

# *The Tragic Tale of Whimsy Woo*

Once upon a time, there was a young, lonely girl named Whimsy Woo: a pleasant girl who was sadly ignored by her careless and lazy parents. Every day, since she learned to walk, she would wander off into the nearby woods from sunrise till sunset, amusing herself with her own delightful imagination. When she returned reluctantly at night, she would curl up in her simple cot and dream of a better, more exciting life.

And so one day, by fate or by chance, she came across a ramshackle hut on her travels and, being a curious child, she approached boldly and tried to look in through one of the dusty, cracked windows. Wiping away years of grime from a frame of glass, she peered into the inky blackness. Slowly, her eyes accustomed to the gloom, and familiar shapes began to form from the shadows.

“Well come in then. It’s rude to stare.”

A dry, dusty voice had whispered from the depths of the darkness. Whimsy barely breathed as the front door opened with the faintest of creaks. “You look cold,” stated the voice. “Step inside.” And without really knowing why, she entered the ramshackle hut without a second thought.

It was a total contrast to what she expected. It was not the crumbling, cobwebbed room she saw through the window but a rather comfortable, cosy room full of interesting ornaments and shelves crammed with leather-bound books. It was the books that particularly caught her imagination as she had never seen so many – never *imagined* so many – in her life! Whimsy loved books: they were so full of wonderful stories; so far away from her own boring world.

A polite cough reminded her that she was not alone. She turned (a little annoyed at being disturbed from her reverie) and saw a well dressed man of an uncertain age giving her a quizzical look.

Whimsy remembered her manners. “Oh, I’m sorry. Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Whimsy Woo and I was just passing when -”

The well dressed man raised his hand to signal silence and smiled a strange smile: all teeth and drawn back lips. “You are a bored child. Not a *boring* child, I hasten to add. You would like to

live a fairytale life? Yes?” He didn’t wait for an answer. “Well I am going to offer you one chance and one chance only. You can say ‘no’ and go about your dull existence or...”

And he left the sentence hanging in mid air.

Whimsy waited.

“Well what is your answer?” He enquired.

“I’m not sure I understand the question,” she replied.

“Simple. It’s either ‘yes’” he shrugged. “Or ‘no’. Your choice.”

Whimsy chewed at her lower lip. Those books, those *wonderful books*. She had made up her mind. “Yes!”

The man gave a sigh of relief. “Oh thank you,” he gushed. “Well, the rules are simple. You will arrive here at midday - every day - and perform chores. For your payment I will allow you to read any of my books for *ten minutes* before the sun sets.”

Whimsy looked startled. Ten minutes! For a whole day of working!

The strange man added matter-of-factly. “You promised. But you will find me a fair person,” he gestured towards the library. “You may read until sundown but you will start work tomorrow... without fail.” He then turned and sat down at an antiquated desk and began to write whilst ignoring Whimsy entirely.

If she found it rude, she did not care. She approached the shelves and ran her finger along the spines of the many books stacked and filed there. One book caught her eye. A thin book with a leather cover as pale as dead skin. She reached out and pulled it out to inspect the cover.

*Noooooo...*

Whimsy spun around. That voice! So sad, lonely and full of despair as if someone would never find happiness again. Only the subtle sounds of the well dressed man could be heard: his pen scratching and tapping the notebook as he wrote with a focused intensity.

Snorting to herself for being so silly, she opened the book and began to read. It was a familiar fairy tale about a little girl...

Whimsy woke the following morning: refreshed and full of life. She bounded out of bed, quickly got dressed and left the house without bothering to make herself any breakfast. Her rushed journey through the woods was uneventful and when she arrived at the old,

ramshackle hut, she was out of breath from a mixture of excitement and exhaustion.

As she reached to knock on the varnish-cracked door, it opened with a faint squeal of protest.

“Come in Whimsy,” the voice from the familiar darkness whispered. “You have plenty of work to do...”

Every day, Whimsy worked hard. And every day, ten minutes before sunset, she settled down in the strange man’s library and began to read the incredible books. For the first few weeks, she picked books at random; reading out of curiosity, rather than any real purpose. After several months, Whimsy took great care over what she read. During September, for example, she read only poetry; discovering the emotional paths the poets wandered. October was a month spent entirely on researching the heavens above (she could name any star and every constellation). Languages of lost tribes and undiscovered countries held her spellbound for the winter months while the habits of the woodland creatures enchanted her in spring.

Months became years... and Whimsy became wiser as they passed.

And every day, Whimsy was only allowed to read for ten minutes before the sun set.

On the eve of her eighteenth birthday (her pathetic parents neither realised nor cared), Whimsy entered the ramshackle hut for what was to be the last time. The well dressed man was waiting for her and as she picked up the broom to begin her chores, he calmly signalled her to stop.

“Put down the broom,” he said softly. “You no longer need it.”

There was a faint shadow of regret in his voice that Whimsy detected. Confused, and clutching the broom tightly, she asked, “But why? Have I done something wrong?”

He smiled a bittersweet smile, “Oh certainly not. However...” he paused and frowned to himself, “... you must never come back. It has become too dangerous.” Wringing his hands, he looked up

and fixed Whimsy with pleading eyes. "You must *never* come back!" he stressed.

Whimsy dropped the broom from her numb fingers, but she did not hear its clatter as it fell to the cobbled floor; her heart was pounding too loudly, her teeth were clenched and tears began to fill her vision. No. This couldn't be! The books! It wasn't fair. Didn't he say that she had done nothing wrong? The rising panic shook her body and evolved into a seething anger. No! This is not fair! How *dare* he? The books are my *life*! The books are *everything*!

The well dressed man was speaking, his hands clasped together: begging to be understood. Whimsy barely listened. "... too dangerous! The books have a power you can never- should never-understand! Please..."

*Please listen! Take heed. Close the book now!*

"No," stated Whimsy. "I understand only too well. The books have given me wisdom, strength, love- and you would deny me that!" she screamed.

The strange man shrank back in fear. He stumbled and fell backwards, his eyes wide with terror as the room began to shake and tremble.

It was as if a violent storm had blown through the windows. Books were swept from their shelves and flew like maddened bats in the swirling vortex, each one striking the well dressed man with increasing ferocity. He disappeared under a flurry of paper sheets and leather book covers and his pitiful cries were snatched away in the whipping winds.

Whimsy stood in the centre of the room, her eyes closed. The storm did not seem to affect her in the slightest; it was almost as if she was dreaming. Her head tilted to one side as if listening to a distant voice and a small smile formed on her lips.

As suddenly as it began, the storm finished.

When the last piece of paper settled to the debris covered floor, her eyes opened.

The strange, well dressed man was nowhere to be seen. Whimsy glanced around the room and frowned at the untidiness. Tutting under her breath, she began to gather the books and loose pages, blowing off dust and arranged them lovingly into neat piles. It took her all day to clean the room and sort out the library and it was as the sun was setting that she was finally satisfied with her efforts.

She sank into the single chair in the library and picked a book at random. It was one she had never seen before with a leather cover as pale as dead skin. It was a fairy tale, how sweet! But how could she have missed it? She thought she had read every book in the library. But this one seemed familiar somehow...

*Once upon a time, there was a strange, well dressed man who lived in a ramshackle hut with only his books for company.*

And Whimsy read on and on...

*The End*

