

# NO FAIRYTALE



Morgan Schatz Blackrose

## NO FAIRYTALE

### Once Upon a Time

His penchant was for little girls. But in scarcer times he'd been known to consume the odd boy or two. Not that he sat around the table discussing his comestibles, like so many of his cohorts. The Giant preferred to savour the memories of his feasts in the privacy of his own den. Here he could relive his experiences, gorging himself on each succulent detail and regurgitating the sensations, without fear or favour from anyone.

His reverie was interrupted by a soft knock at the door.

“Would you like a cup of tea dear?”

The Giant's wife waited for her husband's reply before she turned the door handle and entered the Giant's den. She carried the silver tray laden with a china teapot, two cups set on matching saucers and a large plate of assorted cream biscuits.

The Giant looked up at his wife and smiled.

“Aah, you spoil me wife.”

“It's only what you deserve dear one,” she said, and lowered her eyes in deference to him. “Not every woman has a Giant for a husband.”

The Giant's wife placed the tray on the table and set about pouring the tea. Half a cup for herself, and one full to the brim for the Giant. She passed the cup of scalding liquid to him, and he proceeded to pour it out of the cup and into the saucer. He leant forward on his chair and brought the saucer to his mouth, slurping the cooled tea until he had drained the saucer. He passed the cup back to his wife for a refill and then picked up a handful of biscuits. When the Giant's wife returned the cup, he positioned the biscuits in a spiral around it. He then set about dismantling each one to expose its cream filling. In trepidation he held one half aloft, and scrutinised it. When he could stand the suspense no longer, the Giant ran his tongue over the surface and gnawed the cream until all traces of the filling disappeared. Delighted with the sweetness, he followed by dunking two biscuit halves into the tea and sucking out the hot liquid until the biscuit dissolved in his mouth. Upon finishing the second cup, the Giant passed it back to his wife who emptied the pot into it. The Giant took the remaining biscuits and his wife watched with satisfaction as he crammed them into his mouth, masticated furiously and washed the pulp down with the dregs of the tea.

“Such an appetite,” she said, and took a sip from her own cup.

“A giant appetite,” he replied and guffawed at his joke.

The Giant stood up and patted his paunch.

“I’m looking forward to the autumn feast wife. I hope you’ve got my favourite.”

The Giant’s wife gathered the cups and saucers together and placed them on a tray.

“Autumn is a tough time of year, but I did manage to get you one,” she answered.

The Giant’s eyes lit up.

“A girl!” he exclaimed.

“Well no my dear,” she said, biting her lip. “As I said, it’s harder in autumn. But I’m sure this boy will suit.”

The Giant took out his tobacco pouch and filled his pipe in silence. The Giant’s wife waited patiently for her husband’s response to the news. He struck a match and drew deeply on the pipe, before blowing out a stream of blue smoke. And still she waited, wringing her hands in anticipation. Finally he spoke.

“No-one makes fricassee of boy as well as you do wife. A few extra carrots to sweeten the flesh and I defy any ogre to taste the difference.”

The Giant put his smoking accoutrements on the desk, went to the door and opened it for his tray-bearing wife.

“Thank you dear,” she said, smiling up at him, “always the gentleman.”

The Giant’s wife waddled out to the kitchen and began her preparations for the special Sunday dinner. She’d caught and killed the boy the evening before and hung him in the pantry. Lifting him off the hook, she lugged him over to the baking pan sitting on the table. She positioned him inside it then began surrounding him with potatoes, yams, carrots, onions and garlic. Satisfied with the quantity of vegetables, she drizzled a bottle of oil over the fare before seasoning it with salt, pepper and a few sprigs of thyme.

The Giant’s wife stood back and surveyed her culinary creation. There was something missing. She walked over to the stove, opened the door and picked up an armload of wood from the box and fed the fire. The oven temperature was rising.

“Of course,” she said, remembering the missing ingredient.

The Giant’s wife returned to the pantry and descended the steps into the cellar. She chose two bottles of full-bodied red wine and returned to her preparations. She broached the bottles, poured herself a taster from each, and after discerning that the contents were not corked, added the remainder of the liquid to the dish. Now it was perfect.

Although a strong and able woman, the Giant’s wife was unable to lift the loaded pan and

carry it to the oven, so she called for her husband. The Giant entered the kitchen and grinned when he saw what lay before him.

“Magnificent,” he said, and picked up the baking dish effortlessly and shoved it into the oven.

“Thank you my dear,” she said.

The Giant bent down and kissed her forehead.

“Best you put your feet up wife,” he said, “I will pay a visit to my daughters.”

“No husband,” she snapped, “you have important work to do.”

“You are right wife,” he rejoined, “But I crave their delicious company.”

The Giant ran his tongue over his lips and sniffed the air. The smell of roasting boy flesh teased his nostrils and stirred his imagination. The Giant’s wife was aware of her husband’s inflamed appetite in the lead-up to the autumn feast, and went to the brine barrel to see what pickled morsels she could fish out to sustain him until the meal was served. Her efforts were to no avail. She berated herself for her forgetfulness. Foolish woman that she was, she hadn’t replenished her stocks.

“Perhaps some marrow on a slice of bread my dear?” she coaxed.

“I was hoping for something more substantial wife,” he said, and turned away from her and looked towards the stairs.

“Wait, dear one” she commanded, “please don’t bother yourself with going upstairs. No one is going to mind if you have a taste of the boy now.”

The Giant’s wife bustled around the table to her husband, took his arm and led him to the stove. In one deft movement she opened the oven door. The hiss and crackle of crisping skin greeted his ears and the aroma issuing forth sent him into a swoon. Not bothering to pick up an oven mitt, he drew the baking dish from the oven and slammed it on the stove top. The Giant’s wife took the cleaver from the drawer and handed it to her husband. In one deft swipe he hacked off a foot and held it underneath his nose.

“Back in the oven with it now Jack,” she said, nodding her head and handing him the oven mitts.

The Giant obediently placed the dish back into the oven and returned to the table, as though under an enchantment.

“Now sit down my dear,” said the Giant’s wife, guiding him to the chair.

The Giant set about devouring his rare treat and his wife breathed a sigh of relief. It was an honour to be married to such a great personage, but it had come at a cost. Satisfying his gargantuan

appetite occupied all her time and energy and it required the Giant's wife to employ extraordinary management skills and acts of vigilance; abilities it had taken many years for her to cultivate. Although she could lay no claim to maternal instinct, it was the birth of her children that prompted her quest for domestic diligence.

Reassured that her husband's immediate desires had been fulfilled, she suggested he have a pipe in the den before dinner. She then climbed up the stairs to the children's quarters. It was a giant room, containing seven beds, seven chairs and a long table. It housed her seven daughters. There was no denying that the Giant's wife was their mother, for their hair and complexion matched her own when she was a child. Each girl greeted her with a smile, but none made a move to embrace their mother. It was not possible. After all, they were the Giant's daughters, and no longer had arms to hug her.

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### **Present Day**

Jacqueline poured two cups of coffee from the thermos and handed one to the social worker. She took it and sipped it gratefully.

"Real coffee?" she asked.

"How real do you want it?"

"You wouldn't have any milk would you?"

"Hang on a minute, and I'll see if I can find a cow."

"Really?"

Jacqueline rolled her eyes and smiled, then reached into the esky and took out a water bottle filled with milk.

"I didn't pick you as a black coffee drinker. But if you want sugar, you're outa luck."

"No I'm fine and very grateful that the Police have driven me out here. I'm sure I would never find the place if I came alone."

"Do you know anything about Molly?"

"Nothing, except that she lives by herself and no one ever sees her. The fact that she's so isolated raises some concerns, so this initial visit is a check-up."

"She's armless you know."

"You mean she's crazy but not scary?"

"No. I mean she hasn't got any arms."

"You're joking?"

“No.”

“She was a thalidomide baby?”

“No. Her father ate them.”

Lena coughed and spat coffee over the dashboard of the car. Jacqueline took a tissue out of her pocket and wiped down the spatter, then handed a clean one to the social worker.

“Ready to rock and roll. Only another five ks to go. Gets a bit bumpy here on in.”

Jacqueline started the car and put her mug back in the esky. Lena clipped her seatbelt and turned to the police officer beside her.

“What do you mean her father ate them?”

“That’s the story. And not just *her* arms. Her six sisters as well.”

Lena crossed her arms and shuddered as she stared at the windscreen. The police car jolted as they hit a pothole and she found herself grasping for purchase.

“A *bit* bumpy?”

“I don’t like to exaggerate.”

“You just told me that some bloke ate his seven daughter’s arms. Either you don’t know the meaning of exaggerate or you’ve seen too many zombie movies.”

“Zombies eat brains, giants eat arms and legs, well everything really.”

“You’re telling me her father was a giant.”

“That’s the story.”

“And you believe in giants?”

“Do you believe in God?”

Lena scrunched her face into a grimace. She hated being questioned about her religious beliefs mainly because she wasn’t sure. She always ended up telling herself that just because she hadn’t seen something didn’t mean it didn’t exist. And that offered her no reassurance at all.

“We’re here,” Jacqueline announced, interrupting Lena’s thoughts.

The car stopped outside a crumbling stone mansion overgrown with briars, creepers and vines. They climbed out of the car and picked a path through the fruit trees, hedges and bushes that surrounded the house.

“I feel like I’ve stumbled onto Sleeping Beauty’s castle,” whispered Lena.

“It’s grim all right,” Jacqueline rejoined.

“Very funny,” Lena continued, “will you let her know we’re here?”

Jacqueline walked up to the front door, knocked and called out. After a few minutes it opened.

“Good morning Molly,” said Jacqueline, “I’ve bought a social worker to see you and make sure everything’s OK here.”

Lena fixed her eyes on the woman who stood before her. She was well over 180 centimetres tall, with long white hair that hung in two thick braids ... and she had no arms.

“You’ve got no arms,” said Lena.

“She’s a clever one,” said Molly, and winked at the officer.

“Lena, meet Molly, the Giant’s daughter,” said Jacqueline.

“I am sorry,” Lena apologised, “it’s just that I’m surprised that you really don’t have any arms. I mean how do you manage out here all alone?”

“I have Nature’s Helpers,” the giant’s daughter replied.

“You mean um, birds and animal helpers? Lena asked.

“No, they’re a home help mob from the next shire who come over once a month,” said Molly.

“Oh, right,” said Lena, “so you don’t need any of our services?”

“Depends on what you’re offering,” said Molly.

“I’m new to the area and there’s obviously been some sort of client mix-up. If another shire is taking care of you there’s no need for us to be taking up any of your time,” said Lena, who was trying unsuccessfully to avert her eyes. “Please don’t think me rude but I am curious about how you lost your arms?”

“My father ate them,” she replied.

Lena glanced sideways at Jacqueline.

“You’re not going to tell me that he ate your sister’s arms as well are you?” Lena continued, unsure of how to respond to the woman’s bluntness.

“I won’t if you don’t want me too.”

“Where are your sisters now?” asked Lena.

“Dead.”

“And your father and mother?”

“They’re dead too.”

“How did they die?”

“A boy killed them.”

Lena cocked her head to one side.

“Really. Was his name Jack?”

“That’s the one.”

The Giant's daughter smiled at Lena who lifted her arm and looked at her watch.

"Thanks for seeing us," she said, and extended her hand towards Molly before quickly withdrawing it. "I will contact the social worker in the next shire Molly," she said. "Um thank you for your time."

"Are you sure you won't come in?" asked Molly, "There's a fresh pot of tea on the stove and I've just made a Princess cake."

"That's very kind of you Molly," said Jacqueline, "I'd love some. Come on Lena, I guarantee you won't be disappointed."

"Positive," said Lena, who was aware of her heart's insistent and rapidly increasing rhythm in her chest. "I've gotta go."

The social worker turned on her heel and hurried towards the car. Perspiration beaded on her forehead as she fought her way through the herbivorous maze into the open space, then collapsed against the side of the car. Jacqueline watched her leave then followed at a discreet pace behind her.

"Got the willies have you?" she asked.

"Panic attack," Lena answered between gasps.

Jacqueline opened the car door, reached into the glove box and retrieved a paper bag. She passed it to Lena, who took it and began breathing into it. After she had controlled her hyperventilation she stood up and faced Jacqueline.

"I'm sorry. That hasn't happened for years, but I think meeting her triggered something in me."

"So you don't want to come inside and check out the Giant's lair?"

Lena took a deep breath.

"I'm scared. I admit it. But I think my fear is based on a child's imaginings. I don't believe in giants or witches or goblins or zombies for that matter, but I know that some people do and their fantasy world can be a problem if it collides with reality."

"Molly's not going to eat you Lena," said Jacqueline, 'you're too skinny.

The police officer laughed and put her arm around Lena's shoulders.

"But she is a good cook. Come on. It'll give you a tale to tell your city mates."

Lena followed Jacqueline back to the house. Molly stood there waiting in the open doorway. She beamed a smile at Lena.

"We will eat in the kitchen," Molly said, and led the way through the receiving room into a galley kitchen.

A huge trestle table took centre stage and was laid out with three settings for morning tea.

Along half of one wall was a cooker that Lena could only describe as resembling a baker's oven. Beside it was the stove top which was bigger than many restaurant grills she had seen.

"Were your family cooking for an army?" she asked.

"The Giant liked three hot meals a day. Every day. And my mother cooked them for him. That was her job, to feed him," Molly replied.

"And what about you and your sisters? Did you help?"

"When there wasn't a ready supply of mutton or beef or boy, then we were called upon? Please be seated and partake of the cake. It's an old family recipe from Sweden."

Lena and Jacqueline sat at the table and Molly sat at the head.

"Shall I be mother?" asked Molly, who placed her feet up on the table and picked up a knife between her toes.

"Allow me," said Jacqueline, who took the knife and sliced the cake and placed a piece on each of the three plates.

She then poured the tea into large china teacups and handed them to Lena and Molly. Lena watched Molly drink the steaming brew through a hollow wooden tube. She was reminded of the packs of greeting cards created by mouth painters. This Christmas she would buy some.

"If it's not too rude, could you tell me how old you are Molly?" Lena asked.

"If I knew I would tell you," she answered.

"Were you born in a hospital?"

"No. We were all born in this house. Mother was attended by her cousin."

"What about school?"

"No school. The Giant had a library here, but it was not to my taste. A lot of books on cattle and minerals and mountains and cook books of course. My father was not an intellectual giant."

"What did you and your sisters do all day?"

"We cooked and sewed and told stories until he came and killed them."

"Your father?"

"No. The boy."

"But if your father ate your arms, why didn't you bleed to death?"

"Because mother was a fine needlewoman and nursed us back to health."

"I'm sorry Molly, but have you ever considered talking with a doctor or perhaps a psychiatrist about your life. Sometimes when we suffer trauma we invent ways to cope with the horror of it. It's a survival skill, and I think that you may have done this to deal with the terrible things that must have happened during your early life," Lena said.

“You don’t believe that I am the Giant’s daughter,” Molly said.

“I don’t believe in giants Molly, but I do believe that from a child’s perspective a cruel father can appear as a giant,” Lena answered.

“My father was a giant, and by his very nature he was cruel and stupid.”

“But you aren’t cruel or stupid Molly,” said Lena.

“I take after my mother. She wasn’t a giant.”

“And who did your sisters take after?”

“My father. If I hadn’t let the boy in, they would have killed me.”

“Jack?”

“That’s the one. He killed them all.”

“So where are the bodies Molly?”

“In the fire.”

Lena looked at the range and shivered as she imagined the dismembering that would have taken place to burn eight bodies.

“How long ago was this Molly?”

“A long long time ago, when I was a girl.”

Molly stood up and motioned her visitors to leave the table.

“I’m tired now. Come and visit me next year.”

Jacqueline and Lena followed Molly to the door.

“Do you have a phone so we can ring you?” Lena asked.

“Yes,” Molly replied.

“Plug it in so it can be charged,” said Jacqueline, “like I showed you.”

“Thank you for the tea and cake,” said Lena. “We’ll be in touch.”

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## **Once Upon A Time**

Jack lay on the camp bed and thought about them. Five in all, but who gave a bugger. They were only blackfellers, not the sons and daughters of bankers and councillors or church people. Except for Topsy who everyone knew was the daughter of a local copper, even if the copper wouldn’t own up to it. And now Reggie was gone. Jack had told him not to go bush alone, but he reckoned he’d found a supply of stone fruit that would fill their bellies till Christmas. He just needed to make sure there weren’t any guard dogs there. So now the silly bugger had gone and got himself lost or eaten by some mongrel dog.

The rest of the kids were still sleeping when he put on his boots and warmest clothes and sneaked out of the dormitory. He'd be in for a hiding when he got back, maybe even a few days in solitary but if he could save Reggie then it was worth it.

It took him just over an hour but the directions Reggie had given him proved correct. Before him lay an orchard filled with trees groaning under the weight of their fruit. And he hadn't even brought a sack with him. He skirted through the trees, until he stood at the side of a brick mansion. It was the biggest house he had ever seen.

"What's your name boy?" a voice spoke behind him.

He turned to see a girl, much taller than him. She had long blonde plaits and no arms. Jack stared at her. One of the boys at the home had callipers on his leg because he had polio and one of his uncle's had lost a few fingers working at the saw mill but he'd never seen anyone without arms before.

"Cripes, what happened to your arms?" he asked.

"The Giant ate them," she replied. "And he's going to eat a boy for lunch."

"He wasn't wearing a check shirt and a floppy brown hat was he?" asked Jack.

"I don't know boy. Mother strips them after she catches them then puts the clothes into the ragbag."

"Where's the ragbag?"

"In the laundry. Do you want to see it?"

"Show me."

Jack followed the girl into a brick shed that housed washing troughs, mangles and cane baskets. She pointed to a wool sack that stood in the corner. He took a chair and climbed up on it to peer inside the sack.

"It's Reggie's hat," he exclaimed, and reached in and pulled out a shirt.

He examined the name tag on the collar and threw it back in.

"Was the boy you were looking for wearing it?" asked the girl.

"No," said Jack, "it was Toby's. He went missing last year."

"The Giant would have eaten him. But you better hide now because I can hear my older sisters coming, and if they catch you, the Giant will be having boy for dinner as well as lunch."

Jack dived into the sack as two more armless girls entered the laundry.

"Who are you talking to Molly," demanded the oldest.

"A boy," said their sister, "but he ran away when I said the Giant would eat him."

"Stupid girl," said the shorter one, "father would have been pleased to have another meal of

boy. We will tell mother and maybe she can trap him.”

The two girls then hurried back to the house with news of another boy being spotted. Jack climbed out of the sack and faced the tall girl.

“You’re not just pulling my leg about your father eating boys are you?” asked Jack, who had spied two ways out of the laundry if he needed to run.

“We don’t joke about food,” Molly replied.

“Your father’s a cannibal who cooks kids in a big cauldron,” said Jack, “and that’s what you’ve done to Reggie and Toby and all the rest of them.”

Jack edged his way to the door.

“The Giant is my father and he eats all manner of flesh. My mother is an excellent trapper and cook but she doesn’t have a cauldron. She’s got baking dishes and stewpots to cook the meat in,” Molly explained.

“So my friend Reggie is being cooked for your lunch today?”

“I don’t know if it is your friend, but a boy will be served for lunch and Mother is making the gravy about now. She and the Giant will eat in the kitchen and my sisters and I will eat in our room. If you want to see if the boy being eaten is your friend you can hide behind the woodbox in the kitchen. I have to go now.”

The Giant’s daughter nodded her head and walked out of the laundry over towards the house. She called out as she left. “Goodbye boy. Be careful of the hounds. They bite.”

Jack looked at the shelf above him and saw a familiar box. He climbed on to the chair and took it down, then hid it under his shirt. He crept over to the house and followed its perimeter until he came to a window. He peeped inside and saw it was the kitchen, unoccupied by the giant or his wife. Further on he found the back door, opened it and walked across the floor to the range. He could smell the meat cooking and tried to think of it as beef. A pot bubbled away on the stove-top and he dipped in a spoon and saw it was the gravy. He took out the box from under his shirt and poured the contents into the mixture, then gave it a vigorous stir.

“I’m doing this for you Reggie,” he whispered, “and all the others no one cares about.”

He then squeezed himself behind the woodbox, crouched down and waited.

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## Present Day

Lena was unable to sleep. As soon as she closed her eyes she saw images of Ruben's painting *Saturn devouring one of his children*. This morphed into children whose limbs were blown off by land mines. If Molly was not a not a thalidomide baby then perhaps she was the victim of one of these vile weapons? As for her sisters, there was only her word that they even existed. Jacqueline said that no one ever went near the place because of the vicious dogs that patrolled the property. She'd found no documentary evidence of anyone's births or deaths for that matter. And yet, the police officer, seemed to accept her story without question.

If there was one thing she was certain of, it was that giants didn't exist, even if the medical condition of giantism did. But did Molly say mutton, beef and *boy* when describing what the family ate? She needed to talk further with Jacqueline.

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Jacqueline smiled at Lena as she poured the coffee.

"So what's the verdict?" she asked.

"I'm not a psychiatrist but ... here goes. Molly's mother took thalidomide when she was pregnant and hence Molly was born without arms. Her father was definitely abusive, maybe even cannibalistic and possibly suffering from giantism. Her mother was neglectful, colluding with the abuser, and Molly fantasised about having siblings. When her parents died she probably buried them in the back yard, possibly with the help of a neighbour."

"And the boy Jack?"

"Ah yes. Jack the Giant Killer. I'm sure if we went through the library we'd find a copy of that folktale. An imaginary hero summoned from fiction. "

"So you don't believe her story?"

Lena laughed and settled back in her chair.

"I'm not saying she hasn't experienced trauma, Jacqueline."

"Molly's a vegetarian."

"What does being a vegetarian have to do with her mental health?"

"Didn't you wonder why Jack killed her parents and her sisters and not her?"

Lena shook her head.

"I'm not sure where you're going with this Jacqueline?"

"Molly never ate flesh or anything cooked with the fat of an animal. That's why when they

were poisoned with the *Ratsak* in the gravy, she was the only one who didn't die."

"She told you the food was poisoned by this boy called Jack?"

Lena sat up straight and gasped.

"My god. She killed them. She put *Ratsak* in the food and poisoned her parents and her sisters, if she had any, and conjured this alter ego of Jack the Giant Killer to take the blame."

"Settle down Sherlock. You're barking up the wrong tree," Jacqueline remonstrated. "Do you know how many kids went missing in Australia in the fifties and sixties?"

"No idea."

"You wouldn't cause most of them were Aboriginal kids, stolen from their parents and farmed out to kids homes all over the country, and if they disappeared from them, the superintendents said they went walkabout. That was the end of it."

"And you're telling me what, they were eaten by giants?"

Jacqueline took a deep breath before answering.

"I was ten when I was taken from my family and put in one of those bloody homes. Six kids went missing from that place. They were killed and eaten by the Giant and his wife. But I stopped them killing any more."

"Molly said a boy killed her family."

"I wouldn't be the first girl to dress like a boy because it made life easier."

"You? Jacqueline. You're Jack. Does Molly know?"

"How do you think she survived all these years without any arms? Me, I just disappeared from the home and no-one bothered to look for me."

Lena was aghast at what she heard.

"But why didn't you tell anyone?"

Jacqueline laughed.

"Don't you know kids tell lies and giants don't exist."

"But you had evidence?"

"You saw that stove. It was like a furnace. Molly and me, we burned those cannibals to ash. All that's left of the Giant, besides his daughter and his killer, is the story."

"And what a story," said Lena.

"Yep. Who'd believe it?"

Lena reached out her hand to the policewoman.

"Not me Jack," she said, "Can I call you Jack?"

"Sure," Jacqueline replied, "but leave off the rest of the title. My life is no fairytale."

*No Fairytale* was shortlisted for the Scarlet Stiletto, Sisters in Crime competition in 2016. If I was to dedicate this story to anyone, it would be to the giant slayers; those that speak the truth, listen with the heart and seek justice for the abused, the violated and the forgotten.

If you are interested in any of my books for young adults or short stories please contact me.

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