

Aiyla Salam – A Twisted Fairy's Tale (Inspired by Angela Carter's 'The Bloody Chamber')

Come sit by the fireplace my dear children, on this rug here, and let me tell you a little story.

Once upon a time, in a land not so far away, there lived a Bear. A very inquisitive Bear, too. He had hair as yellow as straw and eyes as blue as the great depths of the darkest sea. Now, dearest children, do take note of the word 'was' for it is key in this tail of a tale. Take the word 'was', because what he is now is merely a cast of the glorious creature he was. The Bear no longer has hair as yellow as straw, but hair as wiry and wispy as silver spider's silk, his once lively blue orbs now glaring, glassy and glossed over. Take heed, children. It was not the cat that curiosity killed, but the Bear. Every day he is subjected to the same whispering of the children that leisurely lounge on his spineless back, playing with dead hairs and blunt claws. He no longer smells the sweet scent of pine after rainfall, only sniffs up the cold ashes of the fireplace, long after the fire has gone out.

Should've listened to Mother Bear. Should've listened to Mother Bear.

Settle down children, and let me tell you the tale of Beauty and the Bear.

Little Bear grew up in the part of the woods closest to those Humans. His natural curiosity brought him closer to the Humans, only to be chided gently by his mother to hide behind the strong oak trees and waterfalls of thick foliage.

*"My Little Bear, do not cross paths with those Humans... Who knows what they shall do if they catch you peeking! Why, I knew a Bear who was just as curious as you,"* Mother Bear would say, *"he would visit the territory of those Humans to reveal the secret of Man's Red Flower. And guess what happened then, little Bear? He was stuffed and hung up, quite like the way we decorate our territory with the entrails of our prey!"*

And the Little Bear would answer with his thoughts, and again Mother Bear would snap her jaws and beat her chest, scratching at her cheeks mournfully. Little Bear decided to stay away; he certainly didn't want his entrails to be spilled out. But one day, my dear children, one day he changed his mind. That was the day he met a Human himself...

It was a winter's morning, when the sparrow no longer warbled his melodic tune, and the woodpecker no longer chopped at the tree with strokes ringing out like deep, thrumming drums. In a cave somewhere, Little Bear was lying against his mother's furry stomach.

Bear was bored.

You see, my children, the season of hibernation was not the ideal time for a restless cub like Little Bear. He wanted to leap about swaying green grass, to feel cold water dripping off his fur as he climbed out of a lake.

Oh, how cold the harsh breath of northern wind! Oh, how cruel the lick of first snowflakes!

Minutes passed. Hours. Days, weeks... a month. Still snow fell and still winds howled. Until that dreaded day. You do remember that day, do you not?

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Little Bear felt the warmth. It was nothing more than a mere spark, but he felt it. The glorious sensation blossom over his numb flesh, thawing the blanket of frost and tickling his skin like millions of goose feathers. The heat coaxed him out of his stupor, out of the cave, out of the forest. Blindly, crashing through snow-covered branch upon branch. Soon he found himself stumbling upon the trench marking the edges of Bears’ territory.

And the beginning of the Human’s.

The warmth seemed to be from the Man village; from the very core of the Humans’ lair. Bear scabbled upon hills of jagged rock, higher and higher. And do you know what he saw, children? Little Bear saw Man’s Red Flower. The flickering scarlet dragons climbed the darkened sky, falling back down to Earth with trails of smoky vines. Bear watched on, hypnotised by the flames emanating from a small pit in the centre of the straw huts. He soon found himself tripping and dancing over the edge of the trench, eyes blazing and legs shaking. As he neared the small river that blocked off the straw huts, something caught his eye. P. It was a tiny Human! But it was different than anything Mother Bear had ever told Little Bear about. It had a long, black mane and skin the colour of cocoa, legs short and brittle.

The Little Human tentatively took a step forward, reaching out a small hand. And do you know what Bear did then, children?

He took a step closer.

And another.

And another, until he was standing inches in front of the Human.

All Mother Bear’s advice was lost to Bear’s mind, discarded amongst the smog of curiosity that clouded his very senses, muddling his sense of reality. The Little Human felt his warm breath on the back of her hand, stroked the glorious golden fur... and swiftly became intrigued. Bear, too, fell for the trap of soft hazel eyes and feathery black hair, of gentle whispers and roaming, calloused fingers. She took him by the scruff of his neck, down rocky hill, across babbling river, through bare fields of ice and snow.

Little Human stopped once they had reached the pit full of Red Flowers, and sat, hand-in-hand with Bear, as though he were her own stuffed toy. Her head was leant against his furry chest as they both stared into the mesmerising embers.

Bear finally felt content.

That moment, however, was the end. He didn't hear the shouts. He didn't hear the screams. He didn't hear the crack of the bullet-filled barrel. All he heard was her heartbeat.

And then he was dead.

Now, my dearest children, stroke this rug here and feel how delicate and wispy Little Bear’s fur truly is... was?

Highly sophisticated and imaginative. well crafted tone and writing feels whole.

(T) knew the difference between colon and semi-colon.

x2 merits

