

(Re) generation and (Re) interpretation of Malevolence and Gender Roles in Walt Disney's *Maleficent*

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ABSTRACT: *Feminine villains, equally imagined and factual, are a focus of insentient gender partiality when part of their wickedness comprises the commotion of masculine power. Disney's one of the utmost popular active villains, Maleficent, from Sleeping Beauty (1959) celebrated in her authority, deviates from flawless womanly decorum. A study of scenes including Maleficent, the "mistress of all evil" illustrates how commanding womenfolk with hubris are criticized past their offences. This exploration is adorned from a deconstruction point of view. The key emphasis of the investigation is on the method where conventional folk tales' and fairy tales' adversaries are transmuted into heroes/protagonists in postmodern entertaining film genres. The research methodology used is the analysis of qualitative descriptive data with an emphasis on the transformation in the main character. Maleficent's conduct and look indicate feminine usurpation of conventional masculine authority. The antagonist moreover engages in finger pricking which pierces and draws blood out, doings linked with figurative masculine power. The claimed skill to bewitch, in unification with the implementation of forms connected with masculine ascendancy, suggests that Maleficent wields supremacy over men and wields the supremacy "of" men. Distress with the means through which the woman employs magic commands echoes old qualms of sorceresses who were suspects of misappropriating masculine sway.*

Keywords: Disney, fairy tales, finger prick, gender, Maleficent.

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Fairy tales have been the bedtime stories for children all over the world for times immemorial. It was a part of oral literature and was passed from generation to generation by word of mouth. These tales had certain cultural and ethnic value that taught children the truths about life in a pleasurable fashion. When writers like the Grimm brothers compiled these tales, a lot of censorship was introduced and these tales reduced from mirrors of life to mere means of entertainment. Soon these tales were adapted into films, animated, and became only a source of entertainment for children. The article engages ideas about female independence, balance, and transformation. I aim to expose the issue of censored representations and the curtailed reading of fairy tales that do not acknowledge the presence of Unexpected and how the new film adaptations of the same tales have attempted to deconstruct the binaries by giving us multiple options to choose from. The paper resorts to Judith Butler's concept of "naturalization" to show how Walt Disney films like *Maleficent* (2014) are the new age films that break such censorship. Butler's intents and the epithet of binary oppositions are defined in gender norms and gender roles. The normative structure of gender was defined through naturalization of norms and reproduction of these norms by society.

Beyond their entertainment responsibility, the expeditions recounted by fairy tales, which take their readers/spectators on the pinnacles of fancy, moreover conceal salient mysteries uncovered by the understanding of symbols (especially since fairy tales carry cultural and social values and have continuously functioned as education means). The Walt Disney Company has transformed well-known fairy tale, such as *Sleeping Beauty* into a fruitful animated movie, originally spreading patriarchal values that trained women about their expected social responsibility and functions. Across time, Disney's perception has slowly transformed, owing to the development of social mindsets and prohibitions, bringing imperative changes predominantly from a feminist perspective. This paper approaches the female characters of *Maleficent* (2014), examining her development from an inert child-like woman, with a gender-based life (Aurora and *Maleficent* in Disney's animated movie) into more liberated and daring women, whose acts lead to definitive plot twists. Particular attentiveness is additionally paid to the development of *Maleficent*, the bad female character from *Sleeping Beauty*, whose Disney depiction is transformed fundamentally in *Maleficent* (2014).

The research observes the Disney film, *Maleficent* (2014), a United

States' gloomy unreal movie directed by Robert Stromberg after a script by Linda Woolverton that is an imaginative rebellion and a redesign of Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). The film represents the story through the antagonist, Maleficent. Maleficent, the terrific character of Disney's 1959 account of *Sleeping Beauty* was "the ultimate phallic woman, intolerably ambiguous and powerfully threatening" (Burns 185). Now equally the means and matter are revised. The film recounts the story from a phase preceding the activities extant in the conventional fairy-tale.

The film envisions dual terrains – a human realm and a connecting realm of fairies, the Moors, where trusting excitement and attractive oddness governed. Maleficent develops into the matron and protector of the Moors. Linda Woolverton interprets a depiction of a commanding protagonist in comparison to the frail fairytale princesses. Besides the female's magic expertise is no longer envisaged as a household help pro sweeping, cleaning or hemming, nonetheless is controlling sufficiently for security and combat. One could similarly see the dissimilarity carried out by the spirit of the matriarchal world with the ineffectiveness of the patriarchal universe. However, the tranquility of the magic lives is quickly defied with the entrance and treachery of Stefan. Maleficent (2014) has attracted not only children but adult audience too, as the film has resumed the original purpose of the tales to show the reality under the garb of fantasy. It was noted by Lewis C. Seifert that people when asked to define the theme of love in fairy tales automatically do so in context of heterosexual relationships because of the normalisation of the assumption that love exists only between man and woman.

In Briar Rose, the original title given by Grimms to their fairy tale, *Sleeping Beauty*, the 13th fairy is the wicked one, "with a black cap on her head and black shoes on her feet and a broomstick in her hand" (Grimm 14), who is uninvited by the king and she ends up avenging herself by cursing his only child, princess Aurora. The Grimms' tale gives a minimal and censored description of this witch that would not even scare a new-born. Her physical features are not talked about and she is only explained as wearing a dark cap and shoes and holding a stick to give her some witch-like attributes. Perrault's tale *Sleeping Beauty in the Woods* even though is slightly different from the Grimms' tale, too gives a minimal description of the wicked old fairy. Both the versions are similar in the sense that they are morally enriched and are normative versions of the tale: the fairy who curses is called wicked. However, Walt Disney gave a new dimension to this character by introducing her as

Maleficent in *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). Maleficent was reborn in 2014 when Robert Stromberg made a movie *Maleficent* from the perspective of the evil fairy, who perhaps is not inherently evil but only transforms into a dark sadist after being maimed by a man. The 2014 movie does not only give an actual plot for revenge and a layered personality to the fairy, but also provides a new interpretation to an age-old fairy tale. Maleficent in *Maleficent* is dressed in a flowy black gown with a cascading wrap, and a shiny bonnet. She has claws and a black horn headdress. She is perceived in an exaggerated eye shadow, her eyes bold black like her iconic black costume and her lips bright red. She presents an ambiguous persona that is wondrous as well as fearful at the same time.

As a child Maleficent is amused by her encounter with a human child, Stefan. They almost quickly become friends and she trusts him immediately after he casts away his iron ring “so that their hands may touch” (Maleficent) and “friendship slowly turned into something else” (Maleficent). Maleficent’s mutilation at the hands of Stefan makes her a disbeliever in the existence of true love. She had to lose her wings to understand that Stefan’s kiss on her lips was not true love’s kiss. She is shocked to see her wings being cut. Maleficent, curses King Stefan’s daughter, princess Aurora, that she will prick her finger when she is sixteen and drop into a deathlike slumber from which only a true love’s kiss can waken her up.

Maleficent and King Stefan, both knew that it was a trap impossible to escape and in a world of betrayal and self-love, true love is nothing more than a myth. While time passes, Maleficent is drawn nearer to the growing princess and she attempts to disengage her curse nevertheless it is ineffective. When Aurora drops into a deathly slumber, Maleficent arranges for Prince Phillip to kiss Aurora but she does not get up. It is merely Maleficent’s destitute although ardent kiss on Aurora’s forehead that makes her conscious. The movie so advocates that true love is not constantly between a man and a woman, however, is similarly natural when between two women.

Limitation

Only one film adaptation of the fairy tale has been observed for this research. This limitation opens the scope for further research in this field that is inclusive of a greater number of tales for more credible results. The fact that the film, *Maleficent* (2014), was the biggest hit of its respective year of release, and also that it is still watched and appreciated all over

the globe, proves the fact that it has to some extent been able to naturalize the deviants.

Relationship Between Authority and Gender

Representations of commanding womenfolk, equally illusory and physical, figure ideas of feminine evil. These characters might perform as mediators of socialization (Bussey and Bandura 1), specially to the extent of gender impartiality (Coyné 25). These sorts of portrayals may likewise replicate unending qualms concerning females acquiring influence at the cost of males (Koushik and Reed 16).

The relationship of gender, authority, and evil has a model in Disney animated types that impact kids in their developmental times (Golden and Jacoby 11-12). Disney villains demonstrate the “gender-role defiance as deviance” epitome (Li-Vollmer and LaPointe 89-109). Precisely, woman villains incline to have personalities believed conventionally manly such as decisiveness and freedom (England 555-67) and normally rule with an “iron hand” (Davis 125). In Disney movies, “echoes of the old continue to reverberate through the new” reproducing contradictory gendered characteristics (Griffin 884) comprising pathologized womanly virilities (Halberstam 19).

The study observes the woman villain whose imperfection is offered as especially atrocious as she not merely exerts authority over men but moreover exerts the authority “of” men. Maleficent displays manly behaviors in domains where men dominate: An imagined empire and the suspiciously masculine monarchy. She likewise appropriates the eventual representation of manliness, the penetrating muscle to prick a finger, a hidden nevertheless evocative encounter to gender customs. The shared merriment of their collapse echoes venerable trepidations concerning daunting womenfolk.

Premises

The three chief themes investigated in this study are: (1) The implication of gender positions prescribing “acceptable” womanly behaviors such as empathy and dependency; (2) finger pricking as representative of females’ embezzled phallic potency; and (3) dreads of womenfolk governing kinsmen and their practice of wizardry.

Method

Content analysis in extracts of *Maleficent* in *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) has

been engaged to do a relative investigation. In supplement, the pervasiveness of the ideas in common representation offered added material concerning whether the desecration of gender models expands the heinousness of womanly villains.

Hopes of Feminine Selflessness Not Determination

Behaviors that are respected diverge when considered according to the gender of the individual. For men, skill is dominant. Whereas for women, empathy is a key. It is an inclination disclosed through the words employed to define men versus women in a scholarship of colleague performance evaluations of United States Naval Academy learners (Smith et al. 159-171). The topmost words used to commend males were reasoned and able. For females, the supreme striking adjectives, empathetic and passionate, transported the importance assigned to emotive cordiality. These results advise that females who minus such potentials, risk mockery.

Sympathy and civility were the merits most commonly declared by girls concerning what they had learnt from Disney's princesses (Uppal 105). Common qualities associated with connectedness and perspicuity (identical to supportiveness, empathy, and cordiality) are linked to females, whereas peculiarities like sovereignty, action, and freedom (such as domination, control, and powerfulness) are associated with males (Carter 57-61). Universal Disney movies show youth the controlled description of apposite woman bearing (England et al. 18). Besides, as females who use power (specifically over men) are considered "power-hungry", therefore, "dominance penalty" might be the outcome. Even without offences, however rather simply for having an agentic attribute, women could be "demonized" to reserve the gender grading, an occurrence highlighted by the Status Incongruity Hypothesis (Brescoll et al. 144-164). While females' activities become more comparable to males', they contract the inequality between the genders and call into question the arrangement that gives more rights to males.

Poise Minus Sympathy

Maleficent exhibits boldness. She shows passion for ambition, characterized by her iconic announcement, "I am the mistress of all evil!" Her entrance at Aurora's naming is prefigured by roar and whirlwind, a thunderstorm authority related to Zeus-like masculine supremacy (Dundes et al.86). Maleficent's strong response could be of a want to be amid the commanding than concerning worries of societal denunciation,

constant with the greater importance allotted to the male-associated attribute of agency vs the female characteristic of communality amid leads (Vial 9). In fact, the noble fairy, Fauna, reports that Maleficent is unfamiliar with affection, sympathy, and the pleasures of helping others, behaviors implied as womanly (England 555-67). Maleficent's utmost outstanding gender-defying peculiarity is possibly her joyful laughing. She inclines to chuckle scathingly when she exhibits her influences, an indication of her dominance that enfeebles males. Maleficent's characteristic laugh disturbs gender rules for women in the identical approach that female humorists are dispirited from making men the focus of their jests (Dyne11 22) or representing men as weak in relation to women (that as an outcome, normally triggers female jesters to resort to self-deprecatory comedy instead). The vernacular connotation of the expression "prick" can be traced back to the 16th century, with its phallic implications possibly connected to the "image of a thorn": "Men fight women's attempts to gain equality . . . [using a] metaphorical phallus that reminds women of who in contemporary society is entitled to privilege and power." (Murphy 77) Consequently, the semiotics of the term "prick" involves penetrating activities that can be both sexual and hostile.

The Pricking Potency of Maleficent

Maleficent, though a woman, has presumed the corporeal shape of a penetrant phallic icon, precisely one implied by the expression prick (a term Maleficent practices when she pronounces her spell). It likewise arranges the platform for a clash in which a male is required to subjugate a female who has seized the male character.

Females' Freedom as a Hazard Connected to Sorceresses and Wizardry

Females' sovereignty was a menace communicated in the witch-hunts of the Middle Ages while worries concerning females distressing the status quo appeared:

The fantasies about the unlimited sexual powers and depravity of women may have been a reflection of the fear engendered by the large number of unmarried women not subject to the authority of fathers or husbands, as, according to prevailing views, they ought to have been. (Ben-Yehuda 22) Witches were burnt in the Middle Ages as punishment for their supposed assumption of male dominance in communal turmoil.

Implication of Destroying the Spinning Wheels

While the destruction of all spinning wheels was illusory, there are

persistent undesirable connotations in current jargons that derogate females' labor as spinners, apparent in the connotation of sayings as: political spin and spinning one's wheels that underpin adverse suggestions of this female dominated vocation. The representation of spinning wheels likewise narrates acuties of spinsters as free women who were capable to fend for themselves with the revenue they made without men (Ben-Yehuda 1-31).

Fairy tales – undeniably each tale – are conveyed for a resolution. They are a method of societal education, a method that certain researchers claim is older than evolution itself. They envision predicaments and suggest an assortment of permitted explanations, labelling publicly suitable and improper behaviour, delineating moral and sinful, discovering existential problems. For the magic component, Disney presented us with True Love's Kiss: the very potent corporeal action a princess can execute, stopping curses, and concluding the story. Princes, for their part, were bodily valiant, cerebrally dull, and conferred their True Love's Kiss on beautiful women they hardly saw—even those who were unconscious or assumed deceased. When we wake up to appreciate the 2014 production of *Maleficent*, Disney's animated movie, simulated images and reconstruction of *Sleeping Beauty*, our fairy-tale world is twisted. *Maleficent*, that takes its entitlement from the original movie's malicious adversary—is an entirely feminist restating of *Sleeping Beauty* which bestows absolutely with all main chauvinist fundamentals of the original.

***Maleficent* Recreated**

In the film, *Maleficent*, the narrative starts as: “Let us tell an old story, and see how well you know it,” and we acquire ample information is innovative, and very recognizable, concerning the domain of *Sleeping Beauty* and the wonderful resident, *Maleficent* (film). As the movie begins, we are told that there are two realms. In one realm, men are ambitious and warlike. In the magic realm entitled “the Moors”, there is a great amount of belief and a tremendously independent system of management. The individuals of the Magical Realm are a multicultural, multispecies assortment of non-human, magic beasties. Youthful *Maleficent*, teenage, adequately winged, well-informed, and the maximum commanding of all the fairies, is happy to live in this pluralistic egalitarianism as a pure resident, helping sometimes as a guide.

One day *Maleficent* sees a Human Realm youngster, Stefan, in the Moors.

Stefan succeeds in attracting the fairy. Quickly the two youths become dear friends, concluding in a “gift” he presents to her on her 16th birthday, a present he calls “True Love’s Kiss.” Sadly, Stefan returns to the realm of humans and shortly enough the imperialist Human Realm is crafting battle on the Moors. To get support of the king, and marry his daughter, Stefan goes back to his previous sweetheart, recuperates her confidence, and slips her a slumbering potion. Whilst she lies unaware, he cuts off the gorgeous wings. Maleficent wakes up and, in a shocking sight, notices she has been deceived and injured.

What trails is familiar to the similar childhood story, nevertheless Maleficent is the antagonist-hero. Stefan becomes the king and is blessed with a daughter called Aurora, and he holds a naming gathering. Three clumsy fairies appear to cast caring charms on the little daughter, however, Maleficent arrives, unwanted, and confers her personal present: a spell of unending slumber at the time Aurora turns 16. As a reflection she complements, with sarcasm, that only the True Love’s Kiss is the single device that can end the curse. But ultimately, Aurora and Maleficent develop into intimate friends. Stefan dies after an outrageous fight sequence. My curiosity here is not so much in the value of Maleficent as a movie, which received rightly diverse evaluations. In the end we see that, Maleficent embraces life with her magic in harmonious conjunction with the natural elements while also demonstrating female independence, transcending any need for a princely rescue, heterosexual love, marriage, or domestication. Maleficent represents a part of our social reality, in which having powers but not being allowed to express them in the wider community leads to guilt, repression, and isolation. Maleficent’s use of magic in the film brings fear. She struggles to control and understand her powers. Because of losing her wings, she creates a perpetual wall boundary but she does not turn her back on her queenly duties.

In *Maleficent* (2014), Maleficent releases her powers after her wings are cut and causes a perpetual wall between the two kingdoms. Nature protects the forest and all who dwell within it from the human beings as a punishment for humankind for disturbing the natural order with large trees standing at the border. She then creates a raven who serves as her spy. Stefan attempts to kill Maleficent, but Aurora selflessly stands in the way and returns Maleficent’s wings to Maleficent and both Aurora and Maleficent discover that their love for each other help Maleficent get back her powers. The theme of love between the apparently protagonist and

the antagonist is central to *Maleficent* (2014). The Earth's body is exploited by the greed of humankind wanting more out of Nature than humanity's share. Aurora's father, Stefan, presented himself as a greedy king who wanted

Nature Dependent on him Rather Than he on Nature

Aurora appears to be the flawless fairy tale personality. She is a usual protagonist, not supernatural. She is positive, where Maleficent is the impeccable fictional character. Fictional characters are supernatural. They carry the burden of the planet on their shoulders. In fact, the fictional characters often encounter a disastrous fortune and we realize we have double stories going together, fictional story and fairy tale story. In the fictional facet of it, the dread of the disastrous fortune is something that the audiences worry about but are surprised in the end.

Maleficent's emergence from Stefan's chains and regain of her wings present a type of rebirth. This kind of rebirth is about women reclaiming what they have lost, to challenge hierarchies, and to replace symbol systems. Since *Maleficent* (2014) departs from the traditional modes of fairy tales in terms of the classic "damsel in distress" trope, it could challenge hierarchy and reclaim something lost for women, which is power and agency in society. Maleficent represents reclamation of female independence and she emerges in sync with the natural elemental forces. Maleficent is a complete individual, upright and malevolent, commanding and exposed, revengeful and tender. Matriarchy ousts egalitarianism in the Moors. The film is honest in its refutation of the craze of domesticity—none of the female characters takes preference in the chore of housekeeping or babysitting: neither the three useless fairies nor the threatening Maleficent, who declares realistically to little Aurora, "I do not like children." The women in *Maleficent* (2014) have no flair in childcare and are repeatedly careless. In the former accounts of this story the sprites were delivered with the appeal of femininity and were perceived to take inclination in the toil of the household exertion. Initially in the commencement of the film Maleficent looks slightly revolted by Aurora, discerning that as an infant she was "ugly" and regularly denotes to her as "Beastie". Besides in the conclusion, it is females performing in harmony and affection that unravels complications, breaks curses, and produces healing and restoration. In *Maleficent* (2014), the kiss that removes the curse from Aurora and brings her back to life is Maleficent's and represents the feminine energy. The emblems have been obvious: Disney's magical interpretation of gender has decisively reached puberty.

As explored rigorously most of these initial Disney films are preoccupied with the male beliefs pontificating on the “expected norms of behaviour in society for females in particular” (Mitchell 279). Generally, each admired fairy tale shows merely two categories of females: malevolent hags and harmless princesses. The secreted thought behind this is typified by Betty Friedan who in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) discourses as follows:

Over and over women heard in voices of tradition and of Freudian sophistication that they could desire no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity...They were taught to pity the neurotic, unfeminine, unhappy women who wanted to be poets or physicists or presidents. They learned that truly feminine women don't want careers, higher education, political rights. (15-16).

For feminist readers, the fairy tales misappropriates patriarchal connotations and perverted them into unrealistic stories that created woman subservience look fervent and a flawless fortune (Rowe 261). However, as gender impartiality has become further recognised in the contemporary civilization, the movies themselves have commenced to review this trope. Consequently, in order to discourse certain undesirable reproaches, writers began producing original fictions that merged conventional fundamentals although set essential storyline deviations. *Maleficent* struggles her approach into the fort to transport the attractively incompetent Philip who is totally useless. This condition is a demand to venture for a prospective superman – a youthful man who can setback the curse by offering the astounding kiss. It is the females operating in harmony that unravel difficulties, breakdown curses, and cause restoration and recovery.

Benjamin Justice asserts that the movie is a “fully feminist retelling of *Sleeping Beauty* that dispenses utterly with every major sexist element of the original” (196) and that the film characterises an essential instant in the fairy tale movie business. It evidently divulges into an ostensible move in the manner feminine self is discovered and offered and praises the feminine help instead of treasuring inaction. The heroine here is a complete individual, moral and malicious, commanding and exposed, revengeful and caring who rules as a commanding matron and the guardian of the Moors. The dual facets of the disposition of a fairy are observable in *Maleficent* by corporeal emblems: outlandishly sparkling eyes, the fashion in which she is equally winged and horned.

Justice, talking of *Maleficent*, advises that “offering female role models who work hard, improve their minds, and do not define themselves in terms of men are an encouraging sign that American patriarchy may finally be cracking” (198). Very serious retorts likewise advocate that these movies endorse gender impartiality. A keener exploration on the film divulges inclinations concerning the practice of gender stereotypes. *Maleficent* tries to placate viewers in regard to shifting social beliefs, however, eventually fail to break away from hegemonic expectations concerning gender patterns.

The opening scene in the movie offers the Moors, the fairylike estate of the forestry where many eccentric organisms live, comprising the child, *Maleficent*. Magic lives such as miniature sprites, weird goblins, vindictive imps, strange pixies and aerial, unearthly existence forms cohabit. They require no leader, as their existence is placed on confidence. Contrary to this empire of the unreal, undoubtedly detached from it by an environmental boundary – the edging of The Moors, manifest by great and substantial boulders – there lays the estate of human beings. This separated land prompts one of the hostilities between: “nature and culture; instinct, insight, wilderness and untamability, on the one hand, versus reason and practicality, on the other; innocence and simplicity, versus civilization and perversion.” (Williams 69).

Maleficent is perceived to proliferate the patriarchal thought of parenthood and female fostering. Most fairy tales replicate this thought by showing females who are deficient of fostering qualities as hags, necromancers, or malevolent stepmothers. As a youthful girl, *Maleficent* restores plants. Once Stefan deceives her, *Maleficent* leaves all supporting feelings and befalls the “wicked” fairy spectators recollect from the conventional story. Just after *Maleficent* advances a protective affection to the baby Aurora does she commence to convert back into the “good” fairy and to undertake her given character of a mom in the patriarchy.

Concluding Thoughts

In the film *Maleficent* (2014), *Maleficent* is imbued with powers while also displaying a kind of female independence. The ending of the film confirms *Maleficent*’s elusive presence. Both Aurora and *Maleficent* surpass patriarchal expectations of marriage and children for women.

The unattainability of *Maleficent*’s body shape is problematic. In fact,

Maleficent does not seem to eat food in the *Maleficent* (2014), unlike Aurora who at the time of her birth is shown in need of milk. If Maleficent is divine-like, then her body processes could function differently from standard human abilities, like the bodies of mythic superheroes. At the end of *Maleficent* (2014), Maleficent lives in harmony with her powers, enjoys her Queenly status with Aurora, and dwells in the Moors with the four natural elements—fire, wind, water, and earth—at her disposal. The reasoning has fashioned a worldview where females are believed to be excessively emotive to be sane, although males are described as cleverer and, thus, further suitable to positions of control. This similar thought is promulgated within the film, even when it asserts to be least chauvinist. Unluckily, the gender responsibilities showed in the *Maleficent* (2014) stay to imitate the ideals of a patriarchal creed. Tyson submits that patriarchy rifts females into double classes: respectable girls and wicked girls. Respectable girls are imagined to be “gentle, submissive, virginal, angelic,” and “if a woman does not accept her patriarchal gender role, then the only role left her is that of a monster” (88). These beasts, or wicked girls, are reflected “violent, aggressive, worldly,” and too erotic (88). In this fairy tale movie, the gender enigmas are hastily confronted through initial scenes, nevertheless are ultimately sustained by the end of the story.

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