

I KNEW YOU WHEN I WAS YOUNG

Written by Christian A. Dumais

The waiting was the worst part for the princess. She had no problems with the creature – grotesque as it was – because it did what it was supposed to do, which was to kidnap her and take her to its lair. This lair was particularly wet and slippery and muddy, the stench of foul meat soaking the clammy air. Now it was all a matter of waiting for the prince to rescue her. She found the process a tad archaic and she wished the ogre didn't have to kill so many people in the process, but what could she do? This was how it was done.

The ogre lit a fire for her. She could see the air steaming out of its wide nostrils, still out of breath from carrying her all this distance, its black fur crusted with blood. It turned to her, its red eyes narrow, its yellow teeth showing, and said, "It usually takes an hour or so for the prince to find the place. The rest is usually pretty quick."

She nodded; it was overwhelming to the ogre how such a simple gesture could exude so much beauty.

"Would you like some coffee?" asked the ogre.

When she nodded again, the ogre turned away suddenly.

The coffee ended up being excellent and the princess appreciated the ogre's professionalism. He brought her some clothes to put down on the piles of dirt so she could sit down. It sat down across from her, a cup of coffee in its hand. After its first sip, he sighed heavily, it being obviously uncomfortable with the waiting part as well.

"What now?" the princess asked.

"We wait," the ogre said.

"I know *that*, but is there something we can do, like play a game?" She looked around and could tell there would be no games to play. "Perhaps you could tell me a story."

The ogre appeared to be thinking this one over. "I guess I could, if that's what you'd like."

"Most certainly," said the princess, a smile appearing for the first time.

"Okay." The ogre looked down at his coffee. "Well, once upon a time, in a far away land, there was once a beautiful woman. While she wasn't a princess – though she was one in her father's eyes – she was always meant for great things. But somewhere along the way, she made a right instead of a left, mistook a doorway for a wall, misunderstood a prophecy as a compliment out of pity, and took her

dreams too lightly. When she should've been out exploring the world, she was sitting inside a large box and staring at a smaller box – one that lit up and showed her numbers – for eight hours or more a day. When she wasn't in the box, she would sit at home and stress and worry about more numbers. Every month she would receive papers that revealed large sums that she owed, and each month those numbers grew and grew. She was always distracted, always staring at boxes, never listening to the Fates, for they are like music – meaningless if there is no one to hear it, and the Fates have only so much patience. She felt as lonely as the bed she slept in, feeling trapped in life rather than being a part of it. There was magic everywhere and plenty to laugh about, but all she saw was yesterday and tomorrow. There was a time when the gods would chain men to rocks for the most trivial of crimes, forcing them to push rocks up hills that never ended – now the gods simply sit back and let men create their own perpetual punishments. They boast their great knowledge – most of it coming from the boxes they stare at, all of them being connected – while forgetting the important things. Their heads are so full of nonsense they may as well be empty, not to mention their hearts. And they fill their homes with insignificant trinkets to match their heads. They have freedom everywhere and yet they restrict themselves, finding excuses when there is nothing to excuse, finding misery and fear where there is none. This was her, punished, restricted, trapped, chained, alone, when she should've been laughing a thousand miles away, teaching others to fly, loving so hard it feels like her heart should be breaking when in fact it's growing, overflowing continuously until her last breath. That was her, the goddess of the never-was. And she –"

It stopped suddenly, its nostrils expanding. "He's close now. He's a quick one, this prince. My trail was perhaps too good this time." It stood up and gently took her empty coffee cup. "You'll need to scream soon to help him out."

"Is there such a goddess?" the princess asked.

It nodded.

"And such a place?"

"Oh, yes. I've wandered there many times. I'm invisible there, except to those the majority considers to be insane, interestingly enough. Everything is backwards there, it is frightening. And the noise never stops, the air is milky and smells, and sadly enough, they tell stories about us and as if we were simple and quaint. They scoff at our happy endings as impossible things."

"How sad."

"Isn't it though?"

It helped the princess to her feet. She started to brush herself off and the ogre stopped her. "No, he must believe you've being mistreated. The dirtier you stay, the better."

They said nothing for a few moments.

"Shall I scream now?"

"He's closer; so whenever you want, sure."

She took one of his hands and squeezed it. "Thank you."

"You're most welcome. Be sure to recommend me to your father when your sister is of age." It smiled but she couldn't tell it was a smile, and then it stretched itself to get back into character. "Now, let's do it."

She laughed, the most beautiful laugh it had ever heard and would ever hear, took a deep breath, and then she screamed towards her happy ending.

"I Knew You When I was Young" was originally published in [Cover Stories](#). Thanks for reading!

