

The Princess Transformed

by Christyn Rey Brewer

Dot was staring at the notebook again. She did this from time to time; working on something secret to showcase to Aunt Emily, her eyes fading from scribbling in the pre-morning dark, the pages lit by a single candle on the bed side table.

I.

Once upon a cross and ornery windstorm, there was born a princess with a penis...

No, no, no... perhaps that's a little strong for rural Ohio... "like black coffee for preschoolers. Aunt Emily will see me coming a mile away." She noted how calm and peaceful this particular morning was. Not a bug whistling. Not a single creature stirring.

II.

Once upon a King's great misfortune, the gods blessed his Queen with the safe birth of a shining and brave new prince who would grow into a tall and awkward princess upon whom shoes never fit... and she would turn into a pumpkin at midnight...

"This is not how this starts," thought Dot. "Yes, there's always a time upon whatever once was, and then a prince with a penis falls for some Princess Vagina and her virginity, and usually some date rape occurs when he kisses her in her drugged sleep and feels her up, maybe. Nec-Romance? I've read these my whole life. Why is this so hard..." A rogue gust of wind pierced the silence. Her eyes moved to the shadow of her hair wafting in the mirror on the nearby vanity. The bleached out, exhausted face of a hard-working farm boy stared back at her. The memory of dust and dead plants stabbed at her. She got chills down her every nerve... dysphoria. Dot's mother had died many years ago, leaving the rather masculine child and a barren farm with her sister Emily for safe-keeping. All that remained untouched of her mother's once vibrant world lay resting on the dusty surface of a short vanity kept just feet from Dot's bed; makeup, a hair brush, and a mirror so informative it had the reputation of being magical.

III.

"Let's try this again..." Just then the wind started howling outside her window. Dot looked through the blinds but could only see the darkness of a sleeping sky still clutching to the safety of the previous night.

Once upon a panic and a cold and hazy hell, a wild young woman grabbed a pen and made a permanent mark in the pages of history.

There was once a beautiful Prince who was gifted a magical mirror. At times of great sadness, he would gaze into the mirror and ask, "Looking-glass, looking-glass, who is fairest in the Queendom?" The mirror would sparkle and dance with light and life, then the face of a girl would appear in the smoke as if her face were the only answer that fit. Sometimes the Prince would fall into a deep sleep, lost in the reflection. In the first dream it was if he had never left the face of the mirror and there, behind him, was a Chimera reflected... lion, goat, dragon... As the beast charged forward, at his back a strange and magnificent coyote ripped into the space between them and

gnarled its teeth at the beast. The coyote was wise and stayed low to the ground so that the tall and lanky Chimera was incapable of deadly blows. The beast tried and tried to counter attack, but the coyote was in the best spot to dash around the beast's dragon-like tail and gnaw and tear with its wild teeth. Once toppled, the Chimera could only use its arms to drag itself away into the deep shadows where the mirror's face did not reflect. The coyote turned to face the Prince, fairest of the Queendom, and bowed before spritely leaping off into the shadows as well...

Then the room lit up with lightning and Dot's attention was drawn back outside the window glass. In the stasis between flashes she could see it like a photograph, and her heart sank into the deepest reaches of despair... a tornado headed right their way, sure to consume the farm in a moment's time.

She ran out the door, screaming for her dog but no one could make out the name in all the roaring of the wind and the flapping of windmills and loose roof pieces. She screamed for Aunt Emily, but no one was visible in the forming dust clouds just above the floor of the farm. In a panic Dot ran back inside, pausing at the reflection of her manly features in the front door glass as she swung the screen open and re-entered the living room. She jerked open the bedroom doors and found no one behind any of them, but as she tried the basement that's when the twister must have hit. The front door came unhinged and burst into the room, shards of glass and clumps of dirt flying all around. Dot thought that the door must have hit her on the head, because as the lightning erupted again all she could see was the redness of her own blood staining her eyes as she faded to a peaceful and unconscious state...

IV.

Then it was silent, and suddenly Dot opened her eyes. The house was barely visible from inside, the windows dark and quiet, her surroundings no longer threatened by the eminent storm but rather cloaked in the guise of night. Otto, her trusty dog, was in the process of licking the dirt from her face. Her right hand still held a pencil but in the dark it was anyone's guess where the notepad went. As she stood to gather herself, her head filled with thoughts about Aunt Emily: was she alive and well, had she avoided the tornado some other way, would she ever accept that her nephew was a girl and that her best farm hand had given up tilling the land to hide in shame and confusion? This fairy tale was a clever tool for Dot to break the tension and let her only remaining family know that she is in a constant state of depression without her having to say it aloud. As she made it to her feet the ground below her gave way and she slid through an opening just below her; the ride through like a slide, only a very filthy one at that. At the end, a solid impact with roots and soil, and she could see that she'd fallen from the chimney of the house into the earth below.

What a sight... the house had been overturned and the roof facing downward; inverted like those Satanists do the Christian crucifix.

"The cyclone must have uprooted the house, Otto. Threw us back down wrong side up." The dog was not at her ankles any more but near the edge of her view; something distracting the pup from around the bend. Her cell phone erupted just then, giving her a little jolt of surprise. It was just her companion app, Tim. She pulled her phone out of her back pocket and could see his metallic face staring back from the cracked screen; a man made of tin and tempered glass, designed to keep the phone owner entertained in the absence of humans. Most humans seemed to have one, so most

humans seemed to be in the absence of other humans, and all had Tim's instead. "Tim, we're fine. Set an alarm for an hour. I'm going to do some exploring."

"Alarm set," he clicked back like a robot, which essentially, he was. The three of them took off bravely down the path.

Clearly, they were in some sort of subterranean tunnel, the ground relatively flat, the walls alive with roots and bugs but solid and well carved, the trajectory curved and possibly circular as the end of the tunnel disappeared into obscurity. And as Dot made her way closer to a point where she could no longer see the house resting above her head precariously, Otto erupted into a sprint and charged at something or someone just past her line of sight. But to her befuddlement the little Terrier was going quite fiercely at nothing more than the remnants of the last straw man that Dot had erected months ago to help preserve her dwindling garden when last she still cared for growing. That shirt belonged to her mother before her death and she could still remember the first time... but then the dog was tearing at the sweater!! *Goddamn Dog!!!!!!*

In a flash she was pulling Otto away from the straw man and the mother's shirt; holding him closely and trying to pet the rage away from his brave, little grimace. She shushed the pup's mouth and told him weird things a dog surely could never understand like *Stop that my head hurts*, and *That's my Mother's shirt!* of which she was in no particular way bracing for a response, but one came, nonetheless.

"Lemme at him! Lemme at him," the tiny pup screamed, as if human only in miniature.

She dropped him in an instant. The dog was about to pounce again onto the pile of clothes and loose straw but then the straw man was exclaiming and carrying on with the distinct high alto of a female's voice. "Leave me be, you little bastard! Last week you piss all over my post, and now you wanna rip my only shirt up?"

"But that's my mother's sh--!" Dot started to argue back before the talking objects began to confound her.

"Sherryl Crow," the pile seemed to yell, Dot noticing at last that the pile was mostly a torso and head, leaning up and forward to scold her.

With tears forming in Dot's eyes she managed to groan, "Where is my Aunt Emily..." but trailed off with a sudden fit of weeping and profound grief. Even the straw person was mindful to proceed more delicately.

"I said you named me Sherryl Fucking Crow, remember? Sherryl Crow. You put this ridiculous sun hat on me, and your mother's shirt which still smells like Chanel only sunbaked and like honey also... you looked at me, smiled really wide and said, *'I dub thee, Sherryl Crow,'* and that's the moment I died inside..." then her charcoal drawn eyes seemed to roll across the burlap skin of her tan and weather-worn face; the texture and color of a hard worker never given enough credit or associated with any form of value. "You people just sort of make monstrosities and you never account for them, and you never make sure we have what we need to take care of our families."

50 painful seconds later Dot managed to say, “Scarecrows have families?”

“Look at the smart guy... We find family, ok? How does one even define a family?”

Dot thought that over, had a few false starts, left it alone ultimately. “I know when to pick my battles. And I’m a girl BTW... my pronouns are she and her... and hers.”

But Sherryl Crow just leaned back and braced for the possible wait patiently. “You think in there somewhere sweetheart you could grab my legs? They’re that pile of coziness you got your knees on.”

Realizing that the house was broken and sealed up with dirt and debris, the only direction the new trio could take was to head down the path that curved continually around and around to the unknown depths below. A sign from an old business perhaps, also sucked into the tunnel like Sherryl Crow and the top of the house, lay up against the wall near one of the mysterious lamps that kept their journey illuminated.

Abandon All Hope, read the sign. And to herself Dot mused, “That’s a weird name for a bar.” Then they headed on down the spiral.

Sherryl Crow told Dot many wild things as they travelled through several circles of hellish conditions. Dot was told that this is the earth, and that all things come back to the earth. She was told that at the center was the eldest resident, and that all knowledge is accessible through this Oracle. Of all things discarded, unloved and forgotten, the Oracle was wisest of them all and surely if anyone could help them to safety it would be them (Dot was also informed that the Oracle preferred they/them pronouns and seemed to roll those chalky eyes again). They passed many sad things, but Sherryl Crow simply talked and distracted and filled the sadness with stories and mythologies that Dot could never have known without her chance encounter with the world of the inanimate and forgotten. She was told the hard truth that every time you throw a baby doll away a G.O.P. Senator’s wife loses her soul, and that *a lot* of baby dolls were consequently chucked and end up down here; forming angry but tiny mobs that cut themselves off from the other beasts because despite being at obvious disadvantages they still view themselves as better than all the others. Hard truths such as everything has a purpose, even evil things. And before they knew it, they were approaching the lair of Baphomet... they could tell by the sudden door and door tag:

Basement, Level 9

Baphomet, Oracle, Notary

Dot braced herself for the unknown, and bravely all four of them walked inside.

Once inside the heat became overwhelming and she burst into a cold sweat. Otto, brave and reckless on a good day, cowered by the door and stared up to the giant demon whom towered over them; part goat, part man, part woman, and over nine feet tall. On the wall near them was a plaque that read Philip IV and mounted above the words was indeed the head of Philip IV. The room was crowded all throughout with a mix of theologies all drinking and smoking together in a musty bar that was way too hot and way too small for the number of gods and angels and demons and beasts

and scarecrows. Dot became entranced by the image of Baphomet reflected in a great and terrible mirror; their supple breasts and openly hanging penis celebrating the binary pitfalls of society.

The Sabbat Goat came forth in a threatening manner, but the demon's voice was light and seductive, full of air and a pleasant smell like bubblegum. "You came for the mirror... you want to know your fate, do you?"

(Crickets. Beat.)

"Look if you came for a notary I kind fucked up the dates and that license expired a long time ago... so..."

"How much does the mirror cost," she asked as she craned her neck to see more of it.

"It only costs whatever you have to give, and nothing more... but absolutely nothing less," said the beast.

Dot came forward, the highly flammable Sherryl Crow and Otto still near the doorway avoiding the lick of flames and certain death. "What does one see in the mirror?"

Baphomet smiled and their large, yellow, farm teeth gleamed in the warmth of the nearby fires. "If you stare into it long enough it shows you where you're headed." The demon's eyes became suddenly sinister and warning, but Dot paid it no attention. She moved forward and took a place in front of the face of the mirror.

The moment she locked eyes with herself her image became fixed and clear, but the surroundings all began to swirl like colored bubble bath draining from a tub. When the basin became empty the images all became clear around her, but she found that she could no longer see the girl but just a dull and possibly dead boy staring back at her from the comfort of a coffin. Dot fell back in terror and shouted out in true pain and agony. Sherryl Crow charged forward despite the flames and grabbed hold of her arm as she fell to the ground.

"It's useless. We only leave here to die," she conceded.

"Ignorance," spat the straw companion. She stood up and puffed her chest out, headed straight to the mirror. "Mirror, mirror on the wall. How the fuck do we get out of here alive?"

But the mirror didn't answer questions that way, and instead the swirling background came to focus around the scarecrow to show that she'd been placed back on the wooden pole in a growing field high with corn. Defeated, Sherryl fell to her knees as well, and both wept for what felt like too long. They were stuck with the fate that had been shown them, and they owed all they had to give to possess this knowledge. The straw woman was going to end up nothing more than protector of a huge and lush field, alive with vegetation and nourishment. And the boy within Dot's mind that she could not seem to bury only ends up dead and buried in spite of all of her efforts...

And then it hit her. This is a trick. "It's a goddamn trick, Baphomet! But we have the final word!"

The Beast looked at them with a confounded glare.

She continued, but she was talking to Otto, to Sherryl Crow, convincing herself. “The scarecrow ends up protecting life, and there is no horror in that. There is merit in being the mother of life. Go forth and raise your young that they might feed the world.” Then she closed her eyes, her heels involuntarily dancing toward one another and clicking just slightly with each new contact. “And as for you, Baphomet, Sabbat Goat, your payment has been paid in full. You’ve earned the dust from the clothes of a hard-working scarecrow, all she has to give, nothing more and nothing less. And as for me, your quarrel is with a boy now dead in the face of your mirror... because you can clearly see a woman before you, and she owes you nothing of his debts.”

The demon turned many shades of red and purple, the colors of passion and explosion. But as all nine feet of the beast lunged forward to attack and exact revenge on the clever girl and her companions, Tim came to life, and the alarm he sounded was so loud it shattered the mirror and brought Baphomet to their knees screeching in pain and discomfort; the room starting to swirl and the light and dust therein becoming a cloud of uncertainty and transformation...

V.

But then Dot opened her eyes and it was like the house was suspended a few feet off the earth then dropped back into place... right side up. With a jolt she exhaled a sharp, “Oh!” and bounced lightly on her mattress, safely back at home after the storm, the demon sealed below in the forgotten places she will never return to.

Near her bedside, her mother’s vanity was still intact, only the corners of the mirror spiderwebbing out from minor fractures. Spinning on the counter top was her mother’s favorite shade of lip stick, and Dot stood to grab hold of it and to keep it safe. The storm had passed, and she had survived. She looked deep into the reflection and could only see the face of the bravest girl she had ever known; strong willed, clever and bright, and full of a heart so loved it even loved itself, at long last, she loved herself.

She screwed the cap off and patiently applied the proper amount to make her smile. She gazed into the eyes of a girl who had lost everything, only to find herself instead. At the front door hole where once was a mail flap and carpet lay her notebook, the remnant of a fairy tale she long ago started as a means of coming out to her sweet Aunt Emily. And with a courage she had never felt a day in her life she kicked it aside and put her best scarf over her sweet face, then headed out to the fields where a certain Aunt was lifting a certain scarecrow back onto the pole. Life, finally, was on its way back home.

The End.

Thanks to Judy Cronenwett for the Oz inspiration.

Check out Christyn’s Fairy Tale Blog: <https://princesstrans.wordpress.com/>