hissed a voice. Merlyn jumped and from behind one of the leaning trees emerged the person to whom the raspy voice belonged to. She had a flowing, long, silvery gown and her facial features were sharp, angular, and pale. She was eerily beautiful.

“I- yes it is,” stammered Merlyn.

“I’m sorry, but who are you?” asked Merlyn.

“Who am I? I’m the inhabitant of these woods and I have been for more time than your little mind can imagine,” replied the pale lady, coming closer and closer. She walked to stand next to the harp and stroked the wood with her long, skeletal finger.

“I own this beautiful harp. Believe it or not I fashioned it myself. I know that humans don’t acknowledge supernatural forces and think its all fake, but I can assure that its not,”

Merlyn knew that she had been taught that witches and curses and magic were fake, but she was starting to question what she was taught.

“Well, you needn’t answer, though humans have always been close minded. Just because they don’t like magic, does not mean they can just say it is not real,” said the lady. Merlyn wanted to give a retort, but she found herself tongue-tied.

“You see how that harp is playing itself? Well, there are actually spirits playing the harp. They will play for the rest of eternity. Do you know how they became my servants? They were once humans that wandered into this part of the woods and disturbed me. I took mercy on them. Instead of me taking their lives, they became my harp players. I make them play because the music attracts humans. Most of the time, I kill and consume the humans that come this way.”

Merlyn shrunk back in fear. Why did she even wander into the woods? Just for some solitude? Curse her curiosity and need for alone time.

“I- look, I’m sorry for bothering you. I don’t have money, but I can give you anything else you want,” Merlyn lied. A terrifying grin spread over the lady’s mouth and Merlyn could tell that her life depended on what the lady wanted.

“You insult me child, but I find you amusing. I need no money. My life force depends on humans like you who are too curious for their own good. However, as the centuries pass, I’m noticing that humans become scarcer in the forest. I know not the cause of it, but I know if I don’t get more humans soon, I will fade.”

“What- What do you want me to do?”

“Isn’t it obvious? Find me a decent sized group of humans. Tell them you found a perfect picnic spot and I’ll have a feast. If you bring me them, I will spare you. Pick. Do you want to save yourself, or do you want to be consumed?”

The witch had a triumphant smile on her face. She clearly thought that Merlyn would agree to bringing more people so she could save herself. Merlyn thought about it for a moment. She never really was close to anyone, even her multiple foster parents. No one had particularly cared for her. After all, as she had learned time and time again, life was just a fight for survival.

But there was something tugging at Merlyn's heart and she knew. The only way she could protect others was to sacrifice herself for the greater good.

“Kill me. I won't help you murder innocent people,” declared Merlyn with just a small tremble in her voice. The witch scowled. Her eyes filled with a steely determination and hatred and she stepped forward.

“A very stupid choice. Nevertheless, you have made your choice,”

She stepped forward and wrapped her pale hand around Merlyn's neck and slowly sucked the life out of her.