



Song Of Light And Shadow

Fairy Tales & Related Fandoms · Not Rated · 5025 words

by Arukir

Contents

Song Of Light And Shadow 3

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Here is the story of a Shadow Lord, or perhaps a Lord's fool, and a Rainbow Princess. One is free as he wishes, trapped within the dark. The other is imprisoned, traveling the Gods' world. What will happen when Shadow and Light meet?

A sorta-retelling of Hades and Persephone.

I tried to keep an 'old fairytale' feel, but I think I only succeeded in some parts of this.

I wrote this a while ago, and am only doing minor edits as I publish it. I hope you enjoy!

Should I split this up into multiple chapters, or is it good as-is?

In case you couldn't tell, the pastry was pomegranate flavored.

Once upon a time, there was a man who lived far beneath the earth. Some say he was a Lord, others a Lord's fool, but all agreed that the creatures of darkness and night were his allies. In caves lit only by blood red flames, he and his fearsome lot did mysterious things.

Some say he had been a boy that stayed out too long at night, bewitched by monsters to forever serve the shadows. Others say he is the monster that did the bewitching in the first place. Yet others say he is a fallen god, punished for his mischievous ways.

At the same time, there was a woman in the land of the Gods, a princess of light. It is said she shined like the golden sun, dancing with all the colors of the rainbow. Rumor had it that she could turn into any sort of cat she pleased, and thus the Gods would punish any that brought harm to a cat -- not that any mortal would risk hurting the much-beloved princess.

It is said she is kindness incarnate, fiery and curious and loving. It is said she fights on behalf of mortal women and men. It is said that even the most ancient of the Gods

come to her to settle their fiercest disputes. It is also said that the Gods care so much for her, their warriors follow her at all times.

So here is the story of a Shadow Lord, or perhaps a lord's fool, and a Rainbow Princess. One is free as he wishes, trapped within the dark. The other is imprisoned, traveling the Gods' world.

The princess, Aurora the Light, wandered through a meadow, flowers of all colors springing up in her wake. Six guards with heads of the fiercest beasts followed her, snarling and snapping at any creature that should appear.

Tiring of the noise, and wishing desperately to see the sorts of creatures that had been run off, Aurora decided on a scheme. She tripped upon a pebble of the smallest sort, crashing to the earth in such a way that no skin was harmed, but her dress became tattered and dirtied.

Refusing to appear amongst the Gods in such a state, the princess demanded privacy to mend and wash her clothes in a nearby river. When her guards were out of sight, Aurora stole away with whiskers and paws, as deep into the forest as she could manage.

Delighted, she followed birdsong and spied on herds of deer, stealing honey for her supper and laughing at clumsy rabbits that scattered down into their burrows. She swatted at butterflies and hummed with the trees, so enraptured with the beauty of it all, she didn't notice as the sun slipped behind the mountains.

The world was dark and quiet. For a few moments, she thought the night lifeless, until a family of wolves ran past her. Owls flew silently, hunting mice that escaped them with quick dashes in the grass. Toads croaked and crickets chirped, the squeaking of bats replacing the chirping of birds, the flapping of moths in place of the fluttering of butterflies.

Though not quite as bright or colorful, the night was as alive as any day, its song filling Aurora until she was singing along. Her coat as black as the world around her, the princess dashed between the trees, startling foxes and batting at fireflies. She was so enraptured with the fun of it all, she didn't notice the hole until it was too late.

Down she fell until she landed in a crumpled heap on a cavern floor. A dirty dress in place of fur and broken nails in place of claws, she sat up as no mortal would be able to after such a tumble, taking in her surroundings. Though hard to see, she made out rough stone, leading away into many tunnels.

Not fancying the long climb back to the upper world, she instead went down one of the tunnels, following the sound of running water. The walk was strangely pleasant, the air cool and inviting, so she continued in peace for some time. She hummed quiet tunes to herself, stopping when she saw a dim flicker of light up ahead.

She knew it wasn't daylight, because it was red as fresh blood. She paused, feeling frightened of what might lay beyond, but curiosity and bravery had always come easily to her. She stepped forward, quiet as a leaf falling to the forest floor, and came to a cavern lit by red torches. To her surprise, a long wooden table sat in the middle of the cavern.

Beasts of all sorts sat at the table, fur and skin and feathers and claws dark as a moonless night, eyes burning with the same flames as the torches. They laughed and argued and squawked with voices like the falling of boulders, screeches of eagles, rustling of leaves, crashing of tides, and hissing of snakes. They ate a glorious feast that made her mouth water, though she recognized little of what lay on their plates.

At the head of the table was a rather handsome man, skin as pale as the moon, hair and clothing pulled from the shadows themselves, eyes mostly human but as red as the beasts' around him. His shirt, jacket, and trousers were all plain, his feet bare, his gloves old and worn -- but his traveling cloak and dark jester's cap were new-looking and made of fine cloth.

From the tunnel entrance, she watched the man juggle and entertain the beasts with a smile that made the dark room feel brighter, wishing she could turn the golden glow of her skin as black as her hair. If she could, perhaps she could walk amongst these shadows and eat from their table, satisfying her honey-fed stomach.

And perhaps, her mind whispered, I could speak to this silly man.

It was a foolish thought, as she was forbidden to speak to any besides the Gods and their servants. Though this whole journey was forbidden to her, so perhaps it did not matter...

The party, for that surely was what the gathering was, ended soon enough, the guests wandering off in many directions. The man stayed back to pick up on his own, which she thought was unfair, but he hummed and smiled as he worked.

"Did your mama and papa never teach you not to spy?" The man's voice, like the echo of a laugh, startled her. Though his back was to her, she knew it was she he was addressing. "If so, I congratulate them. Spying is quite a fun pasttime."

"You have my apologies, sir." Aurora stepped out of the tunnel, curtsying as if her tattered dress was the finest ballgown, head held up proudly. "I did not mean to spy, I simply did not know that any lived down here."

"Not many do, miss." He turned around with a grin and a stack of plates. "Know about us, I mean. Many live down amongst the dark. Not many with glowing skin, though."

"No, I imagine not." She smiled back at him. Then, on a whim, she marched forward and began to help gather up the dishes and wipe the table clean.

Though he raised an eyebrow, the man gave no complaint, and the two worked in a peaceful silence. Well, silent except for one or the other's humming, which both seem to enjoy.

"I thank you, miss, for the help." He nodded to the shining table. "Though if you were trying to clear a debt for spying, I should tell you that there wasn't a need."

"No debt, I simply thought it unfair to pick up on your own." The princess stuck out her hand. "I am Aurora the Light, Rainbow Princess."

He smirked, shaking her hand and sweeping into a deep yet somehow mocking bow that made her giggle. "I am Umbrik the Foolish, Shadow Lord."

"You don't look like any Lord I've ever met." Aurora meant this as a compliment. "Nor do you seem very foolish."

"On the contrary, I am quite foolish, Miss." Seemingly to prove this, he did a backflip and landed upside down, walking on his hands like an expert acrobat. "And you look very little like a princess. Though you are certainly colorful, moreso by the minute."

With a start, she realized her hair had turned to all the colors of the world, reflecting the joy she felt talking with Umbrik. "I suppose I must look quite a sight to someone used to dark and shadow."

"Quite a sight, indeed, miss." He laughed, flipping right side up with a lopsided grin. "Though not a bad one. Tell me, if you didn't come seeking the company, what brings you this far from the world of sunlight?"

"I was playing in the woods," she admitted, feeling no embarrassment to be doing such a thing at her age, "but I failed to pay attention and slipped down a hole. I didn't

fancy climbing back up, so I followed the sound of rushing water to here. Though, I see no water."

"Oh, that was Yafnik, Guardian of the Deepest, Blackest Waters." The foolish Lord laughed. "Hasn't anyone ever told you not to play in the woods after the sun's gotten bored of the sky?"

Having never heard someone describe sunset like that, Aurora took a moment to realized she'd been asked something. She scowled, bitter at things far from there. "Oh yes, I've been told not to do many things. Not to run with the deer, not to sing with the waves, not to spend too much time stuck in the faraway worlds of stories. Not to walk high above the world on a string, nor to chase the wind, and certainly not to venture out of the sun's light."

"Now, now, Miss Aurora the Light, no frowns!" Umbrik's smile fell a little, and she thought he looked nearly nervous. "Surely your parents simply fear for you health. They wish for you to not be trampled or drowned or lost to the world. They fear your falling or being blown away, or... Or wandering into the path of a night beast."

This last was whispered almost as bitterly as her own words, with a sadness and resignation that made her soften. She sighed and plopped into a chair in a quite unlady-like manner. "My parents fear nothing for me, for I have none. The Gods know not how, but I stepped out of a rainbow as a young girl, coming into the world on my own."

"Oh..." He blinked, quietly sitting across from her. "If lacking parents, who is it that bans you from these things? And how is it that you came to your current tattered state, alone in the woods with naught but the stars to light your way?"

"I have felt no abuse, so ease your worried brow." She laughed, quietly and still a little bitter, but somehow warmed by the other's cold suspicion. "I travel always with guards that allow me no access to the animals of the world, despite my interest in all things living, and I grew tired of it. So I tripped and ruined my own dress, demanding to be left alone to repair my appearance for the Gods' court. After they left me, I changed my form and ran off to see that which I'd been denied by the gods themselves. It was so enchanting, I didn't notice the sun's... Boredom."

"It must have been frightening, alone in darkness." He whispered, quieting the laughter that had started upon hearing her trick.

"It was mostly quiet, at first." She hummed, thinking. "I had always thought the night lifeless, and it seemed this was proven. But the day's song was soon replaced by another. Though the colors are duller and the light all but gone, it has its own beauty."

The dark took on a life and rhythm of it's own, and I enjoyed it as much as I had enjoyed the light."

Her hair darkened again, reacting to her joy in a new way to mimic this new world.

"If you wish, you may spend the night in this world." Umbrik offered after a moment, his smile smaller but no less friendly. "I can mend your dress easily, and you can appear to the Gods with the sun, claiming simply that you fell asleep and got lost."

"I thank you for your kindness." Aurora nodded her agreement, following him down another tunnel into... Well, into another world, if she had to call it something.

The cavern was as big as the city of the gods, lit by flickering blood red -- rose red? -- torches. Pillars of dark stone pockmarked with caves were connected by wooden bridges and stone walkways, upon which creatures like those she'd seen before went about their days like regular people. Shops and homes and families made her think that, perhaps, they were just regular people.

"How could I never know this existed?" She breathed, staring in wonder as creatures made from dark and spinning waves flew past.

"Not many do." Umbrik repeated, shaking his head at her wonder, though his smile made it fond rather than annoyed. "The night and its people value secrecy."

And with that, he was walking away, Aurora following him step-for-step.

"But why keep this a secret?" She asked, watching a salesman hand a beautiful spinning toy to a child, the child's mother handing over red and black gems as payment. Ignoring the fur and scales and claws, it was something she'd seen a hundred times -- yet different.

"Fun." He shrugged. She gave him a look and he explained. "To keep a whole world secret takes cunning and trickery, a great deal of it. It's a challenge we've tackled for centuries, not for safety or fear or hatred, but simply because it's hilarious!"

"You are a very strange man." She shook her head in a parody of him, chuckling at the answer that strangely made sense. She gave another look at this world of things both strange and familiar, impossible and mundane.

"I told you I was a fool." He grinned bigger than ever, the term apparently a high compliment to him. He led her across a road, in between beasts and carriages and flying carpets and giant birds with curling horns.

"Yes, I suppose you are." She agreed, grabbing his arm to keep from getting lost in the deep black and ash grey and blood red and pale white. "Though it makes sense, in a way. I don't think I'll tell any of this to any person, for it truly would be more fun to see what other things they'd believe."

"Your skin flows with light, but your mind is as any Shadow's." He chuckled, and she supposed it was a compliment. He caught her frown and sighed. "I don't mean either of those things as bad, Miss. I of course mean any comparison to my own kind as a compliment, but I see the beauty of light and day as well."

"Both are nice." She agreed, following him into a shop carved into a wall. Dresses, cloaks, fine cloth, and other such things filled the store, along with the equipment necessary to make and mend them. "Where are we?"

"Yip's Clothiers." A nasally voice replied. A small lizard with short spikes going from its head to tail stood on a countertop, pink shirt nearly comical on its body. His body, based on the voice. "Umbrik, hanging out with daywalkers, now?"

"Yep." He nodded cheerfully. "Listen, Yipnikî, I need something for my friend here to wear along with the supplies to fix up her current clothing."

"Nonsense, I'll fix it." The lizard -- Yip? -- turned to her with a wink. His manner of speech was quite peculiar, with an accent she'd never before heard, "Trust me, he'll turn your clothes into a clown suit. He can't help it, it's how his so-called fashion sense works. Now, pick out something and leave your clothes in the dressing room in the back, I'll have 'em ready in a couple hours."

She curtsied and thanked the lizard, leaving Umbrik to his faux-offended spluttering, looking through the clothes. Most could never fit on her, either due to size or shape, but all were well-made and beautifully designed. And they weren't just red and black as she might suspect, though the colors were all dark. Some things shimmered as if covered in stars, but the main material was still colored as the night sky.

She found a simple dark-blue dress, made of rich fabric, the sleeves and skirt shining with silver pinpricks. She found a dressing room her size (as opposed to towering above her or smaller than her fist) and quickly changed. Her hair turned to many shades of blue and silver, mostly brighter than the dress but matching wonderfully. She thought she looked quite fine in it.

Based on the quickly-covered-up-with-a-cough jaw-drop she got from Umbrik, he agreed. Yip laughed at her payment of gold, explaining that the currency down there

was very different, but accepted it anyways. And by accepted, she meant that he scarfed them down, eating the coins with a contented smile.

"Sorry about that." Umbrik chuckled as they walked away. He laughed and smiled a great deal, lifting her spirits with his mood. "Yip's sort eat gold, so it was as if you were paying with bread and fruit."

"He's very kind, then." She chuckled with him, walking down a 'street'. "I doubt most would accept such things for their goods or service."

"Yeah, Yip's a good one." Umbrik agreed. "And great at his job, it takes a good couple centuries for something he makes to wear out, so long as you take care of it."

"I'll have to remember to wear a different dress next time I trick my guards, then." She nodded seriously, delighting in the little laugh he gave her. She yawned, not really meaning to, coming to stop.

"Perhaps we should find you somewhere to rest." Umbrik muttered, looking around as if trying to remember his way. "I doubt you're used to staying up so late."

"Oh, but I may never come here again!" Aurora argued, fighting against the fact that she really was quite tired. "I wish to see as much as I can."

"If you like this cold and dark realm so much, surely you could visit again?" He asked, frowning. "That way you needn't lose any more sleep."

"I doubt I shall be able to slip away from my guards again anytime soon." She answered sadly. "And surely not long enough to find this place once more. In fact, I'll probably be kept in the palace after this, at least for a time."

"With all this talk of guards and being kept, you're beginning to sound more like a prisoner than a princess." He lifted an eyebrow. "As far as I can tell, you've been grown for a while now and say you have no family; why should anyone keep you anywhere if you do not wish it?"

"I am a ward of the Gods, and it is their will that I be kept safe." She leaned on the rock wall, looking down. "I am valued for my wit and fairness, breaking up the disputes of the holiest ones. I am too valuable to be allowed-"

"Your freedom?" He finished for her, mirroring not what she would say but certainly what she had thought. "Too valuable and precious and frail to make a decision or see the world or even read a book?"

"I can read any approved book I please." She weakly argued, not knowing why she feigned disagreement with him beyond that being what she was meant to do. "Just not more than an hour and a half each evening."

"Come on." He grabbed her hand in a loose grip and gently pulled her to her feet, leading her towards another shop.

"Where are we going?" She asked, surprised by this turn of events.

"To get you a proper book that you may read as long or short as you wish." He answered simply. "Hour and half of approved reading -- what utter nonsense, even to one as foolish as me."

The shop turned out to be a bookstore filled with hundreds of shelves and thousands of books, comfy reading nooks crammed into every available spot and ladders leading to the higher shelves.

The bookkeeper, a tall thing with way too many eyes and much too small feet, very helpfully directed them to a section filled with fairytales. Aurora was hesitant at first, for none of the stories were on her approved list, but she eventually grabbed one and began to skim through it.

Hours later found both she and Umbrik curled up into reading nooks with piles of books around them, laughing and debating the different tales. The stories were bizarre, filled with cunning heroes and evil Gods and mortals that risked everything to follow their dreams -- even humans learning magic!

She loved every story, even the ones... No, especially the ones that made her question things. Her curiosity hadn't been this alive in centuries, and it filled her even as she pulled at the loose threads in the tapestry of her life, taking apart everything she'd ever blindly accepted.

"I wish not to go back." She sighed, sadness encroaching on her new rediscovery of mystery and curiosity. "But I must, or the Gods will rend the world to pieces in their search for me."

"They do have a tendency for that." He sighed, sharing her frown. She wondered at his past, and decided that she may never have another chance to ask.

"Have you ever met the gods?" She tilted her head like he did when asking something. "You don't seem to like them very much. And how is it that you look so much like, since I have no other way to say it, a regular person?"

"I was born a human." He told her casually, but quietly, as if it were a secret. His grin faltered as he continued, eyes growing distant as he remembered times long past. "The Gods treated humans even worse back then, and everyone merely accepted it as the way things ought to be. I didn't, and I was already quite a troublemaker, so I stole that which gave them the most power over us; fire."

Her blood froze, nearly literally, her hair turning shocked white. Everyone knew the story of humans stealing fire from the gods, ignoring their place and forever gaining powers that should've stayed solely in the hands of the holy ones. She dropped her book and put her hands on her mouth, remembering the nightmares she'd had after her questions to what had happened to the specific thief had finally been answered.

To imagine such things was bad enough, but to imagine them happening to the laughter-spreading man she'd begun to think of as a friend...

"The stories are true." He said simply, not meeting her eyes. "The ones the Gods tell today about what they did to me, they all happened. Years longer than any human should've been able to live, until the darkness swallowed me whole and they thought the ancient night had ended my suffering through sacrifice."

"But you're still here..." Her cheeks felt wet, pain on his behalf filling her, though along with joy that the poor human she'd been told about had survived after all. Somehow.

"I was granted new life by forces more ancient than the Gods." He told her, chuckling. "Night did indeed end my suffering, by making me one of its children. So, yeah, I dislike the so-called 'holy ones'."

"Anyone would." She sniffled. Then, she decided something. "Everyone should."

"No more tears, Aurora." Umbrik smiled at her, wiping at her cheeks with his thumb. He bounced up, gently pulling her from her seat. "Come on, I want to show you something that will cheer you."

She followed him once more, having finished her book. He led her up pathways to a much smaller cavern, decorated like a simple but comfortable house. He looked around for a second, then pulled out a flute and a lyre, asking her if she knew how to play either one. She knew how to play the flute pretty well, and answered such.

The fact that he could play and sing beautifully did indeed cheer her, and they soon had a crowd around them. She had never played for such a large group before, and it felt incredible! She began to dance, moving through the city with Umbrik and the crowd following, more musicians and dancers joining the impromptu parade.

When other lyrists started playing, Umbrik handed his lyre off to another and instead began flipping and juggling in time to the music, adding a twirl or a bow or a magic trick as the mood struck him. Ribbon twirlers ran between the musicians, and by a whim she made the ribbons swirl with a thousand colors. Though startled, the dancers went with it, and soon the dark cavern was filled with color and music and laughing and joy.

Aurora felt, for the first time in her life, truly free. But all parades must end, and people slowly filtered back to their own business as the hours passed, until it was just Umbrik and her outside of Yip's Clothiers, laughing loudly together.

Her old dress was ready, the gold and white looking strangely colorless next to the living night sky she had worn all that time. It was a silent walk to the edge of the dark city, Umbrik leading her without his usual skip. The silence, however, was broken when her stomach loudly grumbled, reacting to the smells wafting off the last shop before the exit tunnel began -- a bakery filled with pastries she'd never seen before, all smelling incredibly inviting.

Umbrik blocked her hand when she reached for one, panic on his face. "You mustn't eat anything from here, Aurora."

"Why not?" Her hunger and impending return to a life that felt a million miles away made her perhaps a little snappier than she meant to be.

"It's enchanted." He explained. "That's why so many creatures of the dark gather here, anything grown in these caves or made from what is grown here is meant for them. If you eat it, you will change into a child of darkness and night. Your eyes will see night as if day, while day will be hard to see in. Shadows will feel safe, and shining lights will spook. These cold caves will seem more inviting than the warmest banquet hall."

"Will I be able to leave?" She asked, the books of fairytales still fresh in her mind.

"Of course, but you'll belong amongst the night." He shook his head. "The sun will make you yawn and your eyes grow heavy, the stars granting you alertness and energy."

No matter how much you enjoy the day and light, you will wilt and grow miserable if away from the shadows for too long."

Without another word, Aurora grabbed a pastry, trusting Umbrik to pay for it. It was the sweetest thing she'd ever tasted, more delicious than a thousand other things she'd eaten in her long life. He stared in shock, and she grinned cheekily with a wink, her hair turning pink and orange to match the flavor.

When Aurora returned to the gods in a dress like the night sky, her gold skin paler, her ears finned, her fingers clawed, and her eyes the color of roses, they almost didn't believe it was truly her. But her swirling rainbow of hair and the flowers that popped up around her marked her as clearly as a still pond.

What happened? Where have you been? Who took you? Questions flowed from the lips of every God and servant, all answered at once in a simple way.

"I got lost and ended up in a world of shadows, but the people were friendly and helped me find my way back, so here I am!" A sigh of relief was breathed, until "I also ate this delicious pastry, but now I feel a little strange. That isn't an issue, is it?"

The Gods couldn't keep her after that, for after only a few months her beauty would fade and her wisdom falter with her misery. So they had to let her journey to the dark realms, traveling between them as she wished, for few Gods were able to venture down into night's domain -- and those that were had no interest in controlling her.

Aurora spent part of her year amongst sunlight and warmth, breaking disputes amongst Gods, chasing the wind, singing with the sea, and outrunning the swiftest of beasts. The other part of the year she delighted in the colors only dark ones could see, flew with bats and owls, danced in parades of her own making, and spent time with Umbrik the Foolish -- the wisest man she'd ever met.

Many years passed like this, filled with books and discovery and laughter, before the Rainbow and the Shadow began to fall in love. They went on many adventures, and had many children, all raised to be free, curious, kind, and brave.

And that, as they say, is happily ever after.

— end of "Song Of Light And Shadow" —