

Afterwards

They never spoke of her. Never alluded to their shared, harrowing experience. Even whilst they sat at the dining table, feasting on delicacies they never would've tasted if not for her, she was not talked about.

Yet, her presence loomed. Threatening. Menacing. Somehow there, but not there.

It had been six months since they were reunited with their doting father, and in that time their lives had changed. Hunger—once an incessant reminder of their wretched existence—now a distant memory. They didn't feel the cold any more, either. Fires roared in the grand fireplaces of the manor house they'd purchased with the riches and jewels they'd taken from the old woman's cottage deep in the woods. They dressed in the finest clothes money could buy.

Still. They did not speak of her.

Every day, Gretel reminded herself she only did what she had to do. If she hadn't shoved the wicked crone into the blazing hot oven and closed the hatch, she would have eaten her brother for tea. In time, she would've come for her, too. Surely, one cannot be charged with murder if done in self-defence?

Even so, guilt clawed at Gretel's insides round the clock. Whenever she closed her eyes, she could see the old woman's face—her dark, abyssal eyes that screamed unspeakable horror, the way her mouth twisted into a gut-wrenching howl, and the macabre silence that followed.

Gretel had taken someone's life. Her family prospered because a woman had died.

They would never speak of her, of what Gretel had done, but they would forever be haunted by the events of that day.