



MARY MECHAM

POISONED  
SNOW  
WHITE'S  
STORY

A RETELLING OF SNOW WHITE



## CHAPTER 1



Darius, one of the huntsmen that worked for my stepmother, Queen Griselda, skulked into the castle kitchen and made his way toward me, weaving around the other scullery maids bustling about their tasks. Ironically, his secretive behavior was what caught my attention; he had never been one to hide in the shadows when there were people around.

“Princess, come with me,” he whispered urgently, eyes darting around furtively all the while. Intrigued by what he could possibly want that required stealth, I wiped my hands on a rag and trailed after him.

Darius was a charismatic, cheerful fellow, well-liked by the servants and nobility alike, but he was acting strangely distracted and jumpy this evening. He led me out of the kitchens where I worked, through the castle, and out a rusted side gate that groaned in protest as we pushed it open. The night was already dim; the sun had sunk beyond the horizon, but a few pink and purple streaks still hovered over the tops of the forest trees. It felt that we walked in silence for an age.

"Where are we going?" I puffed. I was short enough that I had to jog occasionally to keep up with Darius's exceptionally long strides. Friends though we were, I didn't love the idea of sneaking out of the castle so close to dark.

"Forest," he answered brusquely. Darius's fingers kept opening and closing on the hilt of his dagger at his belt, and his eyes moved ceaselessly, not in the normal manner of a guard surveying for danger, but in a nervous, distraught way. I had always been keenly in tune with the feelings of people around me, particularly when I could tell they were distressed somehow, and his behavior screamed anxiety to me. Any time someone felt uncomfortable, I could immediately sense their discomfort and would go to great lengths to alleviate it, people pleaser that I was.

"Is there anything I can help you with, Darius?" I asked kindly. We were fairly close in age, with Darius only a few years older, and in my last few years as a servant, I had sewn buttons for him before, brought him meals and drinks when he filled in for the night watch shift, and cleaned his barracks regularly. He had always been kind to me and was a loyal supporter to the royal bloodline. He usually called me "*Princess*" even though my stepmother stripped me of my title after my father died. Whenever my stepmother wasn't around, Darius continued to show me the utmost courtesy and respect, as if I would still magically become Queen one day.

Darius closed his eyes momentarily, as though shutting out my words, and didn't respond. We skirted the main streets and wended through dark, unfamiliar alleyways in the village that surrounded the castle. I got the distinct impression that Darius didn't want us to be noticed as we strode toward the great, dark forest that grew beyond the village. Many of the townsfolk were afraid of the woods;

they said evil spirits lurked there. Sometimes at night, people claimed to hear shrieks and wailing emanating from it, which further reinforced their fears.

I didn't know what to think of these rumors. I couldn't even remember the last time I'd left the castle grounds before this evening. Usually, my stepmother kept all the servants busy from sunup to sundown, and as a foreign delegation had arrived the day previously, there were even more dishes than usual. The cooks kept the scullery maids working all hours as they slaved away to prepare the royal entourage's favorite dishes. I didn't think that Darius would ever take me anywhere dangerous; he was too protective. Even so, the shadows grew increasingly dark and foreboding. I drew closer to Darius, apprehensive about entering the eerie woods.

"Why are we here?" I couldn't help the nervous quiver that edged my voice. I still had several pots to scour and bedding to wash before I could turn in for the night. Whatever errand he had, I wanted to finish quickly and return to the brightly lit, comfortable kitchens in the castle.

"Just a walk," he said smoothly. "You don't get fresh air often, Princess."

I wanted to laugh, but the pressing darkness smothered any trace of humor. "I've told you before, I am no princess! Not anymore. I am happy just being a servant. And this servant still has pans to scrub tonight, so whenever you are ready, I would like to return."

I saw Darius's jaw clench. He came upon the entrance to a faded path and held back a thorny branch to allow me to pass. "Thank you." I ducked under his arm. As he followed me and let go of the limb, the branch whipped back viciously. As it did so, the sharp twigs cut the back of his

head. I heard him suck in his breath as the thorns tore at his scalp.

"You are hurt!" I exclaimed. "Let me see."

"No, I am fine! It is just a scratch." He tried to push my hands away.

"I don't want you to be in pain," I protested, and gently moved his hair aside to examine the extent of the scrape. The moon's light was increasing, but was barely sufficient to inspect the injury.

It wasn't too bad. I used his small flask of water to rinse off the wound and pulled a clean cloth from my apron pocket. "Hold still for a moment, alright?" I said anxiously, and pressed the cloth lightly against his head to blot up the blood.

"Stop," Darius said, his voice coming out ragged and uneven.

"Am I hurting you?" I pulled the cloth away. "I am sorry, I didn't mean-"

Through the canopy of leaves, I could see the moon's light shining down, which cast shadows across both of us. Darius's face was tormented. I was baffled; the cut wasn't deep, he had sustained far worse injuries before during his hunts, and he wasn't one to complain about a little pain. He pushed his fist against his forehead.

"How can I help you?" I placed a hand on his wrist to gently lower his arm. "Tell me what to do."

"Run!" he burst out.

I stepped back a pace. "What?"

"Run away from here! Don't ever come back."

"But... but, why?"

"It is your stepmother; she wants you dead. She wanted me to kill you, but you know I would never. You need to save yourself, now! I will go back and cover for you."

My breath caught in my throat and I staggered back, shocked. Was this a trick? A joke? I posed no threat whatsoever to my stepmother. Had she really tried to send Darius to murder me? "But, I... I don't understand!"

"She thinks you will take her place. She won't rest until you are dead. So run away! Never come back. I will come find you later. Go, go, go!" He gave me a shove down the path and threw a glance over his shoulder.

I froze for a moment, then turned and fled. Darius's shouting rang after me, urging me on. I ran through the black forest as fast as I could until his voice faded. In my panic, everything seemed terrifying. Tree limbs grabbed at my skirts and held me back. Owls swooped low and made my heart skip several beats. My brain interpreted every rustle in the bushes as another man sent to kill me.

I tripped over a protruding root and sprawled on the rocky, dirt path. The heel of one of my shoes broke and I twisted my ankle, but I wrenched myself upright immediately and plunged on through the forest, barely noticing the pain of my ankle or where I was headed. I only wanted to get as far away from the castle as I could.





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