



Light and Shade by Bella Kamen

(Finalist, 11 – 14 years category, Janis Clark Short Story Competition)

Mysterious and dark the woods are; echoing screeches piercing through the eerie gloom. I creep through the thorny bushes, round the twisted trees. Shadows cover the forest floor. Anyone but me would think this place is some sort of hell. My ripped clothes hang limply from my body. My eyes as bloodshot as the devil.

Exciting and fun-filled the woods are; birds piping away to their fellow friends. I stride through the neat hedges, through magical trees. Happiness fills the woods. My colourful dress reflects my personality. My eyes twinkle with joy.

Footsteps. I have been alone in this wood for 100 years. Twigs cracking. Someone singing nearby. From under cover of the dark canopy I see movement. There. The golden-haired figure looks over and her eyes, dazzling as strongly as a beam, meet mine.

I feel a presence. I have been the only one in these woods for as long as I can remember. Bushes swaying. Someone lurking nearby. There. I risk a glance, and see his short black hair. I meet his eyes, dark as the lake at night.

My head swarms with questions; Who is she? Why is she here? "Who are you?" I anxiously shout. "Blossom" she replies with a gentle smile.

My head fills with questions; who is he? I feel both drawn to him yet at the same time wary. I tell him my name. "Who are you?" I then curiously ask. "My name is Raven" he says nervously.

How can this girl be so happy in a place like this? I had to understand. I stepped towards her and stumbled on a tree root. I reached out trying to break my fall by touching her shoulder. I felt suddenly overwhelmed with waves of positivity. I finally saw the forest as she saw it. The demons I had learned to live alongside all these years were really just woodland fairies. The dark holes were just burrows for the harmless forest creatures. Confused, I pulled away and ran back into the darkness where I belong.

How can he be so unhappy in a place like this? I had to find out. Raven took a step towards me however tripped over a tree root. He tried to help himself by grabbing my shoulder to stop himself hitting the ground. It worked but I suddenly felt overwhelmed with waves of negativity. I finally saw the forest as he saw it. The fairies I had played with all these years were now demons, the friendly trees now gnarled and twisted, and the roots hiding deadly night creatures. Horrified, I stumbled back into the warm familiarity of the sun-kissed place I call my home.

I have not seen you since that day, but I feel that you are often here with me. It is comforting to know that we are sharing the days and nights in the forest even if I can't see you.