

A Final Tale from the Shores of Gascony

My father, a nobleman, was rarely home during these late years after my mother's passing. He never mourned her after the funeral, never wanted me to mourn her either. To him, tears were a sign of lowliness.

My position in the duchy of Gascony required me to be presentable at any hour of the day or night and ready to receive any command my father provided. He wasn't a loving father, but daughters need a father, no matter what kind of man or daemon.

He told me a curious tale one night, a night he had spent drinking and reading in his study the texts written by his father. It was of this young princess who had never seen her father once in her life on the grassy hillocks of Francia, that had lost her way in a thicket in search of juniper berries. A savage spirit found her weak, afraid, and hungry beneath a beech tree. Pale hands reached out for her ever-paler cheek before the lady fell faint and snared in the pasture's green blades. My father wasn't a superstitious man, but he never let me roam the countryside alone.

It was only on days as warm as this one in the summer that I ever received any form of agency. We were on the shores of Gascony, looking out across the overwhelming swirl of turquoise beyond the Atlantic surf. Diamond gems lost themselves in those shining waves after the journeys of heroic men of myth deflowered the daughter of Poseidon.

On these bright summer days, my father enjoyed swimming alone while I kept my place on the sandy beachside. I wasn't allowed to search for the best seashells, dance in the wondrous sun, or climb the rocks fallen from the cliff-face while he was away. My father found the water peaceful on his own and preferred that I waited my turn to swim as a young lady should in his mind. It was awfully difficult not to get into some form of trouble while he was away, but over

time I grew more content on the beach. I would lose myself in my book and pen which turned out to be more enjoyable than sitting there kicking up sand. Giving voice to feeling and meaning to being was something to treasure and record in the written word. I hoped to write a story that would pacify even that spirit who had destroyed the princess' honor.

Thus, I was sat with my head locked onto my last phrase “the rosewood fails the gnawing woodpecker” and looked up to see a desperate hand cresting over the farthest wave my eyes could discern. I sprinted to the beach shore and watched as half of my father waded back to land. Severed straight down the middle, his skin was pale except for the red paste cascading down his pearl skin. His one good eye, a murky white pearl stared dead into my heart. His mouth moved to form a shout at me to return to my place on the beach. Stern, pallid, deceased, he fell into the tide.

My eyelids grew heavy, and I was lulled into a frantic slumber. When I opened them, my mother stood in front of me in a white dress coated gold at the fringes. She reached her cold, cloudy hand toward my own and we swam out into the surf together laughing and crying. We were spirited away into the dark hue beneath the waves where father's voice could not be heard.

The End.

In the gothic tradition, I wanted to weave a tale from long before in the days of 1000 A.D where kingdoms took widespread control over Europe. Many gothic stories like Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* set the story in the past to create this ancient veil over the work that helps suspend belief and control from the reader. This leads into the creation of the supernatural world which I also incorporated into my story with the tale about the spirit stealing away the virtue of a young princess and the ghost of the protagonist's mother coming in to free her from the father's control. Of course, the gothic tradition is a surprisingly feminine genre with a tradition of female authors, readers, and storytelling. Although the protagonist isn't generally heroic, I wanted to simulate a young daughter's perspective who has been raised in this abusive household with a father who is very controlling like Signor Montoni and almost tyrannical. The protagonist finds a level of freedom in her writing and gives way to this kind of escapism outside of her father's control where she can make up her own words and phrases, giving her some agency. This also was meant to demonstrate the history of storytelling and novel reading in the female gothic as we have read in Austen's *Northanger Abbey*. Lastly, the character of the absent mother interested me in gothic novels, and I wanted to bring her back in the fold to guide the parting soul of her daughter away from the abusive father. Although this story seems to only fulfill the roles of stereotypes, I hope that breaking free from the tradition and returning the mother into the life of the gothic heroine adds a more nuanced twist.