

★ **Sour Cherry**

Natalia Theodoridou

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In Natalia Theodoridou's haunting novel *Sour Cherry*, women are entrapped by the gluttonous monstrosities of their sons and husbands.

To elucidate her husband's abuse, a mother tells her child a story about a cursed lord. She begins with Agnes, the woman hired to raise the lord throughout his boyhood. In adulthood, the lord, always blighting the land, animals, and humans around him, is unable to establish a permanent, rooted home. Angry mobs force his family to relocate. These events are covered by the lord; his first wife, Eunice; his son, Tristan; his countless ghost-wives; and by the mother, whose story weaves into reality.

The mother's tale simmers with dark enchantment and Gothic menace. The lord's childhood "castle" and the homes he later inhabits exist on infected "land [that] turns corpses into flowers," rendering livestock impotent. The language is atmospheric and surprising, as with the description of a painting of "a woman with a rosebush for hair, holding an apple and gazing at the viewer with not a hint of emotion." Intimate and self-aware, the characters are inventive in chronicling nested fairy tales and unsettling metamorphoses: Adventurers, lovers, kings, queens, princesses, and princes transform into beasts.

Though the lord's destructiveness is inherited—even his wife is "a reverse Scheherazade who can't be saved until all her stories are told, retold, told again"—his innate monstrosity is questioned. With tenderness, he comforts crying Eunice and files down his clawlike nails to prevent injuring her. He falls for a shopkeeper's storied collectible miniatures amid the decay and violence. The women close to him cling to faint if desperate hope of his changeability: "If she loved him enough, maybe the curse would be lifted."

Dark fairy tales reflect the traumas inflicted on women by men in the heartbreaking novel *Sour Cherry*.

ISABELLA ZHOU (March / April 2025)

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