

*Princess*  
*Story*  
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I REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME I SAW MARKS ON MY BODY.

There were three scratches in a line, going from my collar to my waist. My mother, said I must have done it to myself in my sleep. She is a very wise woman. Everything must have a solid reason behind it. I think that's what makes her such a beloved queen. While I envy her logic and wisdom, I do pity her in some aspects. I say with all the respect I can muster, that my beautiful mother, often lacks the ability to think outside of the box. For instance, I knew I did not scratch myself that September night. There was something much darker happening.

Mother was right that the marks happened in my sleep. A cat-like creature, with horns for ears, and a pointed devil tail, leapt from my dream that night. He landed his claws in my skin, tearing down my body until I awoke from the pain. I sat every morning with a damp cloth to my bloodied arm, not knowing how much worse these dreams would get. The nightmares went on for months. Each night the creatures tortured me in worse ways, leaving all kinds of scars behind. They were careful where they scratched, burned, and cut though. The marks would always be hidden by my daytime clothing. Under my elegant ball-gowns, and beneath my cloak, I was battered. It was a secret between me and my demons.

I didn't speak to mother again of the bruises until about a month after the first incident. By this time, I was waking up on the edge of death. I dared not tell her that much though, in fear of being labeled a dramatic. Her logic was, the afflictions were happening during the day. She hired two knights to escort me at all times. They went by Sir Danes and Sir Walter, but I know their real names to be Jackie and Miles. I can see why they would want to use their Surnames. I suppose I could have worse escorts. They were not controlling or cruel. I was able to do whatever I pleased, they would simply follow behind. I felt badly for them though. It went back to me knowing the attacks didn't happen in the day. Poor Jackie and Miles were simply wasting their time. When the danger didn't stop, mother insisted something change. Mother called the high priest, as well as Duke Hampton, the overseer of all the knights, to meet with me since the afflictions are were worsening. With a deep sigh, I stepped into the room where the three were seated.

After greetings, the priest was the first to ask a question. In a voice that sounded like a swine's squeal, he spoke "Princess Grace these marks you say, you believe them to be from a dream?"

"Yes holy Father, they appear in the morning." I feared answering his questions. My mother's face was full of worry as well. I knew I sounded like a mad-lady to them all. If I were anyone else, the witch hunts would have begun for my demented soul.

"Perhaps," the Father squealed, he paused a moment to cough. "Perhaps there is an attacker in the castle. Your dreams may be warning you."

It sounded fairly logical, but something inside me still said it was wrong. "Perhaps," I agreed, following the guidance of my mother's raised brow.

"Then it is settled. Someone shall be tasked to guard the princess in her sleep. I'll even give my blessing for him to be in her bed chamber."

"Your majesty will all due respect!" Duke Hampton interjected from his seat beside the good Father. Before the Father could let out another squeak, mother turned to the Duke with a deep glare as if he'd rode a horse through her clean parlor. The Duke relaxed his face with the realization of her anger. "Please, I beg your pardon. It's just, I personally know every knight in this castle, and none would wish harm on your daughter. Furthermore, none of my knights would wish to waste their time watching a young girl sleep, when there are other matters to tend to."

Mother's face grew even redder. "Are you implying my only daughter Grace, your princess, is a waste of time? The only heir to any sort of throne must lie in a direct decedent of my husband, you know this to be true. Yet, you call such person a waste of time?"

"No your majesty of course not," The Duke stammered with his words. It was amusing to watch.

Mother rose to her feet. "Without her, there is no kingdom. I want your best knight prepared to be with

her as the priest suggested, and I wish to hand pick him."

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That night, I'll admit I was hesitant. I walked into my sleeping chamber expecting to see someone I recognized, Mitch or Jackie maybe. This man standing in my bedroom was someone entirely new to me. He was blonde, with striking blue eyes. He had broad shoulders, and scruff around his chin. He looked to be about five years older than me. What I remember most though, was the solemn look on his face. I cleared my throat before approaching him, it had to be just as bad for him as it was me. With a curtsy, I began my introduction. The man cut me off before I could even finish a word. "Your majesty with all due respect," he said in a flat, bored tone. "The more we get to know each other, the more awkward it will be for me to watch you sleep. Perhaps you should just lie down."

I was left speechless. Never before had a knight spoke to me so rudely. If I wasn't so tired, I'd have put him in his place as mother had with the duke. However, the nightmares had exhausted me. I was holding onto the small thread of hope that having a night guard would somehow make them go away. I needed sleep.

I climbed into my bed, pulling the pink covers to my chest, taking the extra time to tuck the sheets in around my body. It was odd falling asleep with a man in the same room. It was odd having a man in my sleeping chamber at all. This was not what we were taught to do. Sleeping came slower to me than usual. I tried not to look or think about the knight. I'd never been seen in my bed clothes before. I couldn't help wonder what he thought of me.

I woke up while the moon was still high. My body, jerked into an upright position. The terror of my nightmare was too much to speak of. It had left me wide eyed, but I wasn't the only one paralyzed with fear. Just a few feet away from my face, sat the name-

less knight. His eyes seemed unable to blink and his complexion was pale.

"What is it?" I asked. No answer. "Knight, was someone here?" Still nothing. "I demand a response!"

He moved with great stiffness over to a desk in the corner. "Listen here," I spoke with an attempt of authority, "I will not play your games any longer."

Still with no words, he threw a piece of paper onto my bed. He had drawn something. It was the tiny, troll like creature with fire for eyes. It had wrinkles on its face and a scar under its left eye. There was also a boil on its shoulder, but he had missed that detail. "So they're real." I said, looking into the flaming eyes of the creature.

"There were three of them to start, then dozens. Each of them had something in their hands. I don't know how they got on your bed. They didn't come through the door, more just appeared. It was frightening, and painful to watch. They left as soon as you awoke." The knight was quivering. "I was too stunned to move your highness."

I ripped his drawing in half, then tore it many more times until the paper was nearly dust. "Listen to me, no one must hear of this. Do you know what they would do to me if they found out?" My breath quickened, thinking about my dear worried mother and father. I was their last hope for an heir, their only chance for a child. The princess Grace. God's gift to a barren woman. Now I'm haunted by demented spirits. I lamented for my mother, how she would cry if the people declared me a lost cause. "We have to make this stop." I told the knight.

The knight cleared his throat and knelt on one knee before my bed. "The brave knight David Wallow is at your service, you have my word I will not tell a soul. May God strike me down if my lips do part." His voice had calmed from its frightened state.

"Not even to the queen."

He hesitated. "As you command."

"I am going back to sleep then. When the demons come again will you be prepared?"

The knight grinned, "Do not be afraid your majesty." His hand laid on top of mine. "I will protect you." His sparkling blue eyes were the last thing I saw before closing my eyes.

Somehow it was easier to fall back asleep. The moment of terror was replaced with a new trust. The knight's sword fought off any fear as I drifted off.

I woke up gasping for breath. My neck felt strained. I choked back a few clumps of air. To my right, stood the knight David with his sword drawn. "What's happened?" I asked him. I could still feel the lingering of the demon's hands wrapped around my throat. "Why didn't you stop them?"

The knight returned his sword to its place. He fell to his knees before my bed. "Your majesty, there was nothing I could do. My sword went right through them." I remembered running through halls from in my dream. I was corned by nearly a hundred demons. If the knight had taken just one I wouldn't have noticed. It was the bigger one who frightened me the most though. The demon with the red skin, and pointed chin. He is the one who grabbed me by the throat. I must have woken up just before...

I noticed the sun rising through the window to my left. "I nearly died." The statement was something I had never admitted anyone before. "Did you hear me? I nearly died!" Anger overtook me. My hands trembled. "You promised to protect me." "And I will your highness. I just need to figure out how. Please give me another night."

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I was in the library that same day when he came to me. Everything

became an attempt to distract myself from the dreams. I don't remember what I was reading, the words had all blurred together just as mother's words had when she spoke to me earlier. I had told her I still had a terrible dream. I did not recount it to her, just like I will not now. It's a far too traumatic thing to remember. Mother didn't care about he dreams anyway. She was content with the fact there were no new marks showing through my clothes. I didn't bother worrying her with the handprint left on my throat. The mark was hidden by my satin and lace collar, something I had done intentionally. While I was reading, or more blankly staring, David came up to me. His tired, crystal eyes were nearly as red as the binding in my book, the bags beneath his eyes as black as the text. "Your majesty," he exclaimed, "I have found it, I have found the key to your cure." His voice was loud, cracked with exhaustion and excitement.

I looked around the empty library. Thankfully, mother had just left to tend to father. "Why don't you announce it to the entire countryside?" I snapped in a whisper, still furious with him.

He slowed down his pace, but it only lasted a moment. "It's your grandfather, he is the answer."

"First you allow me to nearly die, now you are bringing up the shame of my family. I ought to have you imprisoned." I turned away from him disgusted.

"But you won't because you know your troubles won't end there." We both knew it was true. "Look princess, I have found his journal." He offered to me an old black book with rough leather binding. It was held together by a course string and the thick pages were entirely covered with scribbled handwriting in whatever direction.

I touched the book ever so gently. My father wanted to throw it

out last year, but mother argued it gave us a sense of how far we had come.

It was sense tucked away with other family journals towards the back of the library. I never thought I would turn to the book for answers. "What does it say?" I asked the knight, still unbelieving.

"It talks about his plans for the kingdom at first." The knight flipped through the pages, "He had great plans. There are so many ideas in here that would still be useful to this country. He talks about his nightmares though. There is everything from demented cats, to description of Lucifer as a red mad with a pointed tail. It seems with every new idea he had, he lost an hour of sleep due to them. Look here see," The knight pointed to a specific passage.

I read aloud from the script, "The demons. Them must be attacking thee in fear. It's the only answer that pursues logic, for no demon would attack a Christian man while his spirit was awake to fight. They wait for me to rest, when I cannot call upon the Lord for refuge."

The knight read scripture transcribed on the other page "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

"My grandfather had these dreams too." My voice cracked with a rush of emotions overtaking me.

"We can do whatever he did to make the demons go away."

I couldn't hold the tears back anymore. First one drop, then a flow. It became hard to breathe. My shoulders heaved, and my chest hurt with every sob.

"Your highness what is it?"

"My grandfather died in his sleep." Δ