

THE DEATH STORY

Once upon a time, in a far-off country, there was a Princess. She was very young and very beautiful. Unfortunately she was put under a spell and magicked into the body of an ugly, misshapen old woman. She could only be released from this terrible spell by a kiss – from a handsome prince who truly loved her.

Her father offered half his kingdom to anyone who would release her from this spell. This story spread throughout the land. The first prince who came to release her was consumed by fire and burnt to a crisp the moment he touched her lips, because he was only after half of her father's kingdom. His hot greed consumed him.

The second prince who came to release her, was sorry for her, imprisoned so in this ugly old body. He was turned by the spell into a block of ice the moment he touched her lips. The cold kiss of pity has no life in it.

There was a third prince, who had been wandering for years, and did not know anything about the spell. He had been made blind in a battle a long time previously and, as no deformed person could rule in his kingdom, had gone – or been sent – into exile. After the hardships of a traveling life, as a seemingly blind beggar, when he eventually reached the castle where the Princess lived, he did not ask anything. He was just grateful to be accepted in and given food and drink. No one knew he was a Prince.

The Princess herself, usually ashamed of her ugly body in front of all the courtiers, preferred the company of common folk who were less judgmental about these things. She served him food and drink and then they got talking. So intelligent, wise and beautiful did she seem to him that he fell deeply in love with her on the spot.

Since he could not see her ugliness and deformities, he perceived her true self and loved it. As a beggar he had no thoughts of avarice or greed or of taking anything from this castle or this kind person. As someone deformed, he would also have probably been beyond pity for someone in a similar situation.

As they talked he spontaneously lent over towards her and kissed her. She was instantaneously transformed back into her true self again. At the same moment, he was magically cured of his blindness. Together they lived happily ever after.

The reason that this is a Death Story - or to be more precise, a Summoning Story - and Death is He who is summoned up - is that it is a metaphor - as all fairy stories are - for a real process.

Once upon a time there was a beautiful girl - like a princess. We are all beautiful - once upon a time. The spell cast on us is the spell of Time and its effect is to age us. *So she grew old and hideous and ugly* - and yet still inside she is her true self, young and beautiful. Many of us feel this: this is part of the human condition. How can she be delivered from this 'spell'? Only by an energy - in the story, a Prince - who is in fact blind to the effects of Age.

The other two Princes are probably romantic additions from the Middle Ages; no matter. Alas nearly all Princes are more worldly or are not truly loving; so they get their just desserts, and the spell was not broken.

Thus one kiss is all that is needed – and then no more ugliness, no more suffering, no more aches and pains, no more sorrow and despair. One kiss and no more remembering of all that has been lost – all those years – and all that might have been and never was: one kiss, and then either nothing, or youth and beauty again, forever more. Happy ever after! This is of course the Kiss of Death. The Prince is the Prince of Death and, in the olden pre-Christian days when this story was first told, he was a beautiful and merciful god in his own right. His was the final glorious reward – the end of mortal suffering.

In the olden days, the grandmothers, who are the memories of the tribe, have and hold this sort of story. They are the ones who need it, of course. They tell the stories, and they are also the closest to death: they are the ones who are old and suffering. The telling of a story like this by an old person, already imprisoned in an aging body, also carries a greater poignancy. If they tell it, they can release themselves from the pains and hardships of life and surrender to the sweet spell of Death. And, if they themselves don't want to die at that moment, then they can point the story at someone else who will then die in their place.

The power to summon Death is a power, which, like all powers can be used for good or ill. Alternatively, Death will choose someone, someone usually close to Him. 'He' likes the youngest and the best, of course, given the freedom of choice. The trick or the power of the story is to be able to, to have the power to, call Him up when you want him, to die at will, so-to-speak, so as to avoid endless unnecessary suffering. Hence the story: tell the story and die. When you are oh, so tired; tell the story. Call up the Prince of Death and pass on the story at the same time. Summon Him up. But, as with all power or magic spells, there is a catch. Once you have told the story, the price has to be paid. Death will not go away empty-handed. If you don't die, then someone else (or something else, some part of you) MUST.

Nowadays things are not quite so black and white. 'Death' does not always mean the death of a person. The 'Death' called for can be the death of something old, something not wanted anymore: old attitudes, old belief systems, old habits – the old order of things. Nowadays we can use this power consciously, as a tool for transformation. This is a common theme for a psychotherapy workshop or conference.

In order for someone to transform, parts of them must die to make room for the new. The old stuck ways that are now dysfunctional must go. The Prince of Death can take these from us, if we are brave enough, to accept the Kiss of Death. But remember, for every gift there is a price, and the price must always be paid. So do not use this power lightly. This is why the story must only ever be told if someone, or something, is really prepared to die.

You have now been warned!