



Mother Tongue

A fairy story from Tales from the Castle by Adrian Farrel

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When the women talked, the men resented it. They hated to be told what to do. They feared to be scolded or shamed. They were threatened by gossip, and they loathed the truth.

So the men decided to cut out the tongues of the women, and the women were silenced.

Now it was quiet except for the swearing and laughing and bragging of the men. In the evening, and all night long, the darkness reverberated with the sounds of their carousing; the stars echoed back the racket, and the moon frowned to have its peace so disturbed. In the morning, the sun's rays were rebuffed by raucous curses and pitiful moans. And the afternoon heat resounded to rumbling snores that rattled the timbers of the houses and shook the nuts from the trees.

But women are inventive and creative. They make homes and food, and they make clothes and families. So it was simple for the women to make up writing, such that they could record their history, advance their science, and communicate with people in different towns.

And the women made signals and signs so that they could chat amongst themselves. They were able to make plans, organise, and talk about the men.

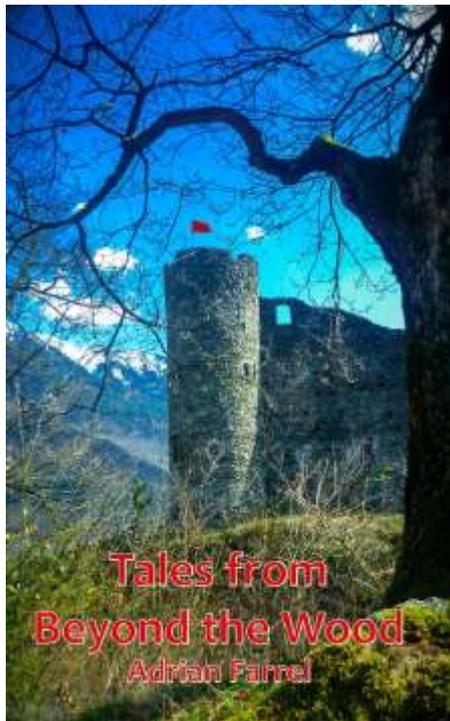
And of course the women made children. Seeing as how the women could not talk to their babies, the young ones grew up unable to talk themselves.

When it came time to hand the boys over to the menfolk to be trained as hunters or as craftsmen, their tutors found their pupils lacking in comprehension and unable to ask questions. Assuming the youths to be stupid, the men flogged them and set them to the simple tasks in the fields. And, considering the women to be at fault, the men beat them and set them to the task of making new children.

But the girls were sent by their mothers to learn to speak. They were taught in secret by the oldest and wisest men still living. These men were so old that they could not fend for themselves: they needed the women to spoon the broth into their mouths, and to wipe their chins afterwards. And these men were so wise that they understood that if they failed to teach the girls to speak, and in complete secrecy, then they would never eat again.

So the young girls grew up able to talk with their mothers in sign language, able to share ideas with each other in secret, and able to read and write. But the boys grew up stupid and careless.

Within just one generation, the tables were turned. And this is why we are now led by strong women who plan for the harvests, care for the old and the young alike, and store food for the dark days ahead. The men undertake the menial tasks as necessary, and are rewarded with food and shelter. And when the women think it prudent, the men also father children.



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