

Skin Deep

Once upon a time, an adorable baby girl with soft, pure skin was born to a poor widow outside in the streets. The woman named her Adonia, meaning 'beautiful.' Unable to take care of her daughter, the widow placed Adonia into the care of a kind blacksmith and his family.

While she was still very small, Adonia conceived a skin disease from the fumes of the blacksmith's furnace which left her entire body blistered and ugly. No one outside of the blacksmith's family dared to even look at her. When it was time for her to marry, no one wanted the girl with toad-skin to be their bride.

One night, she heard a most unusual sound coming from outside the blacksmith's home. Wrapping herself in thick shawls to hide most of her skin, she crept into the streets. The music was melancholy and called her onward. She followed the sweet tune until she found a strange man playing a flute in an alleyway. He seemed lonely, almost as lonely as herself. She carefully made way towards him.

"Hello," she offered when it seemed as if he didn't see her. Or maybe he was too kind to look at her. Either way, he wasn't running away or flinching at her ugliness.

"Good evening," he replied, smiling broadly. When he turned his head, his pale eyes peered right past her, as if he had taken notice of her appearance. "I was hoping someone would hear me. I've gotten lost, which is quite embarrassing on my part. I have nowhere to go, nor any idea of how to get back." His voice was warm and friendly, like a fire in the wintertime.

"I could help you if you'd like," Adonia found herself saying. "Where are you from?"

"The palace." He nodded, standing up. "Would you guide me there? I'm blind, dear lady." He chuckled grimly at himself and held out an arm.

Taking pity, Adonia held out her own arm, doing so revealing the damaged, toad-like skin. She placed the man's smooth hand on it, although she feared he would refuse once he touched her. To her surprise, he actually held on tighter. "You have exquisite arms, Milady." He whispered as if to calm her. "Shall we?"

And so, with the full moon lighting their way, Adonia led the blind piper back to the palace. She noticed he was most handsome indeed, and he was just as kind. When they reached the palace safely, it was near dawn. They bid their farewells, and Adonia turned back to go into the village.

But before she could get very far, an old woman appeared before her. "My child," the gentle woman began. "You've done a great deed, helping this young man get back to his home. Such kindness must be rewarded. There is going to be a grand ball held tonight at the palace in order for the prince to choose his bride. Every girl in the kingdom has been invited. Would you like to attend it?"

"I would like to grandmother," Adonia replied, "but I am too ugly to go. The prince would have me thrown out of the palace immediately!"

"Then," the old woman pulled out a magic wand, "I shall grant you beauty. Everyone will praise your looks and admire your charm. But," she paused, waving the wand in the air. "But at midnight, you will have to choose whether or not you wish to remain that way."

In a flash, the woman disappeared. The shawls wrapped around Adonia fell off to reveal a beautiful young woman, with pure, delicate skin. Adonia felt joy rush through her veins as she ran home. She spent the entire day working on preparing her gown and hair for the ball.

When evening came, Adonia made her way to the palace, dressed in soft blue satin and lavished with pearls. As soon as she entered the palace, people surrounded her, praising her looks

and adoring her beauty. Every man asked her to dance over and over again. This new attention was overwhelming, so Adonia snuck off from the crowd to get away.

That's when she heard a familiar sound. The melancholy music from the night previous. Following it, she found herself in the empty, quiet throne room. The prince was lounging, playing his flute. It then occurred to Adonia that this was the man she had guided. Her footsteps echoed on the floor as she crept towards him. "Hello."

He stopped playing. "Is it you, then?" He asked, his face brightening up. "Are you the lady with the arms that told me a story?"

"I don't know what you're talking about." Adonia replied, now within the prince's reach. "My arms have always been ugly and hideous, until now. Feel." She offered her arm.

The prince felt. He refused, eyes filled with disappointment. "I don't believe we've met before." He leaned back and set down his flute. "People may call this skin beautiful, but not to me. 'Perfect' skin without blemish or scarring is always dull to me. How can I enjoy what always feels the same? Not only that, but women with 'perfect' skin are most often vain.

"There was a lady I fell in love with last night. It was cold, but she offered to help me. Selfless, I should think. What decent woman would leave the warmth of her home to help a stranger? Her textured, brittle arm told me a story of pain and hope. I wished for her to come tonight. Even if she doesn't arrive until the dawn, I will wait for her."

The clock began to strike. Midnight had finally come. "Is that your idea of beauty?" Adonia asked, a newfound feeling of confidence growing inside her. "The world finds scars quite ugly, but you don't seem to think so."

"Of course I don't find them ugly." The prince sat up, interested. "But who am I to judge arms anyway? True beauty lies from within."

“And this girl,” Adonia quickened as the clock chimed again, “you think she is truly beautiful?”

“Of course.”

The clock struck twelve, sending echoes down the chamber. It was then Adonia remembered the old woman’s warning. “I choose to be the way I was,” Adonia cried, happy tears streaming down her cheeks. “As long as someone finds value in me, I will no longer think myself ugly.”

At that moment, her skin grew scarred, blistered and worn. Still adorned with pearls, clothed in satin, there was no hiding the difference in appearance. Yet, it didn’t matter. Alone in the throne room with the prince, who had seen her beauty even when the world hadn’t, Adonia felt as if a curse had been lifted. She was satisfied to be herself.

As the years went on, her arms gained more stories to tell the prince. In time, he played more songs for his bride. Every full moon, they would walk the streets of the village alone whilst everyone was asleep to remember the night they first met.

And as everyone in the kingdom remembers, they lived happily ever after.

The End.