

A Cup of Coffee from the Evil Queen

Ingrid wonders if the apple she made her stepdaughter eat tasted like the apple tarts from that bakery two blocks down, or was it the bitter taste you'd expect from poison? Whatever Snow White tasted that fateful day, it surely must've been preferable compared to the awful batch of liquid they called coffee in this cafe.

"Enjoy your drink!" Poison. Smiling so sickly sweet at each rude or indifferent customer was a poison of its own. Slowly eating at her, but never enough to kill her. Ingrid should've told Snow White that she had it good when that apple took her out with a snap of her fingers. That was a mercy compared to what she had right now.

But now there is no Snow White to hate, just as there is no Queen Grimhilde - only polite, quiet Ingrid, the barista at Dagger Heart Cafe.

Before there was any Ingrid, before there was a Dagger Heart Cafe and its cheaply made coffee, there was Queen Grimhilde, known for a beauty that bewitched almost as effectively as the true magic she held. Why need magical abilities when you could have a man following your orders with an uptick of your lips and a flutter of your eyelashes?

But now, Ingrid can't help but think that for a place called Dagger Heart Cafe, there was a clear lack of daggers she could use on the premises.

"No need to frown like that, doll. How about a smile to lighten your mood?" The man leaning on the counter gave Ingrid a confident grin with a matching wink. Ingrid didn't know if she needed that dagger more for herself or the man. Also, who was he trying to fool with that cool guy act? She had the eyes to see he looked no better than the hunter she ordered to kill Snow White, and that hunter was just a hunter for a reason. If they had any other similarities they were both worthless at whatever they were trying to do.

Most importantly, what frown was this man talking about? Ingrid had trained herself to have the frozen, dead, polite smile on her face for a good 8 hours every day, so what smile did this man expect from her? Seductively, like how she used to smile at Snow White's father? Even if she did have the energy for that, who in the world was he to deserve any positive expression from her?

Ingrid turns to him and hands him a paper bag. She smiles wider by a fraction and closes her eyes for a bit longer and the man's face picks up immediately. Typical. "That'll be 5 dollars and 99 cents."

The man lets out a fake sheepish laugh, rubbing the back of his neck. "What? Ain't got a discount for me, cutie?"

Ingrid has decided who she should use the dagger on. She forces another frozen smile. "Unfortunately not, sir."

Immediately, his face sours and he grabs the paper bag. He all but slams his payment on the counter before exiting the store, with a loud enough mutter of "Wench."

Ingrid breathes, but her peace is short-lived.

"Ingrid, an espresso for number 3."

Breathe in. Breathe out. She grabs a mug. She definitely needed a drink.

Back then, Queen Grimhilde had the kingdom at the palm of her hands like a still beating heart - struggling to survive in her hold, but in her grasp all the same. She had the power and the beauty to back it up if not for a little girl a magic mirror said would take it all from her. Grimhilde watched obsessively for days on end - there was a window from her room that displayed the garden in all its majesty, except that at exactly just before the sunset, a girl would come to fetch water from the well. She ruined the scenery, like an ugly boil or bruise on an otherwise pristine face. Grimhilde would swirl the glass of wine in hand as she watched - what horrors would the girl unleash if left unattended?

"Ingrid! Customer 3 is waiting."

Right. There was no Grimhilde, only Ingrid. No wine, only coffee. She took out the grounded beans from the grinder and threw them in a bin. She turned back around with the coffee cup in hand, ready to serve, only to see lovely black hair in a neat bob cut, held together by a pretty red bow - almost the same red as her pretty bow-like lips. Ingrid blinks and smiles that same polite smile.

"Excuse me for a moment," she turns and heads to the kitchen. Holding the cup close to her chest, she spits - just once - into the bitter brew.

Ingrid returns to the counter, back to the pretty, black, short-haired girl, her smile the brightest it's ever been.

"Enjoy your drink."