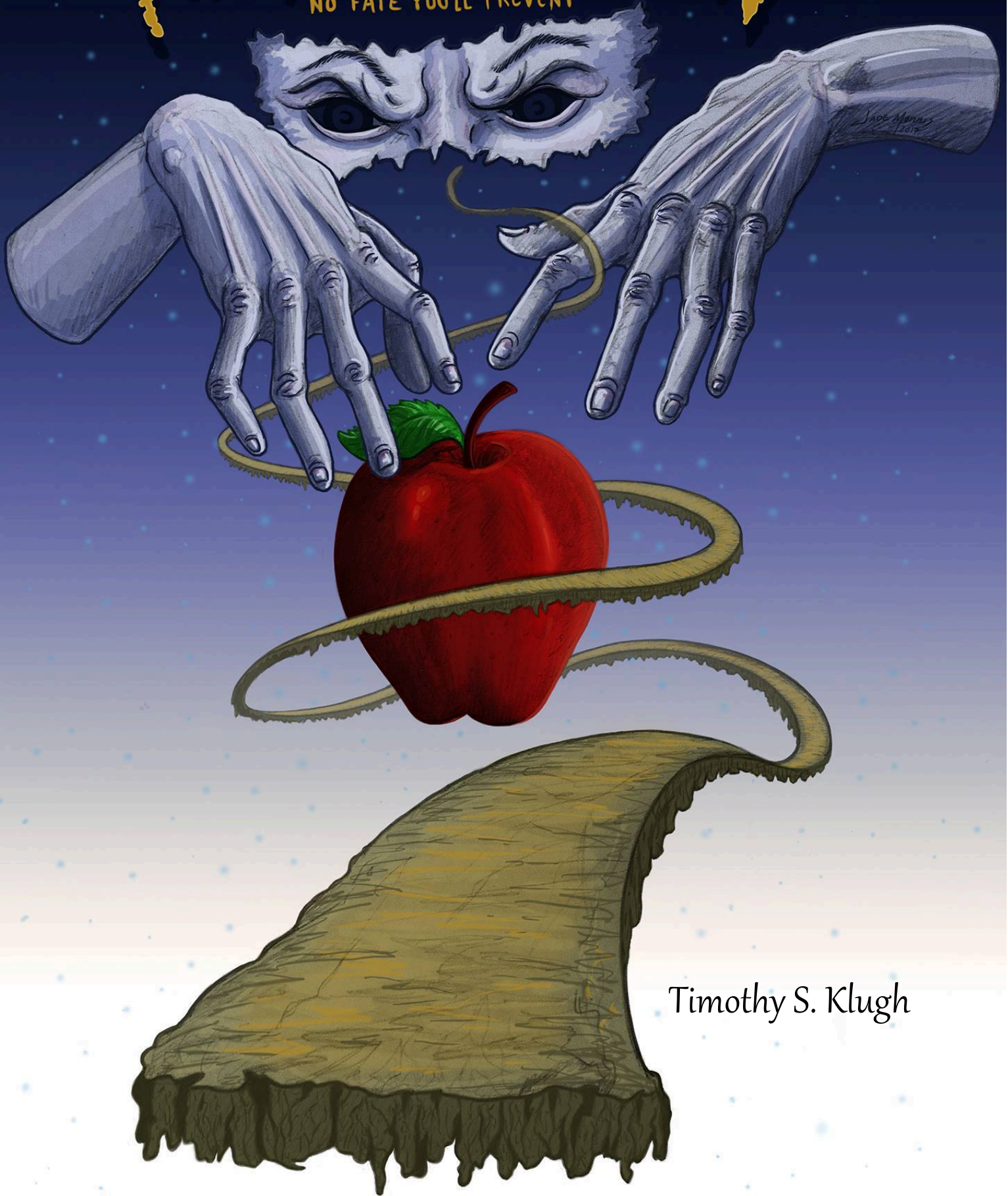


MAGICK & POISON

NO FATE YOU'LL PREVENT



Timothy S. Klugh

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By Timothy S. Klugh

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“Magick & Poison: No Fate You’ll Prevent”

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Based on the short story “No Fate You’ll Prevent” from
“Magick & Poison: The Musical”
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No Fate You'll Prevent



Anyone may seek the good, the pious and humane, or choose the darker options of malice and profane. Some might see a difference at some instance and abstain their foolish deign, and embrace the right with great might and walk the higher plane. Still, a few may fain go down the lane to the lesser domain, and with disdain become the blain of other's pain. For these lowly dwellers forsake the light regardless all the same.

For when the choice of righteousness and evil are bold and easy to define, by its obvious design we find it simple to know where to draw the line. Yet, most of the time, the difference is not so clear, and we are blind as we draw near. The roads we take seem benign at first and we realize not the path we tread. We see not our undoing despite the storm clouds brewing and the rain spewing on the head. It is

not until our feet are deep in the muddy street that we feel the dread... for the trail is riddled in swampy dribble with ruts that would cripple us if we stray. In such a place, right and wrong is partly hidden and difficult to say, and ignorance and fear becomes how we make our way. Most of our life, the answer is not as bright as day, and in that fog that we then trod, our choice is far more ominously gray and often... with a price to pay.

This is a tale where the scale of purity and corruption is sometimes veiled. Decisions are not so easily made. With little steps of compromise, the utter ends are laid. With the slightest nudge, though barely budged, one's course is gently swayed. Thus by little steps that seem so small our fate is starkly played.



In a place most would not grace, there was a long row of derelict buildings that were not fit for even the most detestable sort of loathsome type. In their neglectful ruin, the tired structures were only equaled by the defiled state of the row of buildings on

the other side. Between them was a narrow alley that only could be traversed on foot. It twisted here and there making it impossible to see where either end did lead. This place was all but forgotten and seemingly devoid of life as only the rain could be seen and heard. The way was partly flooded covering most of the cobblestone of the alley surface, and the water gathered in muddy puddles in its ruts and missing stones.

Then faintly, there came the sound of steps that thudded along the rocky pave. Gently growing louder, someone was coming near. The tramping stride sloshed through the flooded passage splashing the water far about. The footfall was determined in its paces like its owner had important business to attend. Yet, never did its walk quicken nor stop to linger on its course.

Finally, into view came a hooded figure dressed in black with a soaked cape that hung heavily down its back. The traveler took no notice of anything around it but kept its focus solidly ahead. When suddenly it halted coming instantly to a stop in the middle of a step. Silently the shadowy personage paused a moment before moving backward one pace. It then turned to its left where a rotting green door was barely standing in an entrance. The

mysterious being gazed at the old threshold as the rain relentlessly fell upon its black garments. For quite a duration it seemed the wanderer would move no more, but then it resumed its pace only this time toward the door. With a leather glove it seized the handle and pushed open the way. As the old green wooden slab swung inward, the rusty hinges broke free and it collapsed to the floor. The figure then went inside.

The creature halted at a set of stairs and took the one leading down into a dank cellar where the entire floor was more flooded than outside. It trudged its way across the room and the water deeply sounded out each movement of its legs. The being came to the far wall where it reached out and felt about each brick upon the surface. It stopped when it found blocks that were loosely fitted. With haste this thing began to grab at the unbound bricks and pulled them from the wall revealing a large hole to another room on the other side. The walls of the other room were made of dirt and the space was very shallow, and there in a squalid corner was a man huddled in the muddy dampness.

“Friar Merek,” the menacing character uttered in a deeply rich tone, “How is it that I find you here slumped into a clump cowering upon the watery floor?”

In an exhausted and frightened voice the man answered, “I cast thee away, thou fiendish sorcerer... Thou beguiler of temptations!”

“So, you know that you are due somewhere, and you are not there,” the creature went on. “We had an agreement to meet today. Did you not mark it on your schedule so you would not be late? This was a very important date.”

The mass upon the floor looked up at his visitor. “I have chosen a more righteous path since my dealings with thou. I have changed my ways these last few days, and I do not need to honor you now.”

The darkened form shook his head and sighed. “It’s funny how these things work out. You gluttoned yourself on my favors. You asked to know the pleasures of the world... things too unspeakable to mention even in the company of just us two. You extracted from our deal half-a-lifetime of lustful zeal till even your desires were more twisted than I foresaw. When the mob came running, did you not somehow flee to unexpected safety and live on to gorge your endless hunger more? Who do you think saved

you, good friar? Now the time has come for my end of the bargain.”

The man held himself tighter and yelped with fear.

“You were to arrive at my door this morning... Do not make me have to hunt you down in this forsaken part of this dreary town,” the brute stated stepping forward.

“It is time to make good upon your end of our arrangement, and by your willing cooperation or my forceful engagement, you will fulfill your binding promise to me.” Then the hooded visitor paused. “She is near, isn’t she?”

“I know not what you are talking about!” the defrocked holy man protested covering his face again.

“With you so near your end, can you not make one amend?” the creature asked. Have pity on the one who did not agree to what you wanted. Has she not suffered enough? Take comfort that I will look after her.”

Through trembling words, the friar cried out, “She is buried in the ground eight doors north on the east side. If she still be alive, may this be my penance to free me from our contract?”

The being opened his cape and reached his hand out holding a scroll in its grip. “Your penance will be your pledge held true, but I assure you what you’ll go through depends greatly on whether she doth too still breathe the air we do.”

“I did not kill her,” the man pleaded. “That must count. I left her to her own destiny.”

The hooded figure chuckled as it stowed the scroll back into its robe. “What you did was leave her trapped in a coffin in the ground where her lot was soundly made. For her fate was one she could not change. Save her is what I will do, but her fate will remain.” A smile drew across the face of the beast as it said, “Just as your fate stays the same.”

The being reached out its hand and seized up the friar with surprising strength lifting him from the floor. It wrapped an arm around the man so that he dangled from the creature’s side. With that the figure took the friar away despite his pleading and

struggling. The corrupted man continued his futile squirming as the black form effortlessly carried him up the stairs, out the threshold, and down the alley on his way to satisfy the deal.





At the same time in the courtyard of the neglected building eight doors north and to the east, a man of lordly wealth entered the yard. He came to a spot where a patch of bare soil was laid and took a spade and stabbed it into the ground. He did so till he reached a simple wooden coffin several feet down. He pried the lid off and threw it in the grass. There was a young woman with long auburn hair and skin so light and fair who stayed motionless where she rested. She appeared as if death had already claimed her. The man brushed his hand upon her cheek. Her chest heaved forward and drew in air and her eyes opened.

“Help me...” She whispered with desperation but no voice was there.

“Of course I’ve come to rescue you,” the good gentleman said in a calm tone. “You are now free of your awful state, and I will take you to my home.”

The stately male reached down his left hand and helped the maiden out of the grave. In her weakened condition she tried to stand, but her knees gave way. Before she landed on the ground, the man caught her in her fall and picked her up in his arms. Here

she was able to really look into the face of her savior. His hair was black but in a peculiar fashion, as it descended from his crown to his cheeks, it took on the hue of dark blue that covered his mustache and beard. Although all of his appearance was clean and well-trimmed, the blue hair was noticeably out of place.

“What troubleth your eyes?” asked the gentleman.

“Forgive me, my lord,” the maiden replied. “I do not know whether my eyes deceive me, but I have never seen blue hair before.”

“Do you fear me because of it?” he asked. “Can you trust someone with hair unnatural in color?”

“I want to,” the woman responded, “but I know not who to trust anymore.”

“I know your past, my dear,” the gentleman commented, “for I am very insightful. Perchance, you trusted someone you thought to be trustworthy. Perhaps, he appeared quite normal. Maybe you felt you would be safe, but then he began to harm you.”

Tears welled in her eyes as disgrace filled her heart.

The man gave her a glance that seemed to penetrate her soul. He then said, "The problem with normal is that we feel safe in its company. It hides what we should dread. For all one knows, those we can trust would look abnormal instead."

His reasoning confused the lass, but still it felt comforting. She sighed and replied, "You speak in ways that I cannot quite understand. Still, I do think a shade of blue is something I can get used to. What is your name?"

He smiled and answered. "I am Lord Velid."

"Oh," she softly uttered, "I am Kora."

He laughed heartily. "Then let's waste no more time in this gloomy place, Kora. I have a beautiful carriage that awaits us at the end of the alley."

Excitement gleamed in her eyes. "I have never been in a carriage before!"

Lord Velid started to leave carrying the woman as he went. He then paused as if he had forgotten something. “There is much more that awaits you, sweet maiden, but I can only take you with me under certain conditions.”

Tilting her head to the side, Kora asked, “What conditions are those?”

He looked at the open coffin and then back to her. “You must be my bride and never asked why I saved you or knew where to find you. You must promise to follow any rule that I make and honor thy husband completely.”

“You do not want me,” the maiden said with sadness, “for I am not chaste anymore. My virtue has been taken, and I am not worthy to be the bride of a lord.”

“I am not seeking your chastity but rather the pureness of your heart,” the lord said easing her despair. “That is what I hold most dear.”

Touched by his words, Kora accepted his conditions. She would go with him and be his bride, for she thought Lord Velid would always provide what was best for her.

The gentleman carried her through the dismal building and down the drab narrow alley. There indeed was a beautiful carriage that was also blue with gold trim along its edges. The coachman and two footmen were blue with faces similar to that of fish, which struck the maiden as even more odd. Still she did not want to continue to question the curiosities around her fearing it might anger the man who had been so kind. The horses were black with blue eyes, blue manes and blue skirts on their tails, which unlike the fishy men, were quite striking in their appearance.

Kora marveled at the sight and then turned to Lord Velid who asked her, “Are you ready to go home?”



As the lord and maiden rode along in the carriage leaving the town behind them, they travelled into the countryside. As they went along, the lord described where he lived.

“It is a palace called Grigori that sits along a river in a lush green forest,” he explained. “It is named after a mighty race of beings so great that even the giants stood in their shadows, but they are long gone... sunk into the ground into legend. The palace is beautiful to behold. There are many servants and many treasures inside. You will find that I have gained much wealth through the years. There, you will be taken care of.”

When they arrived, Kora found that Lord Velid had not overstated his home. The palace was large with spires that towered so high that she could hardly see the blue flags at their peaks. The vast garden was bordered by a magnificent stone wall, with statues of creatures bigger than giants at each corner. In this garden, the wedding decorations were already about with blue ribbons streaming across the lawn, and blue coverings over the tables, and blue flowers everywhere. Kora was given a blue dress to wear and was provided a chamber atop a high stairs where beautiful furnishings were placed all about with a large mirror so clear it was as if she could walk right through.

The wedding was like a dream to the young lady. All that she could have wished for was fulfilled if not even more. Although Kora did not know the servants and guests, they were all elated at the beautiful fest. At this point their fishlike faces were starting to become normal to her. She gladly made her vows to the blue bearded lord and promised to obey and honor him completely.

He took her into the palace where she saw a massive great hall with stairs ascending to balconies that many doors ran along. The passages seemed to be without end with other passages leading to other places and always new rooms all over.

Each door that they came upon, Lord Velid would open to let her see the splendor inside. She saw elegant ball rooms, libraries, dining rooms and bed chambers by the score. Other rooms held nothing but treasures such as gold, silver, rubies, diamonds and other precious trinkets and stones. Exhausted from the lengthy tour he gave her, Kora had no more excitement left to behold each new wonder. At the end, they came to a hall that was dark and quite different from the others. There were no doors along its walls except one that was far at the end, which was barred by a wooden beam.

“You may wander wherever you wish”, Lord Velid said and then paused, “except for that door that is barred by a wooden beam.”

“So many doors in this palace and so many rooms,” she happily stated. “It seems that I would never find my way back to this hall as it is.”

In a voice surprisingly strong, the lord said, “You shall never open that door!”

Concerned that she had enraged her husband, Kora placed her hand softly on his. “Of course,” she gently assured him. “I promise to honor your rules and always do as you command.”

His new bride was tired, so the lord suggested that she rest in her personal chamber as he attended to business that she would not find so savory. This unnerved Kora a bit, but her husband reminded her that she would do as he said. So his bride returned to her sanctuary that towered above the palace. She spent her time combing her hair in front of the mirror and marveling at the splendor around her.



She awoke to find that night had come, but that was not what had disturbed her slumber. There was a commotion that she could hear out the window coming from the garden below. Kora rushed to the window to gaze out at the uproar. By the time she got there, she only saw shadows on the path of those who just entered the palace. She went to her chamber door and opened it just a little. From down the winding stairs she could faintly hear the struggle. Kora did not want to leave her chamber and disobey her husband, but what she could do was open the door wide and be as quiet as she could.

Suddenly Kora heard a voice shrieking words in fear, and the voice was strangely familiar. It cried out, "Please do not do this! Please do not burn me!" She then recognized that it was the terrible friar who had hurt her.



For a friar she felt she could trust as she rushed to him one day just after being caught stealing an apple. So many times she had taken this fruit and gone unnoticed, and she had come to rely on the shop as a source of her sustenance. This time the shopkeeper saw the thief of his goods. He gave chase to the young lady, but he lost her as the friar took her to an empty lane.

There he offered her gold if she would ravish her favors upon him, but this confused and frightened the maiden instead. She began to run but he caught up to her quick and had his prize regardless of her will. The shopkeeper had arrived at this point and beheld the horrible sight, so he hastily called together a mob to attack the friar. Kora broke free and ran down a street, and in his lust and rage, the friar went after her with the townspeople not far behind.

Turning a corner, the friar came upon a door. He opened it and locked himself inside just as the horde arrived. Out in the street a small blue man with a fish for a face called to the gathering that the friar had ran on down the way. The crowd rushed onward passing the door. The friar sighed as he was now relieved of the danger. He looked around the room he was in,

and to his pleasant surprise he found that Kora had hid there too.

Recalling this foul episode, Kora curled her legs close to herself and sat with her hands wrapped around her knees. With her back to the frame of the doorway, she stayed still as she listened to the fading cries of desperation from the friar far below. Then like a chilling slash through her body, she was startled by the friar's most agonizing screams. It was a sound so horrible that she put her hands to her ears and still could not block the suffering wails. Even when it all came to a stop, the experience repeated in her head and left her mind in misery. The hideous feeling of unspeakable dread lingered all about her.

Eventually she heard the tromping of heavy feet coming up the stairs. The approaching stranger was decisive in its stride like it had a specific purpose for taking its course. The weighty steps changed though as it ascended closer to that of a normal pace. As this occurred, she saw a blue glow coming from below and the tinkling of chimes. The light faded to a small glimmer and the ringing ended. A moment later she saw the blue gleam came from a lantern that Lord Velid was carrying.

“Awe,” he said with warmth in his tone. “I am so pleased that you have not left your room. You are now free to go wherever you wish, save the barred door. For now though, we should have our wedding night in my chamber.”





Time had passed and it was the middle of the night. Kora tried to sleep but her husband snored like a snarling wolf. She carefully left his bed and crept to the door. Looking out into the hallway, the young lady saw that the entire palace was dark. She silently returned into her husband's chamber and sought out his lantern, which was covered in a cloth. She then slipped out of the room with the lantern still under its cape. Quietly shutting the door, she glanced both ways in the hall to make sure that no one was watching. Removing the fabric from the lantern she saw a dim small blue radiance within. On closer inspection, Kora saw that it was a blue fairy confined within the glass. She marveled at the beautiful elegance of the fae inside.

“I do not want to harm you, dear enchantress in the glass,” Kora whispered, “for I feel that this is not someplace you wish to reside. I would ask that you simply glow a little brighter so that I may find my way through the blackness.”

The fairy was angered by the lady's request and lifted her arms to reveal the tiny shackles around them. This magical sprite then seemed to give up and forced her wings out wide causing a wondrous blue brilliance that illuminated the hall. With the light to

guide the young woman's way, Kora wandered the many passages which went to other halls continuing in all directions. No matter where she roamed there was no one else there. In fact, it felt like the palace was abandoned. It took hours for her to traverse the great distance of her quest that had only one goal... to find the hall with the barred door.

When Kora eventually came upon it, this hall was more ominous than all the places she had been. She slowly began to walk the length of the hall toward the barred door. She noticed that along the walls were paintings of faces. The paintings were positioned at different levels on the walls but all were in long rows that reached toward the forbidden door. Kora was haunted by the faces that peered out from the portraits. She wondered why certain faces were in rows with other faces. As she drew near the barred door, she saw where one of the rows ended. There was a painting of the friar who had deflowered her.

Only a few yards distance from the foreboding door was this spot where she came upon it. After the torturous screams she had heard earlier that same night, his portrait startled her to the core.

Even the fairy in the lantern was uncomfortable with her proximity

to the barred door, and the fae hysterically pulled on her shackles in the opposite direction causing the sound of chimes and a bright throbbing of her blue light with each tug.

“Shush!” Kora hissed emphatically. “We cannot draw attention on ourselves here. We will leave now, but you must stop your fussing.”

Kora exited the hall and found her way back to the door of her husband’s chamber. She covered the lantern and snuck back inside. Carefully returning the lantern to its place, she cautiously returned to bed.



The earliest rays of sunlight woke the young girl again. No longer wanting to hear the snoring of her husband, Kora returned to her own chamber up the tower stairs. She went to the window and breathed in the fragrant air that suddenly smelled of fish. Kora gazed across the palace grounds to where it met the river. There at the river's edge were more lanterns containing blue fairies that were all set on the shore. All of them were near the entrance into the palace walls. Fish were leaping out of the water

onto the ground near the lanterns. Each time a fish hit dry earth, the fairies would glow brightly changing the fish into cooks, maids and other servants of the palace. All of them were blue and bearing the likeness of the fish they were. Kora could hear the faint chimes of the fairies' efforts from where she watched.

A short while passed before she detected the flapping of feet running up the stairs. It was followed by a knocking on her door.

"My lady," it called from the top of the stairs.

Kora pressed herself to the door and peaked through a crack in the slabs of wood. On the other side, there stood a blue maid with a fishlike face.

"What is it?" Kora asked nervously.

"Lord Velid has sent me to invite you to join him for breakfast," the maid answered.

"Oh, of course," Kora responded. "Give me a moment to dress and I will go with you."

"I can assist you if you would like," the maid suggested.

"No, that will not be necessary," Kora replied reaching for dress from her wardrobe. "I shall not take long."

She peered into the mirror and ran a comb through her hair until she was presentable to be seen. She was growing leery of the odd happenings about her, so she had to pause until she could get her wits. Kora then went to the door and opened it.

“Please, lead the way,” she said to the maid.

The particular dining room that Lord Velid had decided to eat breakfast in was one of the largest in the palace. The walls were pale with trimming made of walnut. The table and chairs was also made of walnut, and the table was about the length of a tree. Lord Velid was seated at the head of the table, and a place was set for Kora at the foot. The young lady sat in her chair and glanced around the room. There were heads of different types of animals mounted all about the walls, and there was a grand fireplace just behind her husband with a crackling fire inside.

“What an amazing assortment of creatures on display,” Kora said as she marveled at her surroundings. “You must be an extraordinary hunter.”

Lord Velid laughed. “I am indeed a great hunter, and I am

quite the tracker as well. Nothing gets by me.” He glanced around the room. “It’s been years though since I caught these beasts. I have moved on since then. In fact, I must do some hunting today.”

“I was hoping maybe we could stroll through the garden,” Kora suggested in a hopeful tone.

“After the hunt is over, maybe we’ll do something,” the lord replied. “It seems my work is never done.”

She paused as the food was brought in by some of the servants. First, the master was served with a platter holding a mass of charred meat, its shape having the appearance of something troubled and tormented. One servant with a lead pitcher poured a thick crimson liquid into a gold goblet that was on the table before the lord. For Kora, the servants presented her with a large wooden bowl filled with apples.

“Oh, how delightful,” the young woman said with a gleeful smile. “My favorite fruit.”

“My favorite as well,” said Lord Velid in an unexpectedly deep tone.

“Is it?” Kora asked pleasantly. “So, why are there no apples placed before you?”

“I like them for other reasons,” he answered.

The lord then went to devouring his meal, which he did using only his left hand. He used no knife, but twisted the meat about with his fingers until the sinews rip and the bones crack. He brought the portions to his mouth and tore the flesh off with particular viciousness. He gnawed on the gristle letting the grease drip down his chin. Reaching his left hand then to his goblet, he aggressively gulped its contents leaving streams of the red brew seeping out either end of his lips.

The scene was disturbing to the young woman. The lord was so unappealing as he dined, but she would have to learn to put her repulsion aside. She had a bounty of a meal greater than she could consume. She did not want her husband to think her unappreciative. Kora brought her hands together to say grace.

“Do not perform such ceremonies here!” He ordered interrupting her effort. “I have provided the feast you are having. The one you are praying to has given you nothing in this palace.”

Kora had let her husband down, and she quickly lowered her

hands. As she did so, her right hand accidentally hit an ivory salt cellar that was setting near her meal. The salt cellar toppled over causing its lid to slide off and dump salt onto the table. Kora apologized and took a pinch of salt from the table surface and threw it over her left shoulder. To her shock, Lord Velid instantly cried out in pain. His bride looked up at him with much worry. He tightly held his left hand to his closed eyes.

“What happened, my lord?!” she emotionally inquired rushing over to him.

“No! Stay where you are!” the husband ordered partly opening his view to see her. “Tis nothing for you to worry about,” he went on in a frustrated but calmer manner. “It is time for me to leave anyway. Please, enjoy your breakfast.”

The lord stood up and in haste left the room. The young woman was bewildered at what just happened. She went to return to her chair, but her inquisitiveness made her want to get a good look at what the lord was consuming. Slowly moving to the head of the table, she examined the carcass upon his platter. Even up close, Kora could not make it out. It had been scorched

terribly on its surface, and there were deep cracks all upon it that sunk low to the raw flesh inside.

The goblet smelled of blood and Kora knew it without a doubt. This frightened her profoundly, but then she recalled that it was a custom of many hunters to drink the blood of the large game they killed. A sense of relief came upon her, yet it still did not bring her back to a state of ease. Something awry still festered in her heart. No matter how the young lady tried to dismiss it, her uneasiness refused to subside.

Kora was now on her own, save the fishy servants she occasionally saw in the palace halls. She had climbed the stairs to her chamber once more when she saw Lord Velid leave the palace gate. He rode on one of his black horses with the blue manes. With great speed the horse galloped into the lush forest and out of view.

Kora's mind was fixed on the peculiar things she had experienced. The mystery ate at her. Surely the answer would be found behind the door barred by a wooden beam, but she was

determined to obey her husband still. Perhaps the answer could be found elsewhere in the palace. Surely a conundrum such as this could not be totally contained behind just one door. She decided to explore the rooms on her own.



As all of this was occurring with suspicions greatly stirring, elsewhere in the forest there was another tale to tell. Near a sleepy little town in a cottage could be found an elderly man in his study. The old intellectual had gained much knowledge over the years, more than had ever been available to any mortal. His heart had experienced the greatest emotions of love, even if that search for love was part of a contract. He knew the end was near, and he had grown so much wisdom that his mind knew he justly deserved the price that was needed to be paid. So when he heard the heavy footsteps that did not cease in their approach toward his room... When he heard the Grim Reaper knock, with good manners, he let him in. The hooded figure halted in surprise when he saw the man bravely open the way.

“No scythe?” the scholar asked. “My preference would have been for the scythe to be in your grasp. My old friend.”

“If you must,” the beast replied.

From his left hand the creature grabbed a small sack fixed to the belt of his robe and shook it vigorously. The trapped fairy inside made a bright bluish glow and a tall scythe appeared in his left hand. The bluish, curved blade of the scythe was positioned on the shaft above the figure’s head.

“It should be in your right hand,” the learned man commented.

“I hate my right hand,” the creature lowly uttered, “but if you must have your way.” With reluctance, it placed the scythe to its right.

“Come in, Velid,” the elderly scholar said stepping back to give the visitor passage. “Or should I say, Devil. Really, you should choose another way to veil your name. Perhaps, you could scramble some other name you are known by: Iblis, Diabolus, Ahriman, Mara, Apep, or Baal... The Dragon, The Old Serpent, The Evil One, The Adversary, The Tempter, the fallen angel, the Prince of the Grigori, the prince of this world.” The old man put his hand on the hooded form’s shoulder. “How about Mastema when you suggested that the young boy Isaac be sacrificed? How about Lucifer or The Son of the Morning, or should we still credit those to that old Babylonian King? Perhaps

a name you stole from another, such as Beelzebub, the name of that Philistine god?” Releasing his grasp, the man walked to a chair as he went on. “So much to choose from for someone above the giants, one of the jinns... low as the demons, one of the fallen hosts of Heaven.” He sat down and looked at the figure without an ounce of fear and continued, “Or, how about Satanael, Shaytan or just plain Satan?”

“Enough!” the beast shouted. “I see our arrangement has allowed you to acquire much awareness, my old friend, Faust. I gave you twenty-four years to gain all the comprehension that you could possess, one year for each hour in the day. You have come so far from the weary melancholia that haunted your mind, your suffering from imbalance of humors.”

“I am exceptionally grateful,” the old man said. “I have taken advantage of all that I bargained for, and I have found that all there is to understand is limitless. More is born with every minute, every second, even less... and there already existed far more at the moment we made our pact than one could ever take in.”

The figure moved closer to Faust trying to break down his confidence. “I have made you a fine example of erudition, and the quality of my effort is very impressive. Have you forgotten

your lust for your beautiful Gretchen? You wanted her to want you. You wanted her to desire you—“

“Speak low if you speak of love, you deceitful spirit,” Faust quickly snapped. “You speak small of love and will never know its essence. Love will not be spurred to what it loathes, and it loathes you, foul demon.”

“Enlighten me, oh man of great wisdom, what love truly is,” the creature responded condescendingly.

The scholar knowingly smiled and stated, “I have experienced love, and that in itself is worth whatever punishment that awaits. Your unkindness may defeat my life, but never taint my love. I wished not for any companion in the world but Gretchen.” He put his hand to his chest. “I could doubt the stars are fire, doubt that the sun doth move his aides, doubt truth to be a liar, but never did I doubt love. I sought love and it was good. Her love was unsought and it was better. Together what we found, what we had, was nothing that could be conjured from such a disgraceful wretch as you... for we truly loved each other.” He looked into the face of the hooded monster with unbreakable courage. “Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind... and in the heart is it constantly connected. When she died, part of my

heart went with her and part of her heart stayed with me. We will never be apart from each other... That, my fiendish friend, is not something you can achieve. It is beyond you.”

The hooded monster became enraged and pulled back its scythe as if to dispatch its victim. “You think too much of yourself,” it snarled. “Tis time to show you what real power is!” It swung the scythe around the learned man, and it held him tight to its blade. “It is time to pay your end of the deal.”

Faust’s eyes widened as if in fear, but he gave into a laugh. “Don’t you see, you old fool? I have learned much and I have known love. Whatever now awaits... means nothing.”

The dark figure used the scythe to yank the old man from his chair until his frail body was pressed up against the creature’s cold form. The beast growled, “You will not think your destiny is so light when I have shown you your plight!”

The room became brighter as white rays descended from the ceiling. The scythe faded away into fairy dust as did the sack around the creature's belt. The blue fairy inside, realizing she was free, flew quickly away and out a window. The beast and the

man looked up and saw not the ceiling but the heavens open and there was the voice of Gretchen.

“My dear companion,” her voice spoke, “you still have a heart to love, and in that heart, courage, to make love known. I have never ceased to plead your case since I left you in this world. Till the end, you never failed to show your love was strong. Your time has come, but you’ll come here and have the forgiveness you truly deserve. For your soul if sent to Hell, would extinguish the fires.”





Now we return to the happenings in the palace, and we find that the rooms Kora visited were intricately detailed and breathtaking in design. She observed the next place as always more magnificent in its grandeur than the one she had seen before. Her eyes never beheld such extraordinary workmanship. As for the rooms containing treasures, each was more ostentatious having riches with exceeding glimmer, sparkle and luster than the previous. As new discoveries were made, she noticed a bluish haze that emanated over all presented to her view. Eventually, everything was engulfed in the blue radiance, and she stopped while staring at the latest wonder she came upon. Kora then moved to the next entrance. When unexpectedly, she rushed back for the prior door and opened it quickly. The room no longer contained any elegance at all, for all Kora could see was an empty chamber free of bluish fog. Not a trace of luxury or treasure was found. It had all been a façade.

Kora was in shock as she roamed the halls trying to find her way again to her chamber. As she came to each crossing, her fear grew stronger for she had forgotten her way. The trauma no

longer could be restrained in her mind, and she outwardly cried her distress. Just when the halls became an endless labyrinth it seemed, she found the hall with the door barred by a beam. Even with horror flowing through the blood in her veins, she crept toward the banned entrance so it might explain the riddle whose answer was blocked by Velid's chide. She came upon the door, quietly freed the beam, and carefully looked inside.

Across the threshold, there was a deep and great abyss that descended into the earth with no bottom. Sparks, hot coals and fire came up like an eruption, and the flames leaped up so high that they burned her skin. Even the very air that entered her lungs gave her much pain. With mania overwhelming her senses, she slammed the door shut. In haste, Kora returned the beam to its place. She was so petrified that she felt her body would give up the ghost.

Kora wandered along the hall and stumbled once again upon the painting of the friar. His anguished face stared back at her. Surely, this lord Velid was not who he led her to believe. Kora realized that the entire palace was a deception, and what she had seen was certainly the entrance to Hell. A convulsion shot through her body as she realized she may have married the Devil

itself. She pondered why the Prince of Darkness would have taken her to its home, married her, and gave her access to every room but the pit of flames. Kora tried to calm her fright by thinking that all must be right. She tried to comfort herself that the old demon thought fondly of her. Perhaps, the Devil married her to protect her, and only her, from what was beyond the barred door.

Kora had just left the hall that led to the pit, when she heard the unrelenting footfall again coming forth from another passage. She rushed to the closest entrance and opened it fast while moving inside. The pace remained unbroken as Kora listened as it traversed its way into the foreboding hall. Then it stopped its progression, and it grumbled ceaselessly. Suddenly, there came a savage scraping noise that persisted unabatingly so frustratingly tearing at Kora's ears.

The young lady was frozen with panic but slowly regained her senses. Leaving the room where she hid, she went toward the dark hall with an impartial frame of mind as she resigned herself to what lingered there. It was not Lord Velid that she saw but a creature so abhorrent in its appearance that it caused her stomach to churn at the sight of it. This evil figure noticed Kora's

presence as it finished carving a slash on the wall, which was at the end of a row of portraits.

“Kora, my dear,” it said coarsely. “I did not realize you were so near.”

Terror grasped Kora tightly as she saw the face of the beast in full. Its stare drained the warmth from her body. She forced herself to speak.

“Is there something I’ve done wrong, my husband?” she asked with concern. “You just tore a gash into the wall.”

The creature stepped away from the damage it had done and examined its work. “No, my bride,” the figure answered. “Not in this row can you do any wrong.”

The monster motioned to the prohibited end of the hall as it gazed upon its wife. “At least I know there are those I can indeed trust to a deal made. For I see the door is still barred, so you have kept your word,” the beast said with surprising compassion. “You... of course, only you can I trust.”

Kora was greatly relieved by this, and she drew closer to her husband. "I will always follow your will."

The beast opened its arms wide and said, "Now I know I can show you all in this home, including what is behind that barred door." The creature guided her to the end of the hall to where the beam blocked the entrance. "What you might see is a bit dreadful to behold, but I am here to show you the way."

"Yes, my husband," she replied standing by the dark figure's side.



Lifting the beam, the monster cast it aside and opened the door wide. Once again, the young lady saw the fiery flames therein. The beast smiled and promptly shoved Kora in.



In a town that Kora used to live in before her untimely passing, there was a shop where she once stole the apples she liked so much. The shopkeeper grinned as he gazed in his cart and noticed not one apple lost from his wagon that had not been bought. He stood with assurance that the oath had been kept by the man who promised to look after his wares.

“Top of the day to you,” his partner greeted him. “Are you not most impressed with the arrangement we have made?”

The shopkeeper straightened his apron and shook the hand of his new fellow proprietor. “Nothing lost to burglars today, Natas my friend. You are doing a fine job.”



So what is the moral to this tale now told? What is to be learned from this story? It seems that no ill deed goes unpunished, and love prevails over anything. Yet in the dark hall of the Devil's palace, a new painting hangs on the wall. Next to the face of the unrighteous friar is a portrait of a very confused and lost young lady named Kora who did not make the best decisions. Now the Devil is a widower, perhaps the Devil has been a widower before. For surely, some other women have been so beguiled if not even more. Kora's choice of right and wrong was not plain, as ever gradually came each stain. So when she did gain enough evidence that she could no longer restrain her doubt, she did not know whether to run or stay and she could not find her way out. So from Kora, there is a moral that one would be wise to heed and never forget...

Remain ignorant, no fate you'll prevent. Once evil is known, freewill is your own. If you choose to stay and let come what may, you side with dissent.

No fate you'll prevent.

THE END