

The Most Beautiful Witch In The Land Of Lilies

Introduction

Rage can have a creative energy; it's not always tornadoesque. I only located this fiery jewel decades after the fact, but my rage at *Nun-Mother/Witch-Mother* finally wove a fractured fairy tale *The Most Beautiful Witch In The Land Of Lilies*. Facts are fractured, others are magnified, then stitched and hemmed with magical threads, to allow for retribution.

And let it be known that Mother's given name was Lily.

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WITCH IN THE LAND OF LILIES

High up in the Austrian Alps were mounds of edelweiss. Like Lucerne in Switzerland, this mountain range had a tropical canton. Lilies bloomed all year; every variety, ruffle-edged day lilies, tiger lilies, lilies that looked like orchids. Some boasted the brilliant orange and purple of birds of paradise. In seasonal contrast, snowcapped Alps surrounded the lush gardens.

At the center of this majestic land lived the most beautiful witch, *Lily*, each day she pinned a different lily above her left ear to adorn her chestnut colored hair that had never ever been cut but was always primly tucked up at the nape of her neck. On special days she wove a strand of white lilies of the valley through her chignon. This halo at the back of her head accentuated her chaste demeanor. Lily and her home always looked pure and proper.

Below each of her chalet windows hung a red wooden flower-box with blossoms and ivy cascading, down, down to the shrubs below. Not one dead blossom stained the pristine appearance. And inside everything was spotless—everything but Witch-Lily's heart. She had never shared hers with anyone but she liked others' hearts to be fastened to hers. Thus, they left numerous grief-stains upon her puffed heart.

One day the beautiful Witch decided that a child's laughter could remove those stains. From mountain ridge to dell she gathered bits of herbs, mosses, wildflowers, orchid stems, hibiscus petals, and tree-bark scrapings from willows. These she carried home in her wicker basket. Witch-Lily spread her colorful bounty on the marble slab at the back of her house to sun-bake and moon-soak for seven days and seven nights.

As a full moon peeked over the Alps, with her hands fluttering fast as hummingbird wings, Witch-Lily chopped the flora and tossed it into her huge copper kettle to boil for seventy-seven hours. When the clock struck the fifty-ninth minute of the sixty-ninth hour she awoke. Perhaps where her heart should have been, a clock ticked instead. She arose and checked the golden-brown liquid in the uncovered kettle. It had boiled down to just a thimbleful of baby-potion. "Perfect" she said.

To cast a spell upon the bravest and best man in the land, when the next full moon climbed over the mountain she attended the canton's monthly party. Handsome Henry gazed

upon her, instantly feeling the pull of her one hundred and fifteen pound magnetism. He smiled, approached Witch-Lily and without planning to, ardently he drew her to him. As soon as his lips tasted her moist lips, he stuttered with apology.

She feigned embarrassment and quickly departed. When safely beyond view, from out of her pocket she pulled a small vial, emptied the contents into her mouth and swallowed the bitter fertility-brew. Handsome Henry, mortified by his unrestrained behavior, forevermore avoided the beckoning call of Witch-Lily's moss-green eyes.

In just nine weeks, nine days and nine hours, and without any pain, a daughter was born. The villagers, knowing she had magical powers, were surprised that the baby was as bald as an apple. Six months later just a few wisps of fuzz sprouted from Baby's scalp. Truth be known, Witch-Lily was a bit glad about it. Yet the neighbors thought, "What a pity, a beauty like Lily giving birth to such a scrawny, bald baby." But as her daughter grew, so did her hair. At age three, her thick dark hair reached down to her waist. Mother-Lily found it such a bother to wash and brush out the tangles but was convinced, smooth and neat her hair must be.

Lillipiu, or Piu, as her mother called her, sat almost motionless on her rock-chair as her mother pulled a handful of stiff, pointy, holly leaves through her tresses. "Ouch" sometimes escaped Piu's lips. She wished Mother would use her own brush, made of fine pine needles. Witch-Mother parted her daughter's hair down the center, took half the hair to the left, the other half to the right and divided each into three sections, making two braids so tight, no curls could escape. Barely a hair was out of place at each day's end. Her braids remained pristine as her mother's house, but no laughter ever sweetened the air in their chalet. The lack of laughter remained a mystery to Witch Lily.

Piu was most quiet, tame as her braids. She always yearned to be tucked into bed like fairy-tale children and to be told that she was good but only a heavy mist of silence or criticism filled the chalet. Soon Piu wished she was sheer as the organdy curtains so she could fade into the walls.

But the busy hands of time are always less kind when stroking adults than when caressing children. Like a young birch reaching for sunlight, Piu's little body started stretching. Folks took less notice of her mother and made an ever-bigger fuss over Lilipiu. Lily wanted to cut Piu's hair very short but knew the villagers would think poorly of her for breaking with tradition. Girls get their first haircut only after an announced engagement to their betrothed. The towns-

people's compliments became plentiful as flowers in this canton: "Piu looks just like you looked when you were young." Lily turned paler than a jonquil as she thought: first my daughter stole my features and now she has stolen the shine from my hair.

Lily's resentment steamed out of her narrowing eyes. Despite Piu's striving to please her mother, day by day Lily disliked Piu more; especially after Piu's breasts began to grow. That summer Witch-Lily insisted Piu had no cause for modesty, and, forbidding her to wear a blouse, sent her to town with a long shopping list. Piu dragged her feet slowly and bent her head low. When she reached the wooded area she skittered from tree to tree to gain some cover. Not noticing a dip in the ground, she tripped. Quickly she got up and looked all around. Fat-Frank was sitting up in a willow. Interrupted by sudden movements in the shrubs below, Frank switched off his tears. He spotted Piu, a wide grin filled his face and he snickered aloud.

Tears welled up from Piu's belly and clogged her throat. Quick as an arrow, guilt pierced Frank. He tried to quell her sobs with an offer of a pale pink orchid. But it was a robin fluffing its feathers that distracted her. What a great idea, she thought, then she unbraided her hair and shook her head fast as the robin had fluttered its wings. Like a sable fur cape, hair draped her torso. As long as there was no breeze, it concealed the small mounds on her chest; and off she went, waving goodbye to Frank.

Following the moss on the trees she walked north, out of the woods onto a well-worn path and across the green knoll. Most shopkeepers and customers only noticed that her tresses were as full as that of three girls. With a sigh of relief, Piu bought everything on her mother's long list, then trekked back over the hills and dales and into the woods. Suddenly she spotted Fat-Frank kicking the soil. Dirt streaks on his face betrayed the path his tears had made. It plucked the harp-strings of Piu's heart, so she stopped to talk to him.

They chatted for a while. Piu told Frank that her mother had forbidden her to wear a blouse on this hot-summer-day. Frank whispered, "Just as badly as you, I need to cover up even though I am a boy." Then ever so slowly he crossed his arms in front of him, put his hands on the hem of his shirt, closed his eyes, grimaced, and slowly raised his shirt up to his armpits. "Those welts are from my father's belt because I didn't shuck enough corn for our chickens. He's always angry. I can never please him." After sharing their secrets, they walked home.

Before Piu reached her ivy-covered door Witch-Lily spied her and sputtered, “Who do you think you are walking around like that? You know long, unbound hair is not for maidens. I don’t want to see you looking like a wild horse with that unbridled mane ever again. People will think I too must be a wild woman”.

Feeling like a bushel of nettles, confused by her changing body, and wanting to be unnoticed, one day Piu grabbed a large pair of upholstery shears. She cut and cut and cut her hair till it was two and a half inches all around. (Her mother said Piu’s hair was finally tidy, as hair should be.) More than ever Piu resembled a birch sapling but with barely a crown of branches or leaves. That was the first and last time she had very short hair. As her hair grew back, rebellion brewed in Piu’s blood. She did not braid her hair or tie it back.

Having Frank as a friend erased Piu’s need for her mother’s approval and she began to ignore Lily’s needle-words. She often strolled amongst the wondrous flowers and trees and made up games with the local youngsters. She was especially kind to lame children, pets, or those whom she thought were as lonely as she had been. This cheered her up and made her heart as rosy as her glowing cheeks.

One cloudless evening Frank introduced Piu to his cousin John, who had come to live with his family. John had the bluest eyes Piu had ever seen. They sparkled with the love he instantly felt for his “Pie-Belle,” as he called her, or his Belle. Walking on a path in the woods they came upon a cluster of rope-swings. Tentatively, Piu sat and swung her legs as they spoke about the surrounding beauty. With a glint in his blue eyes John went behind Piu and gently pushed her as he sang like a multi-lingual mocking bird. A repertoire of forty of fifty birdsongs emanated from his joyous lips. These he interspersed with words of romance *Your green eyes, your chestnut hair, delicate, so delicate lips*. Shyly, Piu looked at the ground but her whole body was smitten by his vocal feats. She knew, only a superb listener could appreciate and replicate so many bird songs. Thus she was convinced that he would be as fond of children as she was.

John and his Pie-Belle often returned to the rope-swing they saw that first evening. He liked to push her higher and higher as his songwords replaced more and more thrush melodies. Despite her mother’s protestations, from that day on they went to parties and dances.

Pie-Belle hadn’t even guessed that such happiness existed anywhere in the world. She couldn’t contain her delight; it put a lilt in her step; and as she tasted what she cooked, she’d kiss

the spoon and exclaim, *Yum, yum, yum*. Oh, everything tasted so much better and looked more radiant since she had met John. After two months they decided to marry and word of their engagement quickly spread through the canton. As was the *Land of Lilies* custom, young men helped John build a small chalet for him and his betrothed. The day after it was completed, the townspeople made a combination house-celebration and wedding.

All knew that dessert was Pie-Belle's favorite food. The women baked for days for the festive occasion. There was plenty of mulberry pudding, a seven-tiered peach wedding cake, and, of course, there was a gigantic sacher torte; and lots of sparkling Lingonberry wine to toast the couple. Known for her wonderful way with flowers, Witch-Lily was asked to make the bouquets for each and every picnic table and other floral arrangements.

No one would have ever suspected, into the bridal bouquet, with bitters of jealousy, Witch-Lily splashed a deadly spell. What she didn't know was that the thirsty tarantula she had hidden among the black-eyed Susans drank all those gooey-dewy drops. Lily waited for her magic to take hold but death was nowhere near Belle. The more agitated Witch-Lily became, the bigger and darker her heart-stains grew.

With John's nurturing love, in just two years Belle's corner-sharp hip bones were smoothed over by a much-needed weight gain of thirteen pounds. Her skin was radiant; her hair again grew down to her waist. When in the glow of moonbeams, sunbeams or candlelight it shimmered. Belle wore it loose. People often spoke of its beauty.

Each day, while brushing her hair she looked into the mirror, sometimes she felt pretty, on rare occasion beautiful, but most often an ugly female stared at her from the mirror. Bewildered, she asked herself, "Why do people admire my hair?"

Witch-Lily disapproved of Belle's hair and as her anger brewed in response to her daughter's rebellion, her stained heart grew acned lumps. In a green flash of envy an idea was born; she began picking stamens from the lily fields. She dried and mashed them into a fine flour. She decided to taint the flour and add it to each sacher torte batter that she'd make. She knew chocolate was Piu's favorite food and that her dutiful daughter would continue her Tuesday, Piu-Day visits.

Sure as the sun rises, Piu ate lots of sacher torte and day by day, month by month, her hair grew duller, drier, weaker, and began falling out. After four years, Piu, or Belle as John still called her, now the mother of two sons, gazed into the mirror and thought, *I used to ignore hair,*

mine or anyone else's. I brushed mine once in the morning and that was it. I never carried a comb or brush - didn't even look in the mirror again till the next day. Now I look often to see if a bald spot shows.

Belle noticed everyone's hair, the abundance or lack on any man's, woman's or child's head. She dreamt of hair, losing it all; and feared that her husband's love would grow thinner and sparser till it too disappeared. Her interest in hair, as minute as a poppy seed, had blossomed into a towering willow of obsession. She confided to the mirror, *At long last I understand why people fussed about my hair, I had bushels of it.*

The next day when she took her sons to Grandma's house Witch-Lily said, "Your hair finally looks the way it should. Now I love it." Piu never suspected a poisonous potion had plundered her hair but she did realize that Witch-Mother finally liked it because it resembled dead chicken-feathers. And from that day on she visited less and less often. As the years passed, Belle's hair, her eyes, her nails and teeth grew shinier and stronger.

One day, while visiting her mother, she found a recipe for tainted-tonics inside her mother's sorcery-book. She flipped through page after page astonished at the evil within. And what do you imagine Belle found? She suddenly saw a formula for endless sleep, which included a furry tarantula. She recalled the furry little beast that John had pointed to in her bridal bouquet. She was appalled and dismayed. Belle said nothing but decided it was time to employ her never-before-used inherited powers.

In a swift inspiration Belle chopped off her hair at ear's length and wove the long strands into a magical doormat. She placed it at Witch-Lily's doorstep, only intending to trip her mother. This mischievous gift was to be for her mother's fiftieth birthday. But, unbeknownst to Belle, during the night her rabbit-friends had dug a very, very deep tunnel under the mat by the front door. Early that next morning Witch-Lily stepped out onto the be-ribboned doormat and fell and fell and fell till she reached the ceiling of Hell. Despite her magical talents Witch-Lily could not climb out.

Belle, curious to see what her mother was up to, went to visit. From behind a mulberry bush Belle heard a rustling and ruffling. A crowd of rabbits and birds had gathered in song around the hole, *Ha! Now you are where you belong. The place where all mothers dwell who do not love their children well! And you will never ever again see another blossom.*

Belle was quite shocked at the sight till a humming bird reminded her, *Long ago it had been known but then was forgotten, Mothers with pitted hearts are sent to reside inside the narrow land betwixt the hot ceiling of Hell and Earth's dank floor.*

Before Belle knew it, her body had shifted into the rhythms of her friends' song. That was the beginning of the change when Tuesdays stopped being, Piu's *I-don't-want-to-go Days*. Tuesdays grew into *New-Days*. Each week Belle, her two boys, and John spun funny or scary tales to amuse themselves. Despite her mother's name, Belle daily wove lily of the valley into a strand to adorn her neck. The aroma of flowers made her happy. Inside, her home was decorated with gardenias, lilacs, orchards, wildflowers, and snapdragons. Outside, shrubs, blossoming trees and plants enticed daily visits from canaries, warblers, finches, and other birds. Belle and John continued to watch their sons flourish amid beauty, story and song.