

## The Rusalka's Fairytale

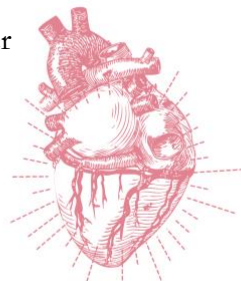
by Alexandra Grunberg

Vyria floated beneath the water, letting soft bubbles escape through her lips and rise to the surface of the lake. For so long, she had waited in this same position for helpless prey to come to the edge of the water, then be dazzled by the vision beneath the surface before they were pulled into the depths, another victim of the rusalka. But those days were over now.

When she was young, Vyria would listen to the women who gathered at the edge of the lake to wash their clothes and linens as they gossiped and told each other stories of folklore and fairytales. Princesses would wait, guarded by an evil and bloodthirsty monster, until princes came and vowed their undying devotion, giving themselves to their lover heart and soul. Vyria did not like to think she was evil, but she could not deny her thirst for blood. These stories taught Vyria the role she was born to play, and she played it without question, luring men to the water and pulling them in for her feast.

Sometimes she would wonder what it would be like, for a man to give her his heart, to promise her his soul. But she resigned herself to the fact that monsters' stories did not end in lovers meeting. The rusalka's story began and ended in immortal torment and watery death. She would never be the heroine of the fairytale.

But then, he came for her, her nameless love, her knight. He knelt at the edge of the water to drink, his clothes muddy from whatever long roads he had travelled on, not knowing that he was travelling to her. As Vyria reached up for him, he saw her and grabbed his chest. Vyria recognized the image as "swooning" from the reenactments of the washwomen, though they tended to perform the action mockingly. But this man was completely sincere. Instead of pulling him into the water when their hands clasped together, Vyria let him pull her out. And he gave her his heart.



Vyria broke through the surface of the water, laughing as the light reflected off of her splash, a flash of sparkles flying around her. Since she had met this man, she had forsaken her role as a monster. She would never be evil again, and they would be together forever and live happily ever after, as all fairytale couples always do.

Vyria waded to the edge of the lake where the man lay, waiting for her. She softly caressed the side of his face, down his neck, and around the gaping hole where she had pulled out his heart after he had pledged it to her. He had been sleeping ever since, but that was common in the stories, though it usually happened to the heroine.

Vyria kissed him, but he remained still. Oh, well. Sleeping Beauty had slept for a hundred years before she awoke. Vyria would just have to be patient.

She cuddled next to his body as the sun began to set, throwing reds and purples across the surface of the lake. She wished that the man was awake to see it with her. She wished that he had told her his name before he had given her his heart. She wished that he would wake up soon before she finished digesting his heart and would feel the urge to hunt again, to return to the role of a monster.

And Vyria laughed, because in fairytales wishes always came true.

The End.

