

Inescapable Darkness

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/9314558) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/9314558>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
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Category:	F/M
Fandoms:	Allerleirauh All-Kinds-Of-Fur (Fairy Tale) , Donkeyskin & Related Fandoms , Catskin (Fairy Tale) , Fairy Tales & Related Fandoms
Relationship:	Prince/Princess
Characters:	Princess (Fairy Tales) , King (Fairy Tales) , Prince (Fairy Tales)
Additional Tags:	Tragedy , Drama , Heavy Angst , Horror , Fear , Memories , On the Run , Disguise , balls , Romance , Trauma , Sad , Unhappy Ending
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2017-01-14 Words: 846 Chapters: 1/1

Inescapable Darkness

by [Rosa Cotton](#)

Summary

She has escaped her enemy, but not her prison.

Notes

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She grows cold when a shadow falls over her as she works. It grows tall and threatening. A shake of her head reveals it to be round and plump, belonging to the irritated cook. A scream escapes when one of the young lads tries to pull off her coat, jeeringly asks how ugly she is. In her head echoes the loud rip as she flees, leaving part of her hem behind. She jerks awake, rough straw under her, surrounded by darkness, her heart in her throat. Sweat on her brow, almost drawing blood from her bottom lip, it is many minutes until she is sure she is alone and lies back down, tremblingly returning to her dreams.

Outside she pulls her coat of a thousand furs closer around her, as though attempting to hide from the sun's far-reaching, exposing rays. She ducks her head when she hears people whispering about her or a servant tries to peer into her soot-covered face. In the warm, noisy, busy kitchens when the gossip is about the latest visitor to the court – an ambassador, a messenger – from a far-off kingdom, she cannot stop her hands from shaking the rest of the evening. Full of dread, she half-expects to be summoned before the young king and ordered taken back to her home, to *him*.

Thoughts of the ball are too tempting to resist, and she turns her face towards the light that breaks through her dark shadows. She casts off her disguise, washes her face, lets her hair like gold tumble down in waves, and clothes herself in a dress as blue as the sky. Once again she is a princess. The young king's eyes are soft, his smile kind, his hold on her hand gentle. And for a moment she smiles, a new emotion embracing her. "You are the loveliest maiden I've ever seen," he whispers wondrously, tenderly as they move over the dance floor.

"You are lovelier than your mother ever was."

The words ring in her ears. The ballroom's soft glowing candles' flames grow large like a roaring fire, changing from yellow to red as blood. The smiling expressions on the courtiers' faces change to amazed horror. The hand grasping hers becomes wrinkled and old; yet its grip is like iron, crushing. He leers down at her, eyes wide, crazily...

With a loud cry she snatches away her hand. In a whirl of blue she races from the glistening room. The shadows following at her heels laugh mockingly at the voice she does not hear, asking what is wrong and pleading for her to stay.

She stares at the door, unable to sleep, huddled in a corner of her room. Shudders rack her body as she weeps brokenly. Every time she hears a noise in the hall, she catches her breath, not daring to move, so scared... This time she has no lock to stand between her and danger like that long-ago night when her door would not yield to the dark hand.

The light of the ball once again beckons to her. Uncertainty lingers on her shoulders as she takes off her coat of furs, a little reluctantly this time, and puts on a dress shining like the sun. The young king comes to her at once, his smile relieved and happy. Looking in his clear eyes, she dares to dream of freedom. Late in the ball, he slips a silver ring on her finger. "Will you marry me?" he says.

"You shall be my new queen!" And a gold ring with diamonds, her mother's ring, was on put on her finger...

Her eyes widen, "No!" tumbling from her quivering lips. She tears herself from the young king, disappears into the crowd, and makes her escape, hearing nothing but wild laughter behind her.

She is put to work cooking the soup. Amidst the shouting and bustling about, she is unable to stop the tears filling her eyes. The silver ring on her finger weighs heavily, like her heart. Hesitating for a moment, she drops it in the soup. It is not rightfully hers. She shall not see the light of hope again.

"Funny coat, you are in for it now!" the fat cook hollers after a servant rushes into the kitchen to bring the person who made the soup before the king.

And she goes, her feet slow, dread flowing through her...

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The bedchamber is cool; yet she feels the moister form on her forehead as she desperately fills her lungs with air. She senses his sad, concerned gaze on her. Yet he has learned long ago he makes it worse by trying to draw her into his arms. She bites her lip, the dream taking too long to fade. She recoils when tentative fingers brush over hers. She is not ready.

It has been two years since she ran away, one since her father's death. Still he haunts her memories, causing her to draw back from her loving husband's touch. Still she is not free. Still she is trapped in her prison of terror.

THE END

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