



Legend

Love is the way

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Read me.
I will help you remember who you are.



After the death of her father, a sensitive girl decides to leave her village and head into the forest. As someone with a more liberal and mystical approach to life, she is misunderstood and judged by the other villagers. But when she meets a boy for whom she feels an unconditional love, everything changes.

Love is the way is a legend about who we really are.

Legend means *things to be read*. It is the story of the life of a saint or mystic.

Prologue

In this life our paths crossed again. That's when the memories of a distant life in England surfaced. Here is where I tell you about that life, a life in which we knew each other. Here is where I tell you our story. Do you remember?



1

The house

I had not heard the woman enter. Still in the grip of my father's passing, I had become absent-minded. It was a mistake I was to repeat, albeit with a less innocent ending.

The woman's voice was too loud and bobbed up and down with her jerky movements. Her mouth reminded me of a soup that as it comes to the boil produces big bubbles that suddenly burst. That's how the words passed her lips: a torrent of splashing and spluttering. The woman's heart was dark and her body like stone. She knew nothing of the lightness of the wind or the vastness of the water.

It took quite an effort to ward off the attack. I quickly stepped back to find myself almost pushed up against the damp stone wall. The cold enclosed my back. The woman's eyes widened. Then all of a sudden she moved away from me, as if she was aware of her overbearing stance and realised that I required a different approach. Thereupon she leaned towards me

and lowered her voice. But I sensed that her words did not express her true intentions. The sounds slithered through the room like a slippery serpent. I froze and my throat felt tight. After a while, the woman stopped talking. She straightened her back, planted her hands on her hips and threw me a blistering look.

‘Suit yourself,’ she snapped.

She turned around, grabbed the two large bundles and stomped out of the house. My lungs filled with air and the pressure on my throat eased. Quickly, I opened all the shutters to clear the atmosphere and allow the tension to drain away.

This was the first visit I received since my father’s passing. I decided it would also be the last.

I needed time to gather myself. Outside, I sat down on my favourite stone. The garden was strewn with large, flat rocks and from an early age I had used them as seats whenever I wanted to daydream and look up at the sky. Its surface was still warm from the balmy, late summer sun. Gradually my body unwound a little and my breathing slowed. But I still felt a tingling sensation in my chest and I could not feel my feet. Was it fear?

My head was like a hive, with thoughts buzzing around. What was it the new sheriff’s wife had said? Was it true? Was I not allowed to live here on my own? Was I expected to live in with another family and work for them? The doubts crept in. The pins and needles intensified and my throat seized up. It felt as if a noose was slowly being tightened. What’s wrong with me being here on my own? How can it be ‘against the will of God’?

'We need one another like the plants need the rain, and the farmers their fields. Nobody can be alone. Nobody ought to be alone,' she had said.

But maybe I do.

The thought brought relief. However, it was immediately followed by something greater than my doubts, something more cutting and vicious. It flashed through my mind before quickly dropping down to my heart where it left a deep gash.

So if I want to be alone, I thought, there must be something wrong with me.

I swiftly reminded myself that I had always been different, that people were simply not all alike. But a small void remained deep in my heart and over time it would cause the necessary pain.

Would I be staying here then? I looked over my shoulder at the small house where I had lived my whole life, all fourteen years of it. The yellow paint on the shutters was peeling – the shutters I closed in the evening to keep in the warmth and opened in the morning to greet the day. After my father fell ill, we no longer had the time and money to paint them. The two of us used to do this together every year. The smell of the wood and the rhythm of the sanding were like old friends: although we met only once a year, it always felt as though we picked up where we left off yesterday.

Whilst sanding, my father and I sang songs and joked about removing the old and replacing it with the new. They were the same jokes year in year out, but

laughing with the person I loved the most made me feel all warm inside.

My eyes filled with tears. Then they overflowed. By the end, I had cared for him day and night. He had been bedridden, slowly wasting away and shrivelling up like an old apple. I had picked bunches of herbs, made infusions, applied dressings. Long hours were spent keeping vigil by his bedside, washing his body, changing the bed linen. And praying – yes, I had been praying too. But to no avail. The will of Life cannot be defied. There is no Life without death, that much I now knew.

I wiped my cheeks on the edge of my sleeve and looked back at the house again. The pitched roof with the lopsided chimney was black with all the soot that had rained down on it over the years. The ivy bore the yellow-and-green hues of early autumn and looked resplendent. Its top leaves reached up to my bedroom and when I sat on the windowsill I could touch them. They smelled of resin.

I sighed. I loved the house. This was not the first time I caught myself talking to her in my mind. Sometimes I thanked the house for the shelter she offered, for instance during strong wind or heavy rain. Lying in bed, I would hear the gusts tugging at the house and showers beating down on the roof. But as the walls creaked worse than usual, the house seemed to be telling me: don't worry, I'll protect you. Or when I looked at the sunlight darting in through the beautifully blown glass window while I went about my morning chores, the space inside the house would wrap itself around me like a soft, warm coat.

The song of a robin brought me back to the rock in the garden. My hands lay curled up in my lap. They were long and slender, but their red hue and many dark creases betrayed all the hard work they had done. And they would be doing even more. I did not want to stick around too long, certain that the villagers would not leave me in peace. How often had they not insinuated I ought to be just like them? I would on my own, wherever I was.

My father, the house: I'd had a premonition that within a short period of time I would lose everything that was precious to me.

2

Departure

I did not need much time. There was not much to pack. The new sheriff's wife had taken nearly all the clothes, cookware and tools from the house.

'The vicar doesn't bury for free,' her words continued to echo through my head. Luckily I always kept the most precious items under my straw mattress and she had not thought to look there.

With a sense of composure that suggested I had done this before, I put down a piece of cloth and laid out everything I thought I might need for the journey: the few remaining items of clothing, my mother's comb, the pig bladder with water, a piece of soap, a few flints, a chunk of old bread, a knife and of course my notebook, ink and quill. They offered me some support in the village, they were my confidants. They alone knew my true nature with all of its ideas and emotions.

I washed my face and crawled into bed. Dusk slipped into the house, shadows dissolved in the dark. Then I fell asleep.

The following morning, as I walked down the path, I looked back at my home one last time. The sun had just risen and illuminated the house like a nativity scene with a candle inside. The air was crisp and still damp after the night and I caught a first whiff of the earth's decay. If only he had died in early spring, I thought to myself, and a smile stole over my face. Father would have appreciated the joke. But there were no more laughs for him. And all of a sudden, I saw him before me. The way he looked at me, with those fine lines around his eyes that danced so merrily when he smiled, it was such an intimate, familiar image. It suffused my chest with tenderness.

'You're with me, papa,' I said softly. And he nodded. One brief moment, so brief I could not tell later whether it was real or not, I smelled the sweet scent of his warm embrace. If there is a heaven, I reflected, it must be here on earth.

I looked at the house.

'Goodbye house,' I said. It seemed to give me an encouraging nod: go ahead, go. So I turned and started walking towards an unknown future.



