

Winner, Authors by Design Twisted Fairytale contest
NOTE: THIS IS A HORROR STORY. NOT RECOMMENDED FOR CHILDREN.

Mother of All Good Children

By Robin Layne
Based on “Fairy Tell-True” by the Brothers Grimm

A woodcutter fled through the forest carrying his three-year-old child. He heard shouts of “Ogre! The woman is an ogre!”

The man ran even faster. He stopped abruptly when a dazzling light shone before his eyes.

A silver-winged being clothed in silk stood before him, her windblown hair encircled with a starry crown. The woodcutter stared. His daughter gaped up at the figure, raising her tiny hands.

“I can offer much more for your child than you and your wife,” the Fairy said. “Let me take her and raise her myself. I am the mother of all good children.”

Trembling, the father nodded. He lifted his daughter and kissed her cheeks.

“You give her up so easily?” the Fairy said.

“We can barely survive. And her mother—” Fear crept into his face.

All the Fairy saw was the toddler he handed her.

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As the girl grew up playing with the other children in Fairyland’s palace, she forgot the rumors of ogres, and almost forgot her parents. But questions haunted her. Was the Fairy really the mother of all good children? Were any bad children in their midst? Sometimes the girl felt as if she were bad. She never had the courage to ask other children if they felt the same way. Above all, she did not want to be shamed in front of them.

When the girl was fourteen, the Fairy announced that she was going on a journey. “I want you to take care of the keys to my thirteen rooms while I’m gone,” she said to the girl. “The first twelve you may enter and enjoy all you like. But the thirteenth room you must never unlock.”

The girl was proud to be trusted and delighted with the freedom to enjoy the twelve bright rooms with her friends. But as time went by, curiosity about the forbidden door

nagged at her. She said, "If I just take a little peek, it won't hurt anything." The other children all said she mustn't open it. She kept wondering if she might be the one bad child among all the good ones. At any rate, it would be easy to investigate the door and not be caught.

One day she found herself alone and unlocked and opened the door. Golden light poured out. Three fairies stood by a blazing fire. She stretched her hand into the brilliance. After she shut the door, she saw that one of her fingertips was golden. Her heart pounded with fear.

The Fairy returned, looked into the girl's eyes, and asked if she had opened the forbidden door.

"No," the girl replied.

The Fairy, feeling her beating heart, suspected otherwise. She asked again.

"No," the girl replied, terrified of being found out and shamed before everyone.

The Fairy noticed the gold fingertip and knew the girl was lying. She asked one more time. Again the girl denied it.

"It is time for you to leave my home," the Fairy pronounced.

* * *

Two recurring nightmares often disturbed the girl's sleep. In one, she saw a beautiful woman with a crown on her head, her dress spattered with the blood of children. In the other, she saw a face with staring eyes and no mouth—rags ever covering the place where a mouth should be, silence always reigning.

She would wake trying to scream. No scream ever came. She knew the meaning of the second dream: It was her constant reality.

Inside, she raged. How dare the Fairy set before her an irresistible door and then punish her for giving in to its call! For that one crime she was stricken mute and banished to a forest surrounded by thick thorns. She survived day by day—season by season—year by year—alone. Her clothes turned to rags and rotted away. She craved company and comfort, but most of all she wanted her voice, so that she could shout the injustices against her to the heavens.

One spring, she heard the hedge of thorns crackle. She crept near and saw a sword blade thrust into her forest. It whacked through a section of the hedge. A man on a horse rode through the hole.

She shrank into the shadows.

He passed her, chasing a deer. She watched him hunt, fascinated, then stepped out into a clearing.

The man gave up pursuing the deer when he saw the young woman dressed head to toe in her long, golden hair. He spoke gently to her, telling her he was the king of the realm. When she made no vocal response, he realized she was mute. He took her to his palace.

The king fell in love with the mysterious woman he had found. That summer, he made her his queen. Although she was comforted by his love and wealth, her nightmares continued. She longed to speak of the wonders and terrors in her heart. Inwardly, she cursed the Fairy for her spell.

At last she was comforted with the birth of a son. When she was alone, the Fairy came to her and said, "Will you admit you opened the forbidden door? If you do, I'll return your ability to speak. But if not, I'll take your newborn child."

For a moment, the Fairy restored her speech so she could answer. Would she give this wicked Fairy the satisfaction of shaming her? "No," she said. So the Fairy carried her baby away.

The townsfolk suspected the queen had killed her child. However, the king trusted and protected her.

With time, she bore a second son. That night when she was alone in her bed, the Fairy returned to her and said, "If you admit you opened the forbidden door, I'll bring you back your first child and return your speech. Otherwise, I'll take this one, too."

"No!" she denied again. So the Fairy carried the child away.

The palace buzzed with stories of ogres living in the forest, appearing as beautiful women and eating children. "Surely you are one!" the people raged at the queen. She couldn't speak in her defense. But the king continued to protect her.

Finally, the queen gave birth to a girl. The Fairy came to her a third time. Again the woman denied opening the forbidden door. The Fairy spirited her daughter off.

This time, the king was away on urgent business and could not save her from his own counselors, who gathered to burn the so-called ogress at the stake.

When she felt the heat of the flames near, the queen feared the fires of Hell. If only before she died she could confess her trespass to the Fairy! To her surprise, she found her voice. "I'm guilty!" she cried out.

The Fairy sent rain to put out the fire. Yet the guards thought the queen had confessed she had eaten her children. They charged at her with their spears.

A flash of power threw the spearmen backwards. In their midst stood the Fairy, leading the queen's two boys, and carrying the infant girl in her arms.

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The queen sat in the palace kitchen playing with her children, awaiting the return of her husband. As she looked into their eyes, she saw other eyes... Before the Fairy became her mother, in a woodcutter's cottage, a crownless beauty leaned toward her with a vacant expression. Then her father had whisked her away into the woods. Her stomach knotted. Her teeth seemed to be stretching in her mouth. Agony mixed with ravenous hunger. She turned away from the hearth fire and stared at her baby daughter.

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The king returned to his palace. A servant told him his queen had been absolved of guilt and that their children waited with her in the kitchen. Ecstatic, the king hurried to meet his family. He heard a sigh from within the kitchen, but the room was dark. *She must have put out the hearth fire to surprise me*, he thought. He walked in slowly.

Silence.

Unable to wait any longer, he ventured, "Children? Where are you? Come to your father. I know your game."

He heard a low laugh—his queen's voice, he supposed. "Ah, my dear," he said. "You've found your voice at last!" Slowly, his eyes adjusted to the dark.

He saw no children. His wife sat in her royal robes with her crown on her head, her back to him, hands busy at her mouth. As he came closer, he saw that her white train was dripping with red liquid. Slowly, she turned her head to face him. Her mouth was smeared with blood.

The king's eyes went wide. "Have you—harmed our children?" he choked out.

The queen swallowed the last chewed sinew and smiled with satisfaction. "No!" she said.