

The background of the entire page is a painting of a woman with long, wavy blonde hair, wearing a light blue, off-the-shoulder, flowing dress with gold embroidery. She is holding a glowing, golden orb in her right hand. She stands in a snowy, dark forest with bare trees and small white flowers. The scene is lit with a soft, ethereal glow.

THE FAIRY TALE MAGAZINE

HARLEY CAPONE - SARA CLETO - GEORGIA COOK - JO DE GROOT
SHARMON GAZAWAY - STEPHANIE GOLOWAY - KELLY JARVIS
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OF FROST AND FIRE

DECEMBER 2023

THE FAIRY TALE MAGAZINE

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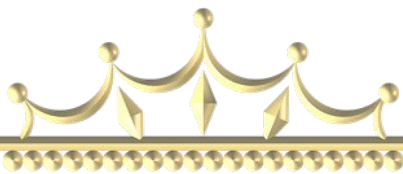
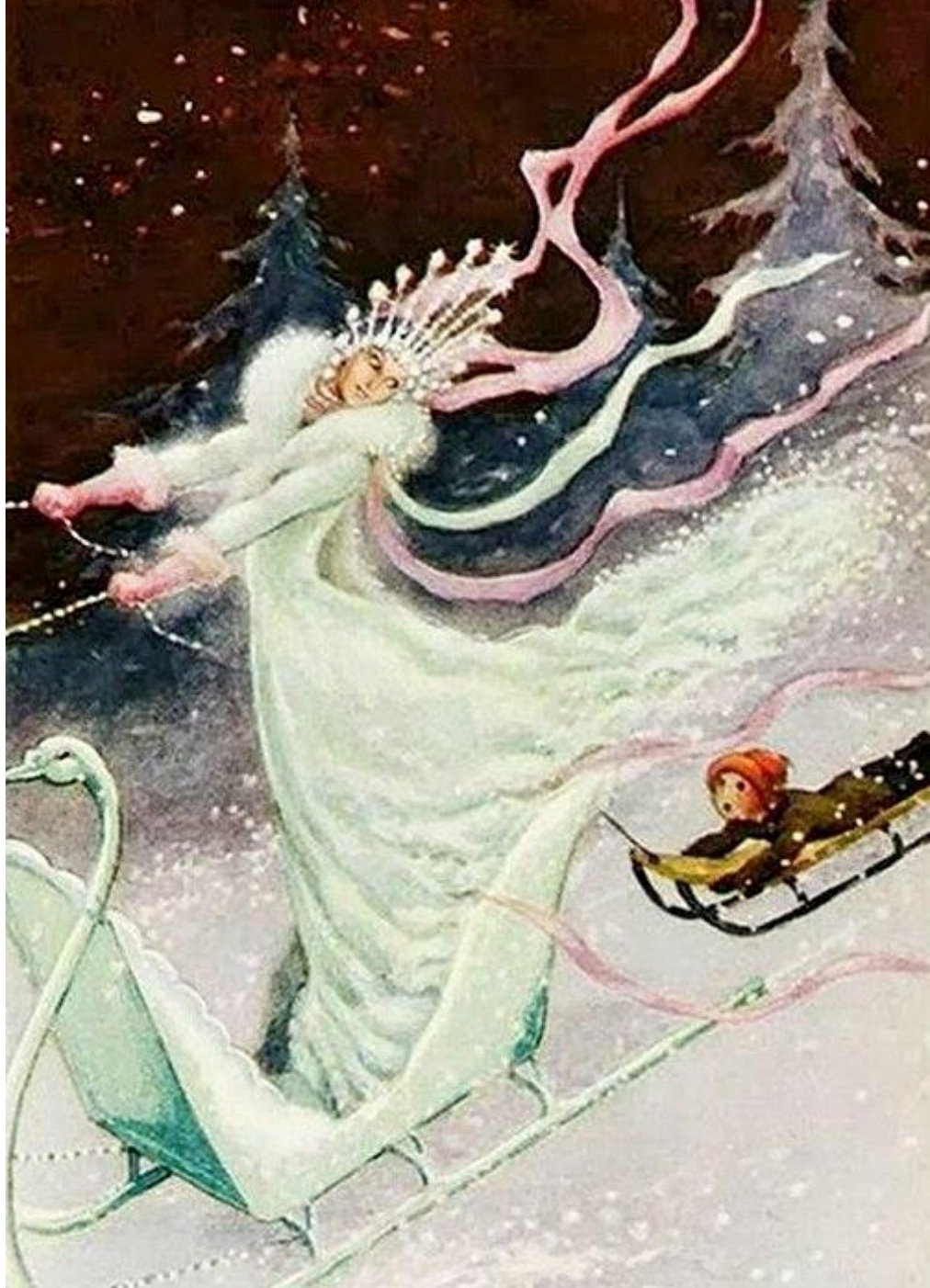
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THE
FAIRY TALE
MAGAZINE

FORMERLY ENCHANTED CONVERSATION

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Hello Enchanted Friends:

Welcome to the final issue for 2023. It's packed full of gorgeous poetry and prose, and stupendous art. Thanks to all who made it so magical!

Some big changes are coming to FTM in 2024. The most important one is that the magazine will *not* be available through the ISSUU platform as of late this month. All issues from 2023 will be kept on file in PDF format and if you'd like one, just email me at katewolford1@gmail.com.

Over the course of this year, it became very clear to us that people preferred the PDF form to the ISSUU experience. We learned this when people began to email us asking for an alternative to ISSUU. The numbers snowballed, so easily-available PDF's will be the format from here on out.

We're also going to publish two jam-packed issues for 2024. You can learn about how and why [here](#). They will be free, and as a result, far, far more people will see the gorgeous art and read the fabulous poetry and prose in each issue. We will also, eventually, make the issues for 2023 free on the site, but not yet. We want to ensure paid subscribers for this year get to enjoy the issues exclusively for a while.

As for this issue, I'm in love with the art and design that Amanda Bergloff has conjured up. It's chilly and dreamy and a little dark, but mostly just gorgeous. And the contents feature topics as diverse as a Medea re-telling and a joyous little story about Hanukkah. And of course, there's lots of poetry to enchant the readers.

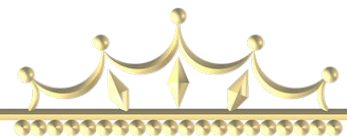
The staff at *The Fairy Tale Magazine* learned a lot in 2023—especially me. Next year will be all about delivering the same level of gorgeousness as this year, with a bit less pressure for those of us behind the scenes. And the free issues will increase access again, and FTM, in all its forms, has usually been about access.

Finally, a special thank you to the staff. Kelly Jarvis, you are the kindest and most talented contributing editor I could ask for. Kim Malinowski, you are a stupendous poet and a terrific help at Zoom meetings. Madeline Mertz, your initiative and creativity with TikTok videos bowl me over. And Amanda Bergloff, well, there would be no FTM without you. Your brilliant artistry and dedication keep me going.

Have an enchanted holiday season, everyone!

Kate Wolford

Editor / Publisher



P.S. Don't miss Lissa Sloan's *Glass and Feathers*, to be published by the Enchanted Press in March! Keep checking at fairytalemagazine.com to learn more.

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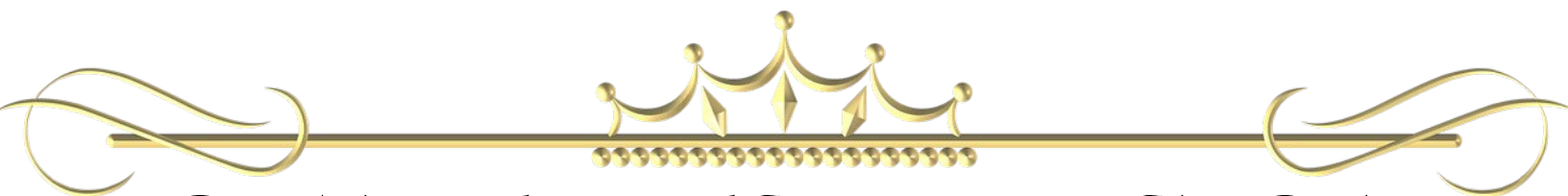




Of frost and fire
Of earth and bone
Of snow and storm
Of hearth and home

Of ice and crystal
Of dark and light
A winter's spell
is cast this night





CRANBERRIES IN THE SNOW

by KELLY JARVIS

"Between the woods and frozen lake / The darkest evening of the year" (Robert Frost)

I

GATHER INGREDIENTS.

Once upon a time, in a kingdom nestled between a vast forest and a lake as blue as the sky, there lived a lonely little princess named Noel. She was the only child of the reigning king and the late queen. Her mother, in true fairy tale fashion, had died giving birth to her on the longest night of the year.

The king and queen had wished and prayed for a child for decades, and the subjects of their kingdom had wished and prayed along with them. The bittersweet news of the queen's death and the princess's birth brought thousands of villagers to the gates of the castle to comfort their king. Many swore they saw the soul of the dead queen floating up to heaven as the first flakes of the season began to fall.

At Princess Noel's Christening, the faeries blessed her with beauty and prophesied that she would marry a king of her own one day. Her maids bathed her in warm milk each morning and evening until her skin glowed creamy white. As she grew, her auburn hair spilled around her shoulders in liquid curls.

In the sixth year of Noel's life, the king gifted his beloved daughter a necklace, a silver cross inlaid with the hand-cut rubies and fresh-water pearls that had graced her late mother's crown.

"It is priceless," he whispered, "just as you and your mother's memory are priceless to me."

Noel loved her necklace and wore it every day, but not even the comforting weight of it around her neck could assuage her loneliness. A kingdom that has suffered a great loss will always be a lonely place, and a castle built of cold, hard, stone can be a somber home for a little girl who has never known the warmth of a mother's love.

II

PREHEAT OVEN TO 350 DEGREES.

One chilly December morning in Noel's twelfth year, the princess burst through the doors of the castle kitchen looking for something warm and sweet. She was supposed to be learning French with her governess in the North Tower, but she had slipped away because she hated sitting still at her cold wooden desk as she conjugated verbs. She longed for the heat of the crowded kitchen. She craved the savory smell of wild mushroom soup bubbling in its iron pot. And, most of all, she wanted to hear

Cook's stories which were full of lonely princesses like Noel who always found their happily-ever-after by the time the day's baking had cooled to perfection on the windowsill.

Today the kitchen was even busier than usual because the servants were prepping for the Christmas holiday. A footman had placed a large fir tree in the corner of the kitchen and the maids had decorated it with pinecones and ribbons.

Noel skipped around the tree and pulled herself up onto a stool where Cook was busy baking.

Cook had been working in the castle since Noel's father was a little boy, and she smiled tenderly at the princess. Cook's sugar-white hair had been pulled back into a loose bun, and flour covered her apron. She opened her ancient recipe book to a faded page titled "Cook's Famous Cranberry Bread" and handed Noel a pile of measuring cups.

"If you are going to be in my kitchen, you might as well make yourself useful," she said with a smile. Noel giggled and began sifting white powder into a large bowl while Cook cracked open an egg.

"I suppose you'll be wanting a story while we work?" Cook chopped up handfuls of bright, red cranberries as Noel began to stir. Outside the kitchen window a squall of powdery snow circled in the air.

"Have I ever told you the story of Strawberries in the Snow?" Noel's eyes lit up at Cook's question. Strawberries were her favorite treat, but she had not eaten any since last summer when she and Cook harvested the fruit from the castle garden to bake shortcakes.

"Once there lived a woman who had two daughters," Cook began, pouring batter into a small loaf pan and placing it in the oven. "Her stepdaughter was sweet and obedient, but her true daughter was spoiled and mean."

Noel had heard stories about kind and unkind girls before. The tales usually ended with diamonds tumbling from the kind sister's lips and toads squirming from the unkind sister's mouth. Although Noel was mostly a kind girl, when she was particularly lonely, she sometimes said unkind things to her servants in the hopes that toads would hop from her tongue. Noel thought no one could be lonely with piles of toads to look after.

"One winter morning when the ground was frozen solid," continued Cook, "the cruel mother sent her stepdaughter outside in nothing but a paper dress to search for strawberries."

Noel listened as Cook told her of the three little men in the woods who instructed the girl to sweep the snow away from their back door where she found ripe, juicy strawberries the color of rubies.

"Why did the kind daughter go out into the frozen forest wearing a dress of paper?" Noel asked. "I would have told my stepmother to search for strawberries in the snow by herself."

Cook's soft belly shook with laughter. She kissed the princess on the top of her head, leaving a sprinkling of white flour in her flowing hair.

"The king you marry one day will have his hands full with you!" she chuckled. Everyone in the kitchen had heard the faerie prophecy.

By the time the story ended with the appropriate mouthfuls of diamonds and toads, the cranberry bread they were baking had cooled. Cook brought it to the table where they were working. Red cranberries winked beneath the golden crust.

"Can we make Cranberries in the Snow?" asked Noel, her blue eyes shining like pools of water.

There was nothing Cook wouldn't do for the lonely little princess. She scooped powdered sugar

into a mixing bowl, added a few drops of sweet liquid, and stirred until the sugar became a smooth, white icing. She drizzled it back and forth over the cranberry bread. Then she cut a thick slice and dusted it with powdered sugar that fell from her wrinkled hands like falling snow. Noel took a bite of the bread, the tart cranberries and sweet icing filling her mouth and her heart.

“Your mother loved my cranberry bread,” Cook whispered, “perhaps your father would like some? It can be an early gift to him from both of us.” She wrapped a loaf in parchment and tied it with a red ribbon.

That night, after a formal dinner in the cold palace dining hall, Noel presented the loaf to her father. His hands ran over the parchment as though it covered a long-lost memory. He smiled sadly, placed the loaf on the sideboard, and returned to his chambers.

The cranberry bread stayed there, untouched for weeks, until it hardened like a brick, and the servants had to take it away.

III

SIFT FLOUR, SUGAR, BAKING POWDER, BAKING SODA, AND SALT INTO A LARGE BOWL.

Although the castle kitchen had been a refuge for the lonely princess throughout her childhood, as Noel grew, she spent less and less time in its warm embrace. There were classes in court finance to take and lessons in elocution to master. There were endless appointments with gown designers and seamstresses. By Noel’s eighteenth year, the cozy kitchen and its loving Cook had been forgotten.

Noel had grown into an exquisite young lady whose beauty was talked of throughout the kingdom. She had ocean-blue eyes, skin the hue of fresh churned cream, and dewy curls that cascaded down her back like a waterfall.

When King Alfred, the ruler of a realm beyond the vast forest, arrived in November to negotiate trade agreements, he could not take his eyes off Noel. He extended his stay through the holiday season, asking her to sing for him and dance with him at every opportunity. He sent her gifts, golden bracelets with crystal clasps, gilded boxes that played a tune each time they were opened, and brocade ribbons to wind in her flowing hair.

The villagers held their breath in anticipation of a Royal Wedding. The faeries’ Christening prophecy was the talk of the kingdom.

It was Noel’s father who presented King Alfred’s proposal to her that December. He sat nervously on the edge of her bed and held her hand in his. He spoke of royal duty, of the treaty between the kingdoms, of how proud her mother would have been. Noel’s heart beat against the idea of marrying Alfred, and a tear slipped down her cheek.

“I will marry him if you wish, Father,” she said. The words, which she knew her father wanted to hear, scratched and ripped her lips with their sharp, raw edges.

That afternoon she told her maid she had a headache and could not possibly go down for tea. She removed her jewels and gowns, keeping only the silver cross studded with her mother’s rubies and pearls. When the footmen were busy serving sandwiches and the maids crept silently through the castle to prepare the evening fires in the bedchambers, Noel snuck down to the servants’ quarters and threw a

patched woolen cloak over her petticoat. Then she ran out of the castle toward the lake where the boat that ferried day-servants back and forth to their villages would be waiting.

She pulled her hood low over her head as the creaking vessel crossed the half-frozen lake that stretched beneath her like a bowl of icy water, but no one recognized a real princess beneath the tattered cloak. Errant flakes of snow sifted into the lake, coating the rolling waves with a powdery dust.

When the boat reached the opposite bank, Noel disappeared into the woods, and the snow, which began to fall steadily from the sky like powdered sugar, erased all traces of her footsteps.

IV

CUT IN BUTTER UNTIL MIX IS CRUMBLY.

What started as a dusting of sugar began to twist and twirl until Noel felt as though she was lost in mounds of snow as white and thick as flour. Evening clouds gathered in blue-gray layers across the sky, their lower edges illuminated by the weak light of winter's setting sun.

Noel squinted as flakes flew past her face. The winds howled and roared. Noel thought she heard the far-off baying of hounds and the thundering gallop of a thousand horses.

Cook had told Noel stories about the Wild Hunt, a ghostly procession of faeries that paraded through the cold night sky searching for human sacrifices. Lone travelers could be swept up by the spectral hunting party and, if the victims were lucky enough to escape, they would find themselves dropped into a frozen landscape miles from their original location.

Noel spun in circles and cried out in fear as branches ripped through her cloak and hair, but the darkening sky kept spilling snow down upon her as if it wanted to bury her in a blanket of white.

This part of the kingdom was full of bogs and marshes, and Noel felt the ground beneath the ice and snow crumble and give way. Her feet sank deep into the watery mire. A gale swept down from the north, and the trees whistled and snapped under the growing weight of the falling snow. Noel heard phantom pipes playing in the winds, and she screamed as a large branch fell toward her head.

The world went dark and silent.

Noel was barely breathing when a large, bearded huntsman noticed her snow-covered body. He gathered the girl in his arms and led his horse up a steep bank to solid ground where a grove of giant pine trees swayed in the wind. The bright green boughs were heavy with snow, but the man, who had spent many stormy nights in the forest hunting for deer and pheasants, parted them to reveal a pocket of open space beneath the branches of a tree. He lowered the girl down to the dry ground and set to work building a small, controlled fire. When he had coaxed the flame to a gentle flicker, he removed the girl's wet clothes and shoes and covered her with his own fur cloak.

He placed the wet, tattered garments near the fire to dry and, for the first time, turned to look at the girl's tear-streaked face. He brushed her frozen hair from her cheeks and noticed a gleaming pendant, red and white, dangling from a silver chain. It was priceless, and far more than this peasant girl lost in the wilderness would ever be able to afford. He wondered where she had stolen it and knew that once the storm let up, the Forest Rangers, who patrolled the woods looking for highway robbers, would be searching for a thief.

It was none of his business, and he knew he ought to let the little thief fend for herself, but he

unclasped the chain and placed the pendant in his pocket. He had grown up with the Forest Rangers, and no one in this part of the woods would dare to search him looking for stolen jewelry. He would take the girl to his village inn and help her get back on her feet, and, when it was safe, he would return the necklace to her and wash his hands of her fate.

While she slept by the fire, he slipped back out into the night and built a shelter of branches big enough to protect his horse from the winds and falling snow. He pulled a carrot from his pocket and offered it to the horse as he backed him into the shelter.

"We'll stay here for the night, Sleipnir," he said, brushing the wet snow from his horse's matted gray coat. Without his fur cloak, the huntsman felt the sharp bite of each blustering gale, but he would not return to the warmth of the fire until he knew his horse would be safe through the night. Sleipnir whinnied and shook the bells on his bridle.

"You're right," the huntsman laughed, patting his steed with affection. "She probably is trouble. Beautiful trouble, but trouble all the same."

V

ADD LIQUID INGREDIENTS AND STIR GENTLY. FOLD IN CRANBERRIES.

It was almost noon when Noel finally woke. She sat up suddenly, blinking in the bright light that filtered through the snow-covered pines.

"Where am I?" she asked, reaching toward the throbbing in her head and trying to remember. Her vision blurred and she started to fall back.

"Easy now, princess."

She heard a deep voice that she did not recognize. Its owner gently took the weight of her body against his and lifted a cup of warm broth to her lips. Noel let the savory liquid drip down her throat leaving a trail of warmth on her tongue. She lifted her fingers to touch her necklace, as she often did when she was frightened, and realized that she was naked beneath the warm fur cloak.

"Where are my clothes?" she demanded, pushing the large man away and clutching the fur against her skin.

He backed away kindly. "You fell into the marsh, and your clothes were soaked through," he explained, grabbing his own shirt from the pile of drying clothes and quickly fastening the buttons.

"My name is Yule," he said gently. His dark eyes were the color of browned butter.

"You must leave me so I can get dressed." Her voice was an irritated command.

She didn't offer her name, so princess would have to do, though it hardly fit her wretched condition. He sighed. Sleipnir was always right.

"I'll wait for you outside," Yule said, dousing the fire and strapping on his boots.

Noel dressed quickly, checking each pocket of her cloak for her lost necklace. It was all she had taken with her when she had run away from the castle, and her eyes filled with tears as she realized she must have lost it in the storm. Now she had nothing left of her father and her mother.

She ducked beneath the pine branches to find Yule saddling a large shire horse. The sun rose like

a round orange over the icy horizon, its juices leaking across the tops of the trees. An errant breeze howled, and Noel's face went pale.

"What's wrong?" Yule's strong arms were around her again. He was afraid she might faint.

"Last night," she stammered, "in the storm, I thought I heard a pack of horses and hounds. I thought I was chased by the Wild Hunt."

He smirked and her cheeks blushed red.

"The Wild Hunt?" He laughed heartily, but his laugh was full of warmth. "Well, if the faeries are on the move, they will be looking for offerings, so we better be prepared." He bounded down the steep bank and swept the snow away from a patch of low growing bushes. Red berries peeked out from the ice and Yule deftly broke off several branches.

"Here," he said, placing them in her hands. "You can ride Sleipnir while I lead us into town. If you drop the cranberries behind you as we go to please the faerie folk, then we won't have any trouble."

"Sleipnir?" Now it was Noel who giggled. Cook had told her the story of Woden's gray maned horse. "I don't see eight legs," she teased.

His laughter echoed off the snowy trees. "I won't tell him you said that."

He dropped to one knee in the snow and helped her to climb up onto Sleipnir's back. Then he threw his fur cloak over her shoulders.

"No, I can't take your cloak," she protested. "The winds will blow right through you."

He pulled his leather satchel over his shoulder. Noel could see his muscles beneath his paper-thin shirt.

"Trust me, princess, I will be just fine."

VI

SPOON INTO A BUTTERED LOAF PAN.

Darkness had fallen by the time they reached the village, and candles danced in the windows of the inn, casting a buttery glow against the cold evening sky. Yule lifted Noel down from his horse and ushered her into the warm embrace of the barroom. He asked one of the serving girls to get Noel some dry clothes, but he would not come inside until he had settled Sleipnir into a cozy stable and made sure he had a hearty meal of apples and rolled oats.

The inn was small with only a few rooms for guests and a tavern with an open kitchen for gathering. A pot of creamy mushroom soup bubbled over the open hearth, and the mantle was hung with swaths of evergreen and mistletoe. The serving girl had helped Noel change into a cotton frock with a burgundy bodice. With her hair pinned up and her cheeks chapped red from the wind, she looked like she belonged in the tavern delivering frothy mugs of ale to customers.

When Yule appeared in the back door, his broad shoulders filling the frame, the tavern exploded with welcome. Someone took his canvas bag filled with pheasants ready to pluck and roast for the week's menu, and another clapped him on the shoulder and placed a crown of holly on his head.

Noel, who had grown up in the somber castle, was delighted with the singing and dancing, and she laughed as Yule, clearly the king of the tavern, twirled her between the tables. There were hours of

frivolity before the room began to clear, the guests heading to their chambers and Yule's serving girls and friends setting out for their homes.

Yule stoked the fire beneath the great clay oven and took bags of flour and sugar from the cupboards. He began measuring things from memory and stirring ingredients together, his arms almost too powerful to direct his slender wooden spoon. Noel marveled at his large body moving seamlessly around the tiny kitchen.

"I can show you to your room if you need some rest," he said.

Noel shook her head. She did not want to leave the warmth of the kitchen.

"Well, If you are going to be in my kitchen, you might as well make yourself useful," he smiled. He took a recipe book down from the shelves and handed it to her with a pile of measuring cups.

"Do you always bake at midnight?" she asked, watching him pour batter into a buttered pan. Streaks of flour dusted his beard, and Noel longed to gently sweep them away.

"Tonight is not just any night, princess. It is Modraniht, Mother's Night, the first night of Yule," he made a sweeping gesture toward the evergreen swags before thumping his chest "the season of Yule, not the man."

In the castle there were formal celebrations for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, but Noel had never marked Yule. She had heard the servants talk of celebrating the old holidays, and she knew that many in the kingdom marked the Solstice as the start of the winter season.

"On Mother's Night we honor and offer thanks to our female ancestors, the women who watch over us and help us in times of need," Yule explained when he realized the girl did not recognize his tradition.

"Did your mother teach you how to bake?" she asked.

"My mother died on the day I was born," he said sadly. "My grandmother raised me. She taught me my way around a kitchen. She was a cook in the castle and used to bake for the king." There was a note of pride in his voice.

Noel's heart fluttered as she opened the recipe book Yule had handed her. She flipped through the faded pages until she found "Cook's Famous Cranberry Bread" written in a flowing script. Noel ran her fingers over the ink. The page was torn and stained with the remnants of butter drips and cinnamon smears.

A note at the bottom of the recipe read "How To Make Princess Noel's Cranberries in the Snow." Memories of Noel's childhood in the kitchen flooded back to her and her tears dropped onto the yellowed page.

"Is your grandmother here in the inn?" she asked. Her voice had an edge of desperation, and Yule could see that she was crying. Yule clapped the flour from his hands and moved closer to her.

"My grandmother died a few years ago," he explained. "I wish you could have met her. I think she would have liked you."

Noel buried herself against his shoulder.

"You must have known much loss in your life, princess, to feel so deeply about a woman you have never known." Yule was strangely moved by the girl's emotions. He lifted her face and softly wiped away her tears.

"Don't be sad," he whispered, "whenever I bake in the kitchen, the way we used to when I was a

young boy, I feel my grandmother with me. The smell of her bread floats straight up to heaven, and I know she is watching over me, mostly to make sure I don't burn down the inn."

Noel laughed and Yule pulled a loaf of bread from the shelf behind him. It was still warm, the cranberries melting like liquid sunlight into the buttery dough. He tore a small piece of the confection with his fingers and took a bite. Then he held what was left to her lips. She tasted it, the tart cranberries and sweet icing filling her mouth and her heart.

Yule reached out to brush the crumbs from the corners of her mouth and studied the soft lines of the girl's face in the flickering candlelight. He had never felt so close to a woman he barely knew. He leaned close, thinking to kiss her, but the stolen necklace he had taken from her shifted in his pocket. He knew the authorities would eventually catch her and throw her in prison.

He wasn't looking for trouble. He pulled away from her.

"Your room is down the hall, first door on the left," he said, his voice suddenly distant and cold. "You should go and get some sleep."

Noel's heart was still fluttering as she slipped into the cold hallway, leaving Yule to clean up the mess in the kitchen.

VII

BAKE FOR ONE HOUR AND TEN MINUTES.

Although Yule had intended to send the thief on her way as soon as she had gotten a good night's sleep, when he saw her the next morning, her hands curled around a mug of hot chocolate, he fell under her spell once more. She seemed to love the inn and was eager to help serve the guests to earn her keep. Yule decided to let her stay through the twelve days and nights of Yule.

While Noel stayed at the inn, no one pressured her to reveal her name. They simply called her princess as Yule did, and none of them ever suspected that she was a real princess who had grown up far away in the kingdom's castle.

Over the next twelve days Yule and Noel wrote their wishes on bay leaves and burned them in the solstice bonfires. They cooked soup flavored with wild mushrooms and baked rolled cakes with sweet buttercream filling. They wandered through the frosted fields counting their blessings. And each night, when they went to sleep, thoughts of one another danced through their sugarplum dreams.

VIII

REMOVE FROM PAN AND LET COOL ON WINDOWSILL.

One morning, two weeks after Noel had come to the inn, she wandered into the kitchen hoping to find a pot of Yule's maple porridge warming over the fire. Yule had needed to visit the marketplace to stock up on supplies the evening before, so Noel had turned in early and slept in late, her body still recovering from her journey and weeks of raucous celebrating.

The fire in the hearth had gone out, and Yule's friends and workers sat around the cold wooden table in hushed conversation.

“Yule would never steal anything.”

“He would never harm Princess Noel.”

“What would Princess Noel be doing this far from the castle?”

Noel froze in the shadows and listened. No one had noticed her.

“The King’s Guard are nothing like the Forest Rangers. They wouldn’t even let him explain!”

“They were searching everyone at the marketplace, and now guards are being sent to ransack every home!”

“What if they throw him in the dungeon? Oh, poor Yule!”

Noel struggled to catch her breath. She lifted her hand to chest to still her racing heart, and suddenly remembered her pearl and ruby cross. She thought she had lost it in the snow, but what if Yule had taken it to keep her secret safe? What if her father’s guards had been searching for her and had found the necklace in his possession? She shivered to think what her father would do to Yule if he thought that Yule had hurt her.

Noel silently grabbed a handful of cranberries from a bowl on the counter. She slipped out the back door and hurried to the stables where Sleipnir was lazily munching on hay. She offered her hand to him and let him nibble and lick the tart, red berries. Then she opened his stall door and prepared his saddle.

“Can you help me find my way back to the castle?” she asked, patting his long gray mane.

She wished and prayed that Sleipnir would understand.

IX DRIZZLE WITH ICING.

Noel had always thought her castle was a lonely place, but she knew the dungeon beneath the castle was the loneliest place of all. It sat far beneath the cold ground, and water from a nearby stream drizzled through the cracks in the stones, pooling on the dungeon floor. Cells were carved out with iron bars, and all night the scurrying and chewing of rats drowned out the sounds of prisoners moaning.

It was in one of these cells that Yule stood, chained to the stone wall, his wrists and ankles chafed by the bite of metal shackles. He had been treated roughly by the guards, who, in all fairness, believed that he had hurt their beloved princess, and a deep cut gaped open over his left eye, dripping blood down his bruised and swollen face. His clothes were ripped and stained with dirt and blood.

It would have gone easier for him if he had simply told them where to find the princess. When the King’s Guards first descended on the marketplace and forced everyone to turn out their pockets, his only thought was to protect the girl who had stolen his heart from being punished for stealing a priceless necklace. It was sometime during the long journey back to the castle while he shivered against the ropes that held him tight in the wagon that he realized the girl who had stolen his heart was the missing princess and not a common thief. With each beating he took, he imagined her sitting in his kitchen, her creamy skin glowing in the firelight, strands of hair falling like streams of water from her loose bun.

Even when they dragged him on his knees before the king, whose mournful face pleaded with him to help him locate his daughter, Yule had refused to say a word. His princess must have had a good

reason for leaving the castle, for keeping her identity a secret, and he would protect her until his last breath.

When Yule saw Noel standing in front of him, felt the soft touch of her hand against his swollen face, he thought he might be nearing death. He had been told that the mind was kind at the end, that the dying often believed they were visited by those that they loved.

“Hello, princess.”

His mouth was dry and his tongue was caked with blood, but this time, when he called her princess, his teasing tone was replaced by reverence. The girl he imagined before him wore a barmaid’s gown and a ragged cloak, but he recognized her for who she truly was.

“Did the faeries of the Wild Hunt bring you to this terrible place?” she asked. She sounded far away, and Yule suddenly remembered how she had believed a winter storm would spirit her away.

“Something like that.” He started to laugh but a sharp pain in his ribs forced him to stop.

“I am so sorry,” she whispered, tears falling down her cheeks, “for everything.” He blinked, and the specter of her body seemed to pour over him. He winced in pain as her sweet breath brushed against the raw flesh of his lips. This was a pain he would gladly endure for eternity.

“Fetch the court doctors immediately,” Princess Noel commanded. A confused guard jumped up to do exactly as she asked, for despite her ragged appearance, she spoke with the full force of her royal position.

“And bring me to my father.”

X

SERVE WITH A DUSTING OF POWDERED SUGAR.

At first, the king had been as confused when what looked like a common barmaid demanded an audience with him at once.

Noel knew she could cast aside her rags and reveal to her father that she was the true princess, but she felt it would be an impossible task to admit to him that she did not want to marry King Alfred. She had fallen in love with an innkeeper from a far-off village, and she cared more about her heart than her royal duty.

“Father,” she said, kneeling before him and regally bowing her head. The pins that held her hair in place loosened and her flowing curls spilled around her peasant costume. She lifted her watery blue eyes to meet her father’s gaze. The cold castle air had already brought the creamy pallor back to her skin.

Through tears, she told her father everything, the words of her betrayal to him hopping and slithering from her tongue.

Noel had lived her life as a lonely princess, so she had never truly realized that she had always been deeply loved. The villagers who had wished and prayed her into existence loved her from afar. The servants in the castle kitchens loved her spirit and her generous heart. King Alfred loved her enough to let her choose her own husband. And most of all, her father loved her, and there was nothing he would not do for her.

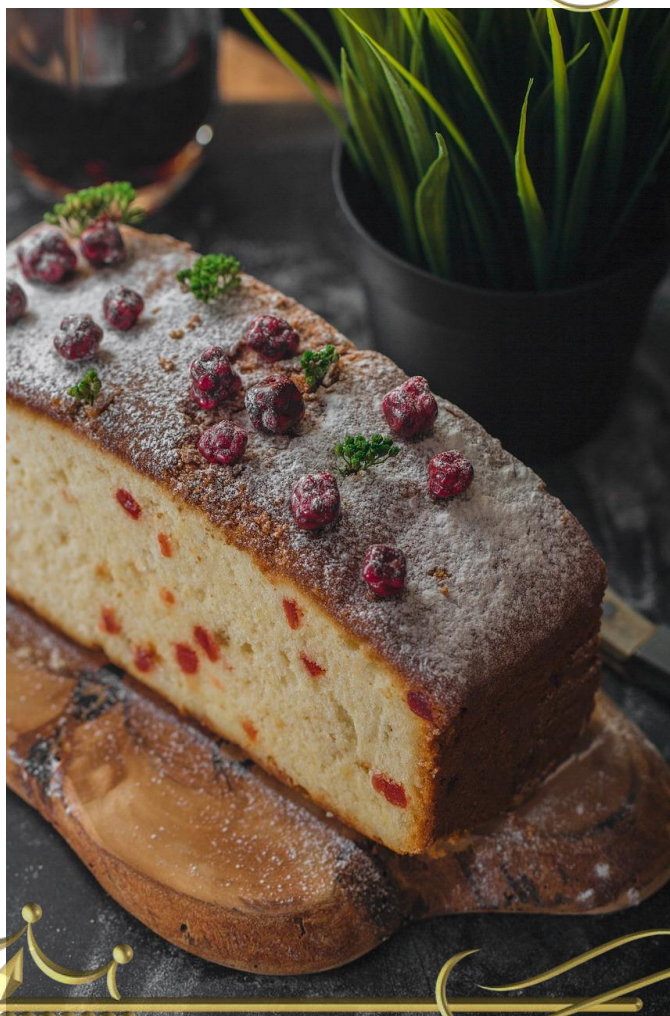
The king immediately released Yule from the dungeons and commanded the best doctors to care for his honored guest. When Yule healed, the king hired him to work in the palace kitchens as his grandmother had done before him. Noel visited him daily, stirring herself into his work and life, the secret ingredient of his success.

Yule and Noel were married beneath a canopy of candlelight when the winter solstice returned. Pieces of their cranberry wedding cake, which they had baked together on Modraniht, were wrapped in parchment, tied with red ribbons, and distributed throughout the kingdom as an offering of love and goodwill.

The following year, on the longest night of the season, in their kingdom nestled between a vast forest and a lake as blue as the sky, Princess Noel gave birth to a daughter.

The child had her father's brown-butter eyes, her mother's milky white skin, and lips as bright and red as cranberries.

Yule and Noel named their baby Snow, for she was the icing on the cake of their happily-ever-after.



COOK'S FAMOUS CRANBERRY BREAD

2 cups sifted all-purpose flour

1 cup sugar

1 ½ teaspoons baking powder

½ teaspoon baking soda

1 teaspoon salt

¼ cup butter

1 egg, beaten

¾ cup orange juice

3 cups fresh or frozen cranberries, chopped

Gather ingredients. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Sift flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt into a large bowl. Cut in butter until mixture is crumbly. Add liquid ingredients (egg and orange juice) and stir gently. Fold in cranberries. Spoon into a buttered loaf pan (9 x 5 x 3 inches). Bake for one hour and ten minutes (or until a knitting needle inserted in the center comes out clean). Remove from pan and let cool on windowsill.

HOW TO MAKE PRINCESS NOEL'S CRANBERRIES IN THE SNOW

Mix powdered sugar and drops of vanilla together until smooth. Drizzle cranberry bread with icing. Slice and serve with a dusting of powdered sugar. Share with someone you love.



BLUE-PLATE SPECIAL

by MARCIA SHERMAN

Nick! Krammie! Have a seat, take a load off.
What'll ya have?

As always—sweetbreads for you there, K?

And the big St. N will have cookies, naturally.

Eggnog for both. Comin' right up.

How's it going this year?

Kids any better or worse?

I'll tell ya, after that scare you gave them last year, K, my two sure did fall in line.

What's that? More non-believers than ever, eh?

Ah, it's all this technology. No mystery in the world.

Everybody knows everybody else's business.

No privacy, no pretend, no make-believe.

And then there's the commercialism!

Used to be you guys had at least 10, 11 months off between gigs, am I right?

Now, it seems as though all the holidays run together.

Halloweenthanksgivingchristmas, hallowthanksmas!

Hey, that's clever!

Well, I bet there are still plenty of places you guys make a difference.

So where ya been tonight?

Oy, that's a bad area, hope you kept an eye out for each other.

Lemme see your bags.

Nick, looks like you gave out every piece of coal.

And ya gave out less gifts, huh.

K—that bag of switches looks sparse. What? Broke a few, hmmm.

Told you it was a bad area.

That other bag looks pretty full, and squirmy, too.

No sir, I do not hear a thing.

Ever since you both visited me so long ago, well, that beating sure did hurt my ears.

Been hard of hearing ever since. And even more so since I got this job.

Bartenders have what they call discretionary hearing.

Yeah, yeah go ahead and tease me, it is a big word!

Ah, here's your food, dig in.

OK Nick, you know where the facilities are, yep back left corner.

Now, K, we can talk. Is it just the one bag? Two more!

Left 'em at the kitchen door, right?

Great, great, always good to get a fresh delivery.

Here he comes...I'll send the money to the same place? Good, got it.

Hey! There ya are.

Eat up fellas, plenty more where that came from.

And tonight, it's on the house!



A MIRROR AND ITS FRAGMENTS

by GEORGIA COOK

It lies embedded in the ice beside the Queen's throne: a tiny shard of glass, no longer than Gerda's pinky finger. Gerda sits a while and stares at it, pushing it back and forth across her palm as Kai stands on the castle's gleaming staircase, crying great gulping tears at the beauty of the Northern Lights.

How had such a small thing caused such strife? Gerda wonders. A shard of broken mirror, lodged in a heart to lose all sense of feeling, like a limb grown numb in icy water. She wonders how it feels. How Kai could live with it all this time.

When Kai comes at last to find her, the tears have frozen on his cheeks, leaving lines of blistered skin down his face. Gerda rises and wipes them clean, slipping the shard into her dress pocket as she goes. She takes Kai's hand, and together they walk from the palace, finding Gerda's reindeer still waiting for them outside. They climb atop its muscular back and ride through the frozen wastes, clutching one another tightly, away from the Snow Queen's lands, towards home.

It is spring when they return. Gerda and Kai have been missing for so long that their return is treated as a miracle. Their homes are smaller than they remember, their parents older, their friends transformed into strangers. They tell nobody of the Snow Queen or her glittering glass palace; they say nothing of her grand wooden sleigh, nor Gerda's chase through dark forests and windswept valleys to find her. They talk of a terrible storm, of months lost in the wilderness, of a friendly traveler who guided them home. Together, they swear to secrecy.

Who on earth would ever believe us? Asks Kai. What evidence could we possibly give?

Gerda knows he dreams about her sometimes, the Snow Queen, with her billowing black hair and stormy eyes, her cloak trimmed with fur and her crown of glistening crystals. She's heard him whispering in his sleep, still trying to solve the impossible puzzle the Queen set for him.

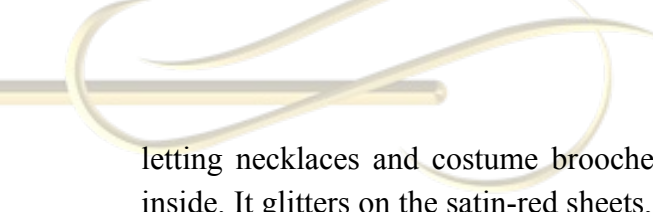
Gerda dreams about her too. They never speak in these dreams, Gerda and the Snow Queen. They stand on either side of a whistling gail, snowflakes as large as dinner plates tumbling around them. The Queen lifts a hand, her expression expectant, but Gerda can never give her what she wants.

She does not tell Kai about these dreams. She doesn't tell anyone.

Up in her childhood room, with its dusty sheets and creaking floors, the balcony window overlooking Kai's own, Gerda slips the glass shard from her pocket and holds it up to the light. She wonders again what it might feel like to cut herself on the edges. How it felt for Kai to have it lodged in his heart, his eye.

She finds a jewelry box in a drawer—a gift from her grandmother. She empties it onto her bed,





letting necklaces and costume brooches bounce across the sheets, then lays the glass shard carefully inside. It glitters on the satin-red sheets, as perfect and sharp as when it first fell to earth. Gerda stares at it a moment, then she clicks the box shut and hides it back beneath her bed, where nobody will ever find it, nor force her to explain why she kept it.



Kai falls in love with her. He loved Gerda when they were children, before the shattered mirror and the lonely Queen of Snow forced adulthood upon them both, but now it can no longer be ignored. Gerda allows him to kiss her, allows herself to stoke the embers of mutual affection. Kai is a changed man from the boy she once knew; he laughs openly and loudly, cries with abandon at every hurt. Gerda no longer understands him, but she loves him all the same, tempered by a reluctance she cannot describe.

She thinks of the glass shard in the box beneath her bed. She thinks of what it once did to Kai. She does not ask him how it felt, what he wanted, how the world looked in such sharp shades of grey and white, brought so starkly into focus.

But sometimes she wonders.



Gerda's grandmother passes away the following spring, as the skies brighten and the verges fill with daffodils. Her room is still and dark. Shadows press against the window shutters. A winter chill hangs in the air.

Gerda cries great gulping tears. She cries until her eyes sting, until her throat is red raw and rasping. She has not cried like this since she was a child, and she does not know if it will ever stop. Her grief overflows, spills between the cracks, threatens to overwhelm even the slightest moment.

At last, she understands.

On the morning of the funeral, Gerda reaches into the darkness beneath her bed and retrieves the little jewelry box. The glass shard glistens in her hand, still no smaller or less beautiful than when she first retrieved it. She holds it between thumb and forefinger. It's sharper than she remembers. It pricks her finger; an unexpected pain. Blood beads around the cut. Gerda unbuttons her shirt, exposing the pale skin beneath, then she slips the little shard neatly through the skin of her chest, between her ribs, into her heart.

It only stings for a moment.

She feels nothing on the walk to the church, nothing at the graveside, nothing as she watches the little cherry-wood coffin vanish into the earth. She does not cry. She understands now why Kai found the mirror shards so difficult to part with.

She feels nothing. Nothing at all.

When the funeral is done, Gerda excuses herself to her room, plucks the glass shard from her heart and slips it back inside the jewelry box. She feels a sting of longing as the grief seeps in, like a cut held at bay by a fragile bandage. For a moment she almost puts the shard back, fearful of the emotions welling within her, but she has a child's understanding of the world, and a child's knowledge of impermanence. She puts the box back beneath her bed, and finds a bandage for the cut on her finger.



Kai's love is a churning thing, warm and bright; a blazing fire at the heart of the world.

When the letter arrives, calling him away, his fear is palpable. Too many young men have been called away in recent years. Too few have returned, and those that do are grey-faced and silent, staring ahead at horrors none can articulate.

Kai takes Gerda's hands, smiling as he did when they were children. "I'll come back, Gerdy," he says. "I promise. And then we'll be married. Won't that be wonderful?"

Gerda does not reply. She stands and watches as Kai packs his meager belongings, watches as he kisses her goodbye on the doorstep, watches as he vanishes out of sight down the street, whistling softly in the summer sunshine. Then she slips upstairs to her room.

This time the shard barely stings as it pierces her skin. It slips into her heart as if it has always belonged there. Gerda presses a hand to her chest, telling herself she will remove it once Kai returns, when the world once more makes sense, when she has an answer for him.



Months pass. Summer turns to autumn, then the sharp chill of winter. Gerda grows accustomed to the numbness. She does not weep when her sister gives birth, when the cat her Grandmother left her is found frozen to death one morning on the rooftop, its eyes as black as spilled ink. She does not freeze with fear when the first letters arrive, addressed to neighbors, friends, those unfortunate few left behind. They are formal things, printed in black ink, a blank space left for a scribble bearing the soldier's name:

We Are Sorry To Inform You Of Your Son's Passing.

We Are Sorry To Inform You.

We Are Sorry.

Gerda does not wait for Kai's letter.

She packs a bag in the middle of the night—nothing heavy; a change of clothes, her traveling papers, the money she'd saved from her job at the town hall— and runs to the train station. She does not tell anyone where she is going, just as she told nobody the night she left all those years ago, to follow the Snow Queen's sleigh into the endless white.

She purchases a ticket for the next train heading south, heading fast, heading away. A snowflake does not look where it's heading when it tumbles out of the sky, so fretful to leave the familiar clouds behind. Neither will she.


She travels to Bucharest, then Munich. Neither satisfies her for long. She moves onward. Finland brings nothing but bittersweet memories, stark in their emptiness. Spain is too warm, too bright. Gerda rides the train across half the continent, lulled by the rocking locomotive. In her dreams she watches a raven-haired woman in the darkness beyond the window, keeping perfect pace with the train atop a sleigh of glistening gray wood. The glass shard in Gerda's heart seems to pulse.

A brush of fingers on the nape of her neck, an ice-cold breath in her ear...

When she awakes, the carriage is empty. Golden dawn spills across the treetops beyond the window. Gerda tries to conjure some sense of the dream, some memory of how it felt to lock eyes with that icy gaze.

She feels nothing.

At last, running low on money, Gerda settles in Paris. She finds a job at a small bookshop selling raunchy paperbacks, and rents an apartment on the top floor of a drafty, creaking building, with mice in the walls and mold in every room. She buys milk and bread, and avoids the eyes of passing soldiers,



never looking too hard in case she sees something in their gaze, something she can't hope to replicate.

The chip in her heart strains, but never breaks. She is numb to heartbreak, numb to joy, numb to anger and unhappiness. She prefers it this way. She watches the pains and fears of her neighbors and customers, and wonders how she could ever have done without it.



Gerda's second winter in Paris brings snow like nothing else. Wind howls across the rooftops. Snow tumbles like spilled soap flakes across the milk-white sky. Couples clutch one another as they traverse the perilous pavements, laughing at their own skittering footsteps. Gerda watches from her apartment window as the world turns frozen and white. She hasn't seen snow like this since her childhood. She recalls those days as little more than a dream; a bird clutched tight in the bowl of her ribs. A wild thing, trapped and fluttering, unable to fly.

She knows, if she tried, she could slip the shard from her heart at last, lift her face to the swirling white, and picture the magic of a childhood long faded. The adrenaline of flight across the frozen wastes. The smell of fur and animal sweat. The impossible beauty of the Snow Queen herself, tall and icy-skinned, decked in furs and glittering glass pearls. A goddess made manifest, craving nothing more than companionship.

She does not. She cannot.

She feels nothing.



Snow falls unceasingly for a week straight. Roads freeze. The Seine glistens with blocks of ice. Paris comes to a standstill.

Gerda slides and trips her way to work, watched at all times by the endless white. As she stands in line at a cart selling hot hazelnuts, she senses a gaze on the back of her neck; eyes as blue and sharp as river icicles. She turns, trying to catch the mirage in the swell of traffic, but she sees nothing.

She hurries away, the snowflakes curtaining her escape across the icy pavements.

When she arrives at work, the shop is empty and dark—no money for light, no money for heat. The books do not seem to mind. Gerda busies herself with the accounts ledgers. She wills herself to forget what she saw in the snow, the prickle of more than ice, encroaching on her numbness.

The shop bell rings. Gerda rises to greet the new customer. The breath catches in her throat, almost sharp enough to wake surprise from its stupor.

Standing in the doorway is a woman of almost impossible beauty. She wears a cape of silky white fur. Raven black hair frames a face as sharp and imperious as the northern wastes; a face Gerda has not seen since her childhood.

The Snow Queen beckons to her, and Gerda knows she cannot refuse.

They walk together, Gerda and the Snow Queen. Down frosted streets and cold back alleys. They talk little, and the little they do talk is quickly forgotten. Gerda briefly considers asking how the Snow Queen found her, what she's doing here. She wonders if the Snow Queen has found Kai once more, swept him back to her frozen palace, but she doesn't ask. She already knows the answer.

She finds herself leading the Snow Queen to the door of her tiny apartment, up creaking stairs already chilly with winter drafts. Ice rimes the banisters at the Snow Queen's touch. Mail left unopened on doorsteps shrivels as they pass.

Gerda's tiny apartment feels so much smaller in the Queen's presence, fractured into a thousand tiny rooms, like the surface of a snowflake. For the first time, Gerda notices the disrepair and neglect, the dusty furniture and spots of mold. The lack of care her numbness has wrought. She doesn't dare turn on the lamps, nor light a candle. Instead, she leads the Snow Queen by the hand to her bedroom, with its unmade bed and smeared looking glass, its bare furniture and billowing lace curtains. There in the darkness, they fall into bed together; Gerda and the Queen of Snow.

The Snow Queen kisses her, and kisses her, and kisses her, each kiss leaving a tiny red mark on Gerda's skin. Gerda's own kisses numb her lips, leaving stark imprints on the Queen's neck.

At the height of their arc, the Queen slips ice-cold fingers into Gerda's chest, cupping her heart as gently as a baby bird. Gerda gasps, but the Queen's touch does little more than sting.

As gently as falling snow, she slides the shard of glass from Gerda's heart.

Tears well in Gerda's eyes, warm and wet. Every lost moment, every kind word and sting of grief, comes crashing through her at once. She gasps. Her back arches with urgency. The pressure is overwhelming.

The Queen grasps her arm. Gerda reaches for her. "Please..." she whispers. She needs the shard put back. She needs its welcome numbness.

The Snow Queen presses a kiss to Gerda's lips. The shock is a lifeline, a flash of light in the dark. "One should not be numbed to the pains of the world," she whispers. "I learned that lesson too late, long ago." She cups Gerda's face, staring into her eyes, as if memorizing every curve, every line, every faded freckle. "...And you shall learn it too." She says.



When Gerda wakes the next morning, the Queen is gone. The air prickles with an uncomfortable chill. The apartment windows have been flung wide, letting swirls of snowflakes dance across the carpets to melt.

Gerda rises and walks to the window, wrapped in a blanket. There is a new warmth in the air this morning. Spots of sky poke through the blanket white, as blue as untouched paint. Spring is coming on.

Gerda remembers the Snow Queen's kiss, as sharp as needles on her bare skin. She remembers Kai's smile, the glittering brightness of his eyes. She remembers her grandmother, faded to watercolor memories in her mind's eye, and she begins to cry.

She wonders how such a small thing could cause such strife, and how she could ever hope to live without it.





THE FAE QUEEN'S WISH

by PAUL STANSBURY

The Fae Queen did gaze across the valley swale
Past the flowers toward the dark woods veil.
"Come swiftly back to me," she whispered on the wind
"So I may walk with you through meadows once again."

So was the wish of Rhoswen Shaylee.

She sent forth her falcon to fly long away
And lead her lost love back from the fray.
"Come swiftly back to me," she whispered on the wind
"So I may ride through the wood with you once again."

So was the wish of Rhoswen Shaylee.

She knelt by the shore in the waning day's light
And wondered where he would sleep that night.
"Come swiftly back to me," she whispered on the wind
"So I may sail with you these waters once again."

So was the wish of Rhoswen Shaylee.

Alone in the great hall she sat and she wept
And implored her love be safely kept.
"Come swiftly back to me," she whispered on the wind
"So I may sing to you of my love once again."



So was the wish of Rhoswen Shaylee.

She gazed in the hearth at a dying ember
And wondered if her face he would remember.
"Come swiftly back to me," she whispered on the wind
"So your embrace may kindle our love once again."


So was the wish of Rhoswen Shaylee.

The moonlight shown down on the silvery scene
But not on her love, Kellen Aelfdene.
"Come swiftly back to me," she whispered on the wind
"So we may slumber under the moon once again."

So was the wish of Rhoswen Shaylee.

She lay in her bed of soft dandelion down
Awakened by a kiss on her brow.
"Awaken swiftly love to me," he whispered on the wind
"I have returned and shall not leave your side again."

So was the wish of Rhoswen Shaylee.





HANNIA
AND THE
HANUKKAH ELVES

by DARREN LIPMAN

Hannia stood on her tiptoes to reach the Hanukkah sitting on the windowsill. The shamash touched the leftmost candle and its wick sparked to life, a beautiful yet small flame. Hannia lit the remaining candles one-by-one until the row of eight all shone brightly, reflecting her round face upon the window's dark glass.

"Dad," she said, "Papa, what story tonight?" She crawled onto the couch between her two fathers and looked around for the storybook they would read, but she couldn't see one.

"This is a special story," Dad said, "a story about how Pa and I met."

"A story," Papa said, "about Hanukkah elves."

"Not goblins?" Hannia said. Hanukkah goblins were fairly well-known, after all, but she had never heard about Hanukkah elves before.

"No, not goblins," Papa said, "but elves."

"Well," Dad said, "they're more like sprites than elves, I suppose. Very small things, about the size of a fingertip. Only very rarely does anyone see them."

Hannia's face glowed in the candlelight, fascinated by the thought of Hanukkah elves. "What do they do?"

"The most important thing," Dad said. "They keep the candles from blowing out."

* * *

It was the first night of Hanukkah some twenty years before, and David stood behind his Hanukkah in the synagogue's social hall. There were about a dozen round tables set up, and about a dozen people stood at each of them, every one of them with their own Hanukkah.

David hadn't been here very long; his family had moved in October, and now it was the middle of December. He had celebrated his bar mitzvah in May, and then in June his father announced he'd accepted a position two states away. Might as well have been halfway across the world: He wouldn't be able to keep his friendships after he moved (this was before cell phones existed, and children hardly used email at the time—if you can believe it). He had spent the summer saying his farewells, and then they moved in August. Then his dad's company decided to transfer him, and they moved again in October. Now David mainly kept to himself; he didn't know when his family might need to move again, and it would be easier if he didn't make any new friends. So now his mother and father stood on either side of him, all of them chanting the candle lighting blessings together, watching as he lit the shamash and then the first candle on the right side of the Hanukkah. All around them, other families did the same.

"Go play, David," his father said, pointing to the activities that had been set up around the perimeter of the social hall: There were stations to make foil-covered tzedakah boxes, places to sculpt colorful bits of clay into dreidels, and even two whole tables for playing with them—loaded up with piles of candy for some playful gambling.

David wandered off, drawn toward a table where a woman was showing other kids how to roll thin sheets of beeswax into candles. He recognized her as one of the Hebrew school teachers.

"Here, David, grab a sheet."

He blushed that she knew his name but he didn't remember hers and took a blue sheet of beeswax and a wick. He began folding them when another boy came up beside him and started rolling yellow beeswax deftly into a candle.

"Can I make another?" he said and the woman nodded, pushing more beeswax in his direction.

David finished his first candle and frowned: It was lumpy and looked more triangular than circular.

"Let me show you," the other boy said. "You gotta make sure the wick is lined up perfectly, then start slow and roll evenly."

Within seconds, he had a perfect candle matching his first.

“Thanks,” David said and introduced himself.

“What’s your name?”

“I’m Yonatan, but my friends call me Yoni.”

He smiled and quickly rolled another candle. “Now I’ve got enough for tomorrow night. Wanna see my Hanukkah?”

“Sure,” David said. His second candle was only slightly less misshapen than his first and he didn’t feel like making another, so he followed as Yoni walked off. As they approached the tables lit by hundreds of candles, the air grew warmer, even cozier.

Yoni led him to a table near the center, to a Hanukkah carved from small squares of clay in greens and browns. They were disconnected and could be arranged in multiple shapes and patterns.

“Isn’t it cool?” Yoni said, his face brightening. “I made it last year.”

“Yeah,” David said, “it’s really cool.” His own Hanukkah was store-bought and shiny, in a traditional shape, but wasn’t as unique as this one. “I like the colors.”

“I wanted it to look like this picture of Israel I saw,” Yoni said. “Have you ever been there?” David shook his head, and Yoni went on. “Me neither, but I want to someday.”

David wrinkled his nose at a whiff of smoke and looked down to see one of the candles on a neighboring Hanukkah had gone out—though the candle was only halfway burnt.

“Should we light it again?” David asked and looked at Yoni. He knew Hanukkah candles were supposed to burn all the way down.

“Light what?” Yoni said, and when David looked back, all the candles were burning.

“I...but...” He scratched at his head, staring at the candle that had gone out a moment before. The smell of smoke had been so real, he couldn’t have imagined it.

“Must be the Hanukkah elves,” Yoni said. “They keep the candles burning.”

David raised his eyes. “Elves?”

“They’re like the opposite of goblins,” Yoni said, and his voice sounded more serious than joking. “I know they’re like from storybooks and such, but I’ve seen them, once.” He seemed to realize what he was saying and blushed. “Anyways, wanna do something else?”

David looked back at the candles again, and all of them were perfectly alight and shining. He didn’t believe there was anything like Hanukkah elves, or goblins for that matter, but the look in Yoni’s eyes had been so sincere, David wondered if they really were real.

* * *

“Pa,” Dad said, “you’re taking too long to tell the story. More elves, less us.”

Pa laughed and ruffled Hannia’s hair. “What do you think? Elves or us?”

She hummed for a moment, swinging her feet back and forth. “I want the elves.”

“Very well then,” Pa said, “I’ll skip the early bits. Dad and I became good friends after that night, but it was another year before we spoke about Hanukkah elves again. Hanukkah was early that year, in the middle of November, and it was unseasonably warm. There was a big storm the first night of Hanukkah; we were all at the synagogue again, and the lights went out.”

“Some of the families left to go home,” Dad said, “but our families didn’t want to risk the rain, so we were still there when the tree fell.”

“You’re getting ahead of things,” Pa said, “let me say how it went.”

* * *

There was a large row of towering windows on one side of the social hall, and rain battered the glass as the families gathered around the central tables to light their Hanukkiot. One match was struck, then another, and as every shamash took flame, passed from one candle to the next, a soft orange glow radiated around the room. The sound of blessings being sung drowned out the thunder for a few minutes, and then the remaining candles were lit and the glow intensified.

The adults took their places at the craft stations around the room, and some of the children followed them to roll candles or play dreidel, but David and Yoni held back, standing side-by-side at their Hanukkiot.

“You okay?” David asked. “You look sorta pale.”

“I just don’t like bad storms,” Yoni said, his words trembling. “Should we—”

There was a flash of lightning and a loud crash—David turned toward the wall of windows just in time to see the tree falling through the glass and people bounding out from its path. The shattered glass sparkled for a brief second in the air before clattering to the floor. Water splashed inside as people started running toward the downed tree to make sure everyone was alright; even the Rabbi ran over to help.

Yoni had gone pale as a ghost, and just when David was about to ask what he could do, a great gale howled through the broken windows and swept toward them. All at once the candle flames shuddered and shook, but none of them blew out. David looked down at his Hanukkiah and gasped—small figures clung to the candle tips, tiny hands shielding the flames.

“Look,” David breathed, pointing, and Yoni turned toward the flames. His eyes widened as he saw them, too.

“Hanukkah elves,” Yoni said, and then quickly looked around; they were the only two near enough to see them since everyone else was still occupied by the broken windows.

David took a step closer and lowered his head to see one more clearly. It was like a little man, though it wore no clothes and its feet ended in spikes that stuck into the candle to hold it up. There was webbing between its fingers, helping it hold the heart of the flame. Its whole body looked gold in the glow, and suddenly it saw David looking at it. Its round eyes bulged out, and its mouth opened in a silent scream.

“It’s okay,” David said as Yoni bent over beside him. “I want to help.” He glanced at Yoni and their eyes met, the candlelight flickering on them. “He wants to help too.”

The wind had calmed for now, but with the windows still broken, it was only a matter of time before another gale threatened to blow out all the Hanukkah candles.

The elf seemed to notice this and nodded. When it spoke, its voice was like a chiming bell.

“We can’t hold the flames forever,” it said, “we need some kind of spark to keep them alive.”

“Hanukkah candles only need to burn for thirty minutes,” Yoni said, and David gave him a quizzical look. “It’s because that’s how long they need to burn so all the Hanukkah candles throughout a person’s life will last as long as the original miracle of Hanukkah.”

“I didn’t know that,” David said, and then turned back to the elf on the candle. “So can’t you just stay until they burn out?”

“That won’t do,” the elf said. “There are only so few of us, and so many more candles to keep alight. So we need a spark.”

“A spark?” David said. “Like a match?”

“Not at all,” the elf squeaked. “A spark—like creativity, or inspiration, or love.”

“Love?” David gulped and looked at Yoni. They had been friends for a year now, and sometimes David found himself daydreaming about Yoni, but it was just a little crush and he was sure Yoni wouldn’t feel the same way. Yet now the other boy looked at him, and he smiled, and David wondered if maybe Yoni would feel the same way.

David looked down at his hands, clutching the side of the table, and saw Yoni was doing the same right next to him. Their hands were remarkably close. It would be so easy to slide his hand a little bit to the right, just to see what Yoni would do.

He didn’t get the chance—Yoni moved his hand instead, and when their fingers touched, static coursed through David’s body. He looked at Yoni, and his lips twisted into a silly smile.

“I wasn’t sure,” Yoni whispered, “so I...”

David shrugged, as if to say, “I felt the same.”

Then their hands folded together, fingers intertwining, and the static in their bodies flowed to their palms. Warmth filled their flesh and started to burn, and they opened their hands to reveal a shining spark between them.

“That’s it!” the elf exclaimed. “Quick, bring it to the candle!”

Together they lifted their hands and brought the spark to the Hanukkah candle. The flame roared up as it absorbed the light, and then a spark shot out toward the other candles—and then sparks shot out from those, too, passing it along until it had touched every Hanukkiah.

The moment seemed to last forever, but only a fraction of a second had passed.

Another wind blew around them, and though the flames flickered and wavered beneath it, none of them blew out. When the wind passed, David realized he was holding Yoni’s hand again, and he blushed. Yoni squeezed his hand, as if to say, “It’s okay,” and David felt the lingering warmth of the spark of love they had ignited.

* * *

Hannia crossed her arms and puffed out her lips. “The Hanukkah elves did very little.”

“On the contrary,” Dad said, “they did everything—we wouldn’t have realized our feelings without them, and then you, little one, wouldn’t be here today.”

That seemed to quell her frustration and she smiled. “Have you ever seen them again?”

“Not since then,” Pa said and ruffled her hair, “but we know they’re there, when we need them.”

Hannia slid off the couch and walked to the windowsill. The candles were burning low and would probably fizzle out soon, and then it would be a whole year before she could light them again. Maybe someday she’d find her own spark to keep the candles burning, or better even, she’d see the Hanukkah elves for herself. She glanced at her dads and thought she heard her name called from the candles, and when she turned back, for the briefest moment, she saw a face among the flames.



MARCH, APRIL, MAY

by HANNAH RUNKLE & LISA VISEK

In the happily, haunted cottage
Beware the dancing doll
with the pink ribbon in her hair
and the shrieking lonely skeleton skull
They sip from a screaming
little teapot and teacup
In an old-fashioned sweet garden
with poison flowers upon an arch wall
Drinking fatal tea
shiver in sinister love.



Enchanted Creators

THE FANTASY ART OF

KINUKO Y. CRAFT

by KELLY JARVIS



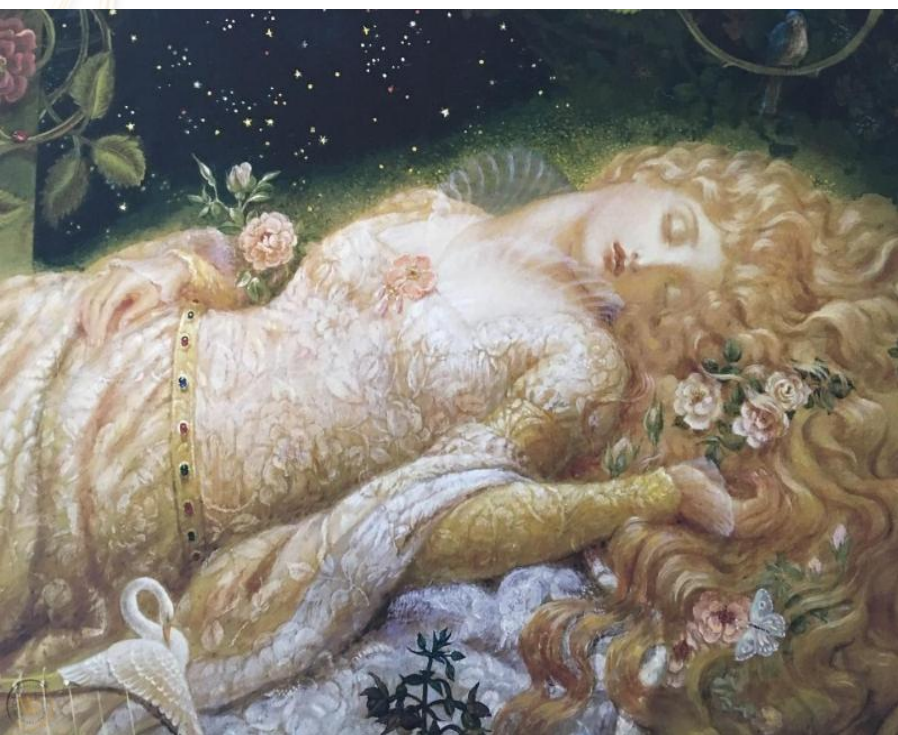
Visions of Beauty, a stunning hardcover collection of Kinuko Y. Craft's famous fantasy paintings and illustrations, begins with the artist's own words: "Painting is my word, my language, my poetry, my therapist, my food. It is who I am."

Winner of the *Grandmaster Spectrum Award*, *World Fantasy Artist of the Year Award*, and *Chesley Lifetime Artistic Achievement Award*, Kinuko Y. Craft has dedicated her life and career to making the world more beautiful. After moving to the United States in the early sixties, Craft studied design and illustration at the Art Institute of Chicago, but she credits her childhood experiences in Japan, where she grew up with the freedom to roam the forests behind her family home, as central to her artistic temperament. "The house I grew up in was filled with books of all kinds," Craft explains. "There were my father's picture books...and my grandfather's set of books about art of the world which covered both western and eastern art." Although Craft cites the remarkable work of Renaissance and Pre-Raphaelite artists as sources of inspiration, she finds fuel for her imagination everywhere; "It can be a combination of colors, a splash of light, paintings, a beautiful face, colorful patterns, stories, poetry or music. They all have elements that can touch my sensibility and inspire my creativity."

Kinuko Y. Craft
KINUKO Y. CRAFT

The natural world acts as an inspiration for Craft's art as well. She writes of her awe in seeing the Aurora Borealis, which she describes as a "magnificent display", but she also writes of finding beauty in simple things. One of her earliest memories "is of sunlight shining on a leaf suspended in a cobweb in a glassless window frame moving to and fro in a soft breeze." She explains, "There was a feeling of eternity in it, and at that time I thought it was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen...In a way, I have spent my life trying to capture that moment in my art."

In addition to her paintings, Craft has created art to grace books, magazines, and opera posters, and her sumptuous attention to detail has helped her to create folkloric picture books including [*Beauty and the Beast*](#), [*Cupid and Psyche*](#), [*The Twelve Dancing Princesses*](#), [*Sleeping Beauty*](#), [*Pegasus*](#), [*Cinderella*](#), and [*King Midas and the Golden Touch*](#). "When the opportunity came to create art for fairy tale books, it gave me the freedom for the first time to express what was in my heart and soul," Craft says. "Stories allow me to peek into somebody else's imagination. When their sentences or descriptions are beautiful, it influences and fuels my imagination." Craft loves the idea of telling her own version of stories through lines, colors, and castles (which she lists as a requirement for every fairy tale). "Stories have a color," she explains, "a certain smell and taste. I have to spend time with it, inhabit it, taste it, know it. I want to bring out my fantasy with that flavor." Craft, who claims that she sees the world in colors even when it is black and white, likes to meet the writers' sensibilities halfway, allowing room for her own imagination. She is at her best when crossing cultural and imaginative boundaries to create paintings and illustrations that tell a story of their own.



While Craft's illustrations hold tremendous appeal to her child audiences, they are created to be appreciated by people of every age. "For me, picture books are not children's books. Though they are called children's books, I create the images mainly for me, both the mature woman and the child within myself." Her consciousness of a dual audience is on display in her illustrations of *Beauty and the Beast* which feature the gorgeous detail of French inspired dresses, windswept, wintery landscapes, and tender moments of affection between the title characters. Audiences who carefully peruse the paintings in the book will also find recurring references to ethereal fairies and

crescent moons, and they may even spot personal details like portraits of Craft's German shepherd Wolfgang. Craft loves animals and credits her pet with helping her maintain her connection to the natural world. "My need for Wolfgang is...primordial. I feel I must have him to be a complete being."

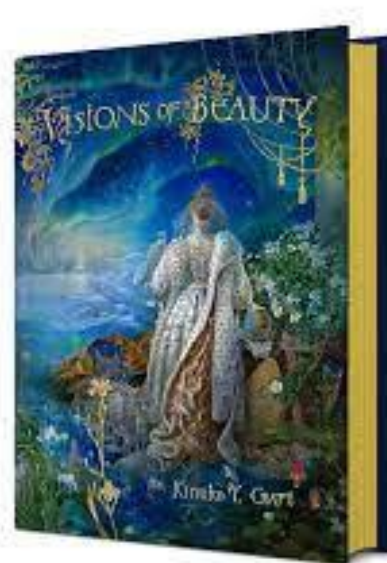
Craft's paintings have the power to transport her audience to other worlds, something she sees as valuable given the violence and ugliness of real life, but she views her art as a product of immersive research and hard work rather than an act of magic. She creates and discards ideas, moving pieces around until she uncovers the images embedded in her imagination. She has been commissioned to create book covers and dust jackets for artists including C.S. Lewis, Stephen King, Isabel Allende, and Patricia A. McKillip who describes the natural world as a "magical force" in Craft's work, "always blooming, recreating, one beauty appearing after another wherever you look." Craft has also collaborated on projects with both her daughter and her husband Mahlon who says at "the core of her work lies beauty. It is what drives her both as an artist and as a person."

When asked about her favorite part of creating, Craft says "My happiest time is when I stand in front of a white empty board: the space is full of hope." She enjoys the process of discovery more than the finished painting, claiming that her favorite project is always the "next one." Craft's endless imagination and commitment to creation have offered viewers the opportunity to be dazzled by her characters and landscapes. In each brushstroke of her work there is movement to witness and enchantment to be found. Each painting is a world of its own.

"Being an artist is something you do because you must," says Craft, "you have no other choice, and we are blessed to live in a time and society that allows individuals to choose their destiny." Those who encounter Kinuko Y. Craft's art are certainly blessed with visions of beauty. Craft's timeless paintings are works of wonder that help to fill our mundane world of reality with fantastical possibilities.

Work Cited

Craft, Kinuko Y. *Visions of Beauty*. Borsini-Burr Inc. & Imaginary Editions, 2022.



LOST DREAMS

by JO DE GROOT

You woke me with a kiss and expected me to be grateful.

You tore me from a hundred-year dream and expected me to slip smoothly into a world I no longer recognize, into a role I never wanted.

You say I will be queen.

In my dream I was queen. I was warrior, explorer, priestess, witch, inventor, story-teller, artist, scientist, nun.

You say I will be mistress of a castle, admired by all, second only to you.

In my dream I was mistress of everything, second to none, and I needed no one's admiration.

You say I will have everything I ask for.

In my dream I didn't have to ask.

You say I will have anything I desire.

In my dream I had freedom, power, independence. Can you give me those?

You say you will give me the world.

I have had it.

You say you loved me at first sight.

I wish I could say the same.

You say I must fulfill my role, follow the rules that others have made.

In my dream I made my own rules.

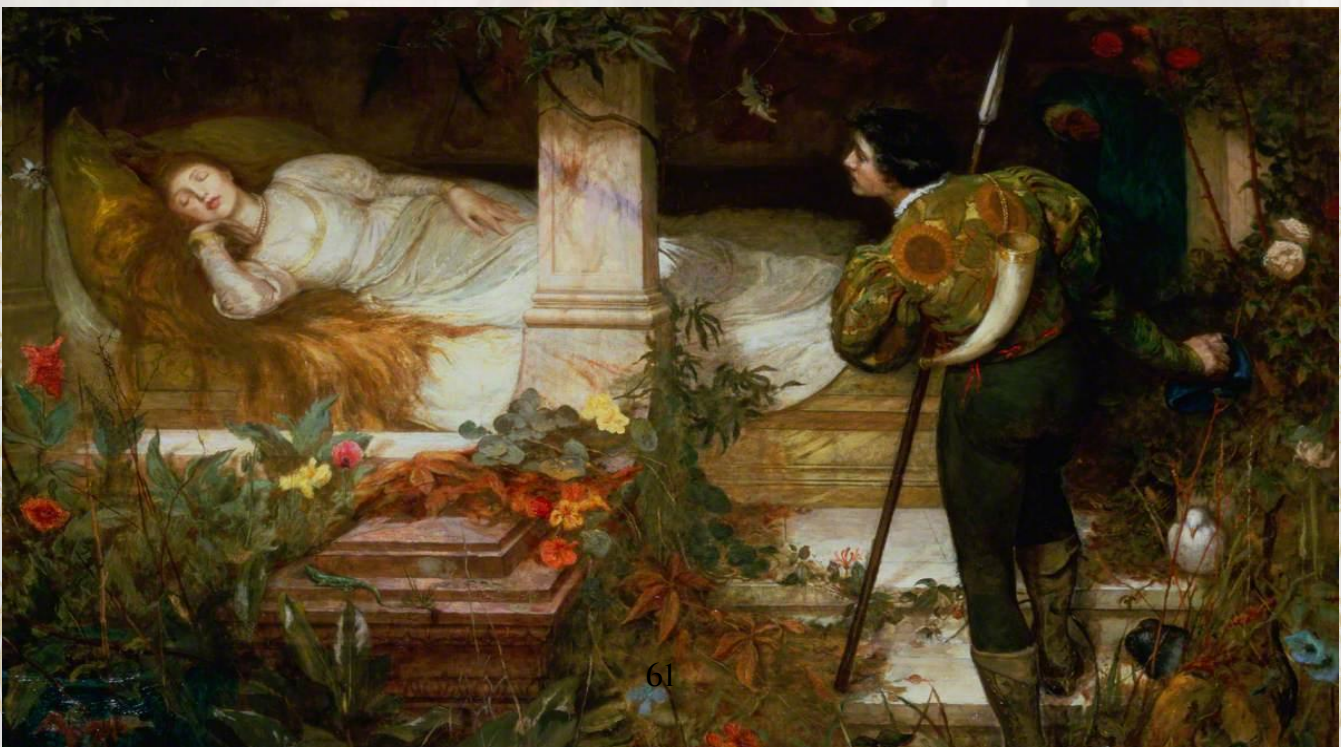
You say I must grow up, join the real world, forget the thousand dream-lives I have lived.

Don't worry. I will. Already I feel them disintegrating, slipping through my fingers like grains of sand.

You say I will grow to love you. Perhaps. I may as well.

I have already lived more lives than most, more than I can hold in my head at once. So I will let my dream-selves fade away, till all that is left is yours.

But the flavor of my dream will linger, and I will savor it, even when it catches at the back of my throat.






Classics from Around the World
**THE WINTER-SPIRIT
& HIS VISITOR**
A NORSE TALE

An old man was sitting alone in his lodge by the side of a frozen stream. It was the close of winter, and his fire was almost out. He appeared very old and very desolate. His locks were white with age, and he trembled in every joint. Day after day passed in solitude, and he heard nothing but the sounds of the tempest, sweeping before it the new-fallen snow.

One day as his fire was just dying, a handsome young man approached and entered his dwelling. His cheeks were red with the blood of youth; his eyes sparkled with life, and a smile played upon his lips. He walked with a light and quick step. His forehead was bound with a wreath of sweet grass, in place of the warrior's frontlet, and he carried a bunch of flowers in his hand.



"Ah! my son," said the old man, "I am happy to see you. Come in. Come, tell me of your adventures, and what strange lands you have been to see. Let us pass the night together. I will tell you of my prowess and exploits, and what I can perform. You shall do the same, and we will amuse ourselves."

He then drew from his sack a curiously-wrought antique pipe, and having filled it with tobacco, rendered mild by an admixture of certain dried leaves, he handed it to his guest. When this ceremony was attended to, they began to speak.

"I blow my breath," said the old man, "and the streams stand still. The water becomes stiff and hard as clear stone."

"I breathe," said the young man, "and flowers spring up all over the plains."

"I shake my locks," retorted the old man, "and snow covers the land. The leaves fall from the trees at my command, and my breath blows them away. The birds rise from the water and fly to a distant land. The animals hide themselves from the glance of my eye, and the very ground where I walk becomes as hard as flint."

"I shake my ringlets," rejoined the young man, "and warm showers of soft rain fall upon the earth. The plants lift up their heads out of the ground like the eyes of children glistening with delight. My voice recalls the birds. The warmth of my breath unlocks the streams. Music fills the groves wherever I walk, and all nature welcomes my approach."

At length the sun begun to rise. A gentle warmth came over the place. The tongue of the old man became silent. The robin and the blue-bird began to sing on the top of the lodge. The stream began to murmur by the door, and the fragrance of growing herbs and flowers came softly on the vernal breeze.

Daylight fully revealed to the young man the character of his entertainer. When he looked upon him he had the visage of Peboan, the icy old Winter-Spirit. Streams began to flow from his eyes. As the sun increased he grew less and less in stature, and presently he had melted completely away. Nothing remained on the place of his lodge-fire but the mis-kodeed, a small white flower with a pink border, which the young visitor, Seegwun, the Spirit of Spring, placed in the wreath upon his brow.







TIN SOLDIER

by JULIE SHIEL

I was made differently
missing parts but steadfast
standing sentinel on my one good leg.

I saw you frozen in your white dress
with the red spangle
your arms reaching for flight
balanced on one pointed toe
(like me)
eyes raised to a star I could not see.

We made plans in the dark
ardent declarations of love
across the moon shadowed playroom
until jealousy pushed me
into the cobbled street below.

Some children found me
and gave me a swift ship
sent me voyaging through gutter rapids
until I spilled into the deep
of the cold midnight harbor.

When the bright behemoth came
I was unable to swim away
with my one good leg
and was swallowed
all the world ending.

For a time I slept
waking when light broke through
the damp embrace of my grave
reborn but still damaged
and returned to my remote shelf.

But my heart was never lacking
and I reached for you, aching
only to tumble into the dancing flames.

I could hear you crying my name
before you broke free
and took that final leap
riding the draft from the window
to join me in the inferno.

Never mind that we burned
we burned together
you into me and me into you
and I felt myself melting
flowing into your empty spaces
and what perfect bliss
to be as one at last.

The bright of morning paled
after that brilliant fire
and when the ashes were swept
they found a tarnished tin heart
fused with a red spangled center.



PRESENT

by MADELINE MERTZ

When I was a boy, my parents would ask me each year to make a list of things I would like for Christmas. Often I would tell them simple things that all young boys loved: stuffed bears and slinkies, tops and chess boards. Each year my gifts would be delivered in front of the fireplace, perfectly chosen and wrapped by my mother and father in the way of a family who can afford such things. Yet as I grew, and came to understand my family's wealth, my requests for gifts came to grow larger and more imaginative, for I was a creative child and fancied myself quite the challenger. I enjoyed the task of providing my poor parents with near impossible requests, solely for the purpose of seeing when I could stump them.

At 15 years of age, I contrived my most imaginative request yet: a dragon. That was the only thing I wrote when my mother invited me to write my Christmas list. I wanted a Christmas dragon.

My parents stared at the word in confusion when I handed them my list. A stuffed dragon? A wooden dragon? They asked me, but I denied them. Only a real dragon would I accept—yet dragons were expensive, far beyond the reach of even my family.

On Christmas morning I sauntered down the stairs in my pajamas, egotistical in my conviction that I had stumped them, finally having made a request that they could not provide.

Instead, in the place of my usual presents sat a pearly egg, perfectly oval and iridescent white in color.

Dumbfounded, I asked my father how he had gotten it. He replied that he had traded all of our white horses for it. My mother asked if I was happy.

"I am," I replied. I was not.

My father adored our white horses; he had collected them over the years, 20 of them, and he tended each one and called them by name. Now, in my stupidity and arrogance I had caused my father to sell his passions to appease me.

I tended the dragon egg in bitterness, keeping it warm, as I was instructed. What I really wished was that the dragon would be returned in exchange for my father's horses back, but I knew he would never accept the dragon if I told him I wanted to give it back. He valued my happiness too highly above his own.

My dragon hatched nearly a month after Christmas. It was a little thing, the size of a house cat, with scales like ice chips and eyes of milky white. I called her Present and resented her dearly, though I tended her with all my care, for I would not devalue my father's sacrifice.

Present learned quickly, for dragons are intelligent creatures, and she could speak nearly three months after her hatching. By some feat of reptile intelligence, she could tell I blamed her for some wrong, and she asked me why I hated her so.



"It is not you I hate, my dear," I replied. "But I made a grave mistake in asking to have you." I told her what I had done, and explained how my father had sold his horses so I could have her.

She thought for a moment, blinking her pearly eyes, then she asked me if I might love her more if we got my father his horses back.

"We have no money to do such a thing, Present. I am only a boy, and you are a dragon. We have no income and no collateral." I explained to her what money was as best I could.

She paused again for a moment, in her slow dragon way, then she asked if we might perhaps earn money through deeds. She was growing bigger and stronger by the day. She could fly and was more useful than a horse at pulling carts. Perhaps the people of my village might pay us for aid in farming chores and transportation.

A hope began to arise within me. Perhaps I might redeem myself of my foolishness and become a good son to my father once more. Never again would I behave so spoiled and poorly, I vowed to myself.

I hoped that I might redeem myself within the eyes of my dragon as well, for she had done no wrong, given me no cause to resent her. While I had not abused her, she had felt the sting of my hatred nonetheless, and I did not wish her to. She was a good and kind pet, an intelligent and elegant creature; she did not deserve such.

For the length of a year, Present and I wallowed in toil. Instead of spending my days playing in the fields and avoiding my tutors, I transported crops, directed Present in hauling goods for traders, and gave the occasional ride on her back from city to city. She was a willing participant, and through our toil we grew closer. She was the one I spent the most time with, and my most prized possession.

We made calls upon the owners of the horses, and one by one, I purchased them and negotiated their delivery for Christmas Day.

When my mother handed me the piece of paper to write what I wanted for Christmas, I simply requested that my father come outside on the morning of Christmas Day.

When he walked outside, Present and I stood proudly in the pasture, filled with 21 white horses, all of his animals, and a new one.

My father cried and hugged my mother and me, then gave Present a kiss upon her pale snout.

In my victory I confessed my guilt and shame at my actions and explained that I was grateful for Present and I loved her dearly. I never would wish for any gift other than her presence, but I also wished he had not sacrificed his happiness for my own.

My family was the most important thing on Christmas Day.



The Best of Enchanted Conversation

YULE

by LISSA SLOAN

I am the time that was.
Famine, feast, birth, death.
I am the truth of it.
Endings, beginnings, and passing through
All written in my rings.

I am the time that is.
I burn away
The fever, the failure
Sobs and songs
Warm skin, every blink and breath
Words and deeds
Heartbeats and heartbreaks
Sear blue to white to gold and crimson
Black and white and gray
Mingle in the hearth,
Bitter and sweet
All crumbled into ash.

I am the time that will be.
Seeds sleeping under earth
Waiting for the sun and the dark
The wind and the rain and the ax.

I will return.



GOTHIC FAIRY TALES

by SARA CLETO & BRITTANY WARMAN

Let's set the scene: You're in a long forgotten castle, deep in a dark wood. The stones have cracked and crumbled, and your footsteps leave a trail through years of dust. Menacing vines and thorns hang over the ruins like a cloak. You've heard that, if the light is right, travelers who stumble upon it might glimpse the haunting, motionless figures inside. They whisper that the tallest tower contains a beautiful girl, the rose among the thorns, trapped in a death-like sleep from which only a foretold love may wake her.

They were right.

Sounds like the plot of a gothic novel, right? But if you read closely, you might have recognized the contours of "Sleeping Beauty," a beloved and classic fairy tale. The truth is, gothic tales and fairy tales are very closely related. Sometimes, they could pass for doubles, even twins. It's easy to think of fairy tales as frothy and light, as simple stories for children, tied up with the bow of a happy ending. And sometimes they are. But sometimes, they are uncanny, spectral, even transgressive. And sometimes, they're decidedly Gothic.

WHAT IS THE GOTHIC?

The easiest way to explain the Gothic is that it's simply a collection or accumulation of tropes.

Behold! Some Gothic tropes:

Castles, Cathedrals, Tombs, Catacombs, Dark Forests, Storms / Bad Weather, Melodrama, Ghosts, Vampires, Monsters, Murderers, Nightmares, Fainting Women / Damsels in Distress AND/OR Spunky, Imaginative Women, Death / Death-Like States, Curses, Omens, Ancient Families, Suspense, Lust and Sexuality, Darkness (literally and figuratively!), Psychology (the darkness within), Magic, Mysteries...

And when you get enough of these things together, they reach a critical mass and become a Gothic text. Beyond that, scholars like to argue about specifics—as Chris Baldick puts it, “[t]he term [...] has become firmly established as the name for one sinister corner of the modern Western imagination, but it seems to work by intuitive suggestion rather than by any agreed precision of reference.”

That said, most of the time, when people encounter a Gothic story, they can pretty easily recognize it as such. “Yep, that’s a Gothic thing!” However, there’s a lot of argument about how exactly to define it. Is it something about the past, as Fred Botting and Robert Mighall have argued? Does it have to do with subversion, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick proposes? Is it simply “dread and glamor and passion,” as Angela Carter puts it? Perhaps it’s a combination of all of these.

What we know for sure is that Gothic literature first flourished at around the same time that Romantic literature did, and many have argued that the two are actually part of one tradition. However, while Romantic literature went on to become part of “high culture” and is “invoked in modern criticism to describe a [whole] literary period,” as Michael Gamer points out, the Gothic was not formally embraced in the same way... it was too over the top, too associated with women, too violent, too evil,





and too obsessed with the past. It was also, it must be said, probably too popular to ever be taken seriously.

GOTHIC FAIRY TALES?

So what does this have to do with fairy tales? Romantic luminary Samuel Taylor Coleridge offers us a clue when he writes:

“The book, I well remember, used to lie in a corner of the parlour window at my dear Father’s Vicarage-house: and I can never forget with what a strange mixture of obscure dread and intense desire I used to look at the volume and watch it, till the morning sunshine had reached and nearly covered it, when, and not before, I felt the courage given me to seize the precious treasure and hurry off with it to some sunny corner in our playground.”

You’d think that Coleridge was remembering a book of ghost stories or tales of the macabre, but he’s actually describing how much he loved...and yet was utterly terrified by...his Dad’s copy of *The Arabian Nights*. Which is, essentially, a book of fairy tales.

While it might seem bizarre, Coleridge is onto something. Fairy tales *can* be absolutely terrifying. They’re full of murder and gore (“Bluebeard”), child abandonment (“Hansel and Gretel”), abuse (“Cinderella”), curses (“Sleeping Beauty”), and monstrous bridegrooms (“Beauty and the Beast”). And, truly, this is just the tip of the Gothic iceberg.

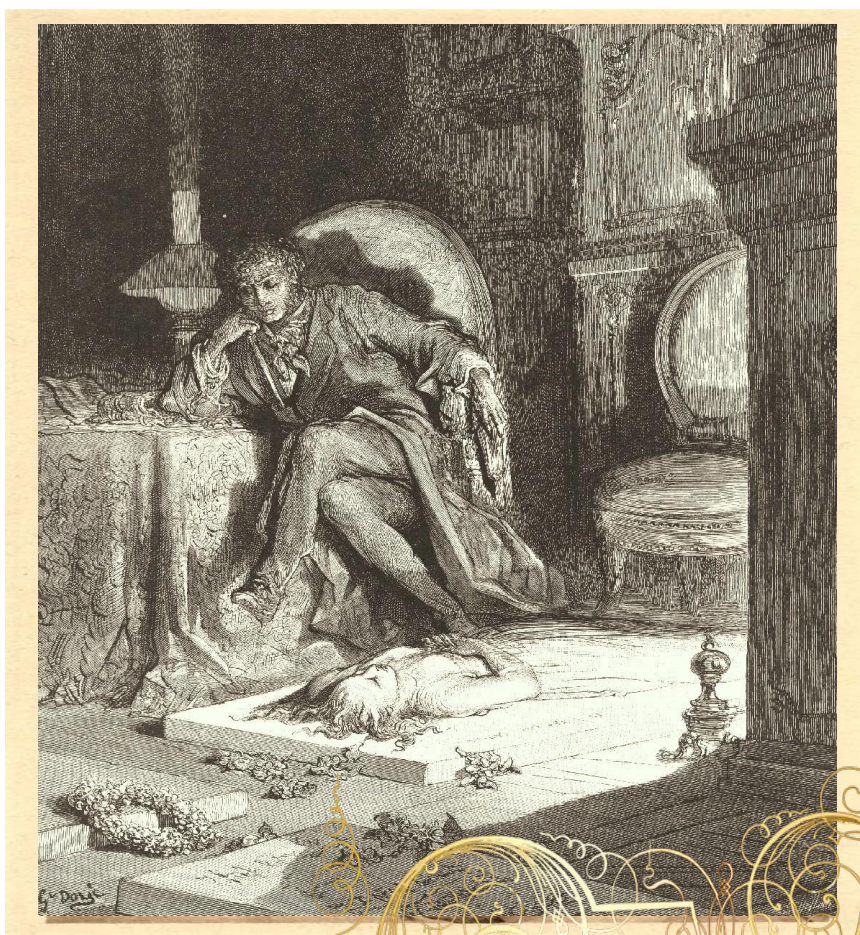
Fairy tales being scary shouldn’t be shocking. Very often, that is the essence of what fairy tales are.

So, are fairy tales inherently Gothic? Sometimes, yes! At the very least, they are Gothic more often than you might think. A lot of our most famous fairy tales are built on pretty Gothic foundations—remember the big list of tropes from the top of this article? Think about how many fairy tales have sinister castles, family secrets, and dark forests. For example: Bluebeard is a story about a young girl swept off her feet by a mysterious, rich aristocrat. Isolated in his castle, she roams the ornate rooms, trying to understand her new husband, and eventually finds the bodies of his former wives locked in a forbidden chamber.

It does not get more Gothic than this!

And while not all classic fairy tales are super Gothic, there's no denying that the Gothic and fairy tales pair beautifully together because there's already so much overlap. You can see it in the almost fairy-tale-like short stories of Edgar Allen Poe (particularly the MANY tales that involve half-alive/sleeping maidens!). You can see it in *Jane Eyre*, which mght as well be a retelling of "Beauty and the Beast" (or "Bluebeard," depending on how you want to read it!). And, of course, you can see it in the more contemporary texts that explicitly draw the two forms together, like Angela Carter's short story collection, *The Bloody Chamber*.

The spell of the Gothic haunts both the traditional tales themselves and the many texts that call upon those tales. As Carole G. Silver notes, "[t]he same perverse imagination that lies behind the strange tales of Sheridan Le Fanu or Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is present in these works" and that's something we should celebrate.







ERATO'S SERENADE

by THOMAS KORON

I.

Eros walked slowly through the forestland,
Near Mount Olympus, in the soft twilight.
By his side, he held his bow in his hand,
As he walked on through the advancing night.
Above the forest, the evening was clear,
As a full moon lit up the mountain's peak,
An endless number of stars filled the skies.
Through the trees, he saw a wandering deer,
That appeared to be searching for a creek—
He quickly followed its path with his eyes.

II.

Reaching back into his quiver with care,
Eros placed an arrow within his bow.
He quietly raised the bow in the air,
Then he slowly crouched his body down low.
He watched the deer at the creek quench its thirst,
As he swiftly trailed it through the thick brush—
Suddenly, there came a beautiful sound.
The music startled both of them at first,
Then Eros and the deer left in a rush—
The arrow fell from his bow to the ground.

III.

As they both followed the sound of the lyre,
They then found themselves now coming nearer
To a woman on a rock near a fire—
Her sound and her beauty became clearer.
The deer slowed down from the pace which it ran,
And shook the loose leaves away from its fur—
Erato had brought an end to the hunt.
Her playing always charmed both beast and man—
The deer calmly listened from behind her,
And Eros stood enamored from the front.

IV.

They listened together, as she played on,
Wearing myrtle and roses in her crown.
Further into her presence, they were drawn—
Surrendering, Eros placed his bow down.
In the moonlight, Erato's tunic flowed,
Appearing light blue within the green trees,
And her golden lyre began to glisten.
The fading embers of her campfire glowed,
And remained burning in the gentle breeze—
Eros stood and continued to listen.

V.

Overhead, the moon hid behind a cloud,
The fire was soon extinguished in the dark.
Her playing became increasingly loud,
And the fire reignited with a spark.
The playing then soon silenced in the night—
Her precious lyre upon the rock she placed,
And handed Eros a golden arrow.
He then watched the deer leave in the firelight—
Being thankful, for their presence it graced,
And for the sounds from the clearings narrow.





CINDERELLA: AN EXPOSÉ

by SALINDA TYSON

The mice chittered and chattered, recovering from a cheese and sugar high.

"What a wonderful party," said one.

"So many nice sweet crumbs on the floor, so much to sniff and nibble," said another.

"So many curtains and tables and benches and chairs to hide under," squeaked a third.

"And," sniffed a fourth, the runt, "so many ladies who saw us and said 'Eeek!'"

The four scurried in circles, laughing: "And—all the cats were outside. With bells on their collars!" Best party ever, they agreed, and hoped the prince and Cindy, er, Cinderella, would be real happy. As they all agreed, they, the four mice, had made it happen.

Rat patted his belly and burped. "Yes, I hope Cindy's happy. I must say, that was the best feast I've ever been to. Ideal conditions. Cats outside. Hunting dogs on leashes! That was grand. I dragged home some extra goodies." He opened his paws and wiggled his dewclaws.

The mice squealed. "Ohh, more goodies!"

Frog hopped close to Pumpkin. "What happened?"

"Oh," the squash sighed. "Oh! Being the Coach was so exciting, flying along the road at breakneck speed. Mice, you did an excellent job as horses."

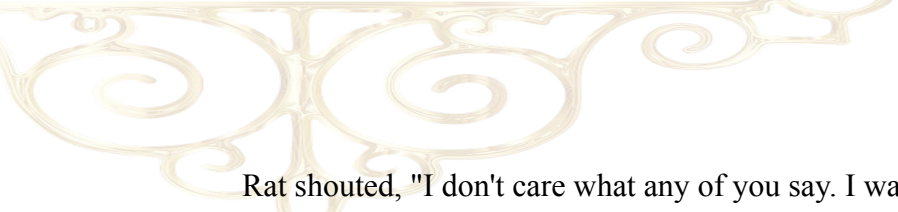
The four mice bowed, smirked, and groomed their whiskers.

Pumpkin said, "It all went off without a hitch. Until the third night. Until the clock chimed midnight, and I shivered and shuddered and quivered all over, and fell apart—and was just my old self: a big squash, parked in front of the castle. The embarrassment!"

Pumpkin sniffed. "Poor Cindy ran down the steps as her dress turned to rags! All ruined. You mice and rat and lizard scurried off. You abandoned us!"

They all cried: "What were we supposed to do?"

Pumpkin sighed. "Cindy picked me up and carried me for a while, until her arms got tired and she set me down. What was I supposed to do? I rolled back to the patch... Bumpety-bump-bump. Now I can grow even bigger and more golden and, um, become pumpkin pies. What an adventure it's been. Still, my patch is comfy. It's good to be home. The vines and nice big leaves and curlicue tendrils keep me cool when the sun's hot."



Rat shouted, "I don't care what any of you say. I was the most important one of all! As Coachman I actually got Cinderella to the actual ball."

Lizard raised his snout. "But you didn't get her home!"

Rat snorted. "I did so, every time but last night! And I warned her to get outta the palace at 10 minutes to midnight so I could give her a lift home. The warning worked the first two nights, but that third time...what a doozy! I used every hand signal I know: waving, pointing at the clock, twirling my whiskers.... She and the prince got all—distracted, all lovey-dovey! I don't care what anyone says. I'm the real hero, the star, the prince of the story! So to squeak, er, speak?"

Pumpkin frowned. "Dewclaws, you didn't get her back in time..."

Frog moved closer, raising a foreleg. "Now, now. I see there are opposing viewpoints here."

Rat huffed. "Details. Details. Fairy Godmother's magic could only last so long. It's quite a strain to keep all that hocus pocus going. She warned Cindy, too."

Pumpkin sighed. "But watching a clock shouldn't be so hard..."

The mice squeaked. "DewClaws Rat, you couldn't have driven her anywhere in that coach if it wasn't for us mice. Me and my brothers and sisters worked hard, pulling that coach! We sweated. Don't forget us! It was super exciting being big and going fast! That was the thrill of our lives! But we wanted to eat cheese, not grass like real horses do!"

"Nibble cheese, eh?" The frog's tongue flicked out, but missed a fly.

"Well!" Brown Mouse mopped her forehead. "Passing cats was terrifying...until we remembered we were big and snorted and scared 'em off! How they ran!"

The frog held up its hand like a traffic cop. "So you forgot you had been transformed?"

Rat burped. "Magic is strange stuff." He patted his belly and twirled his whiskers.

Lizard hissed and glared.

Brown Mouse squeaked. "DewClaws, admit it. You couldn't have driven her anywhere in that coach if it wasn't for us mice. Don't you dare forget us!"

Frog waved his webbed foreleg. "So this magic didn't feel natural?"

"Like Dewclaws said, Magic is funny stuff! But we'll be telling the grand-mice about this, we will. We mice were the most important part of the whole operation because we pulled Cindy's coach. If we hadn't done that she never would have gotten to the palace, let alone danced with the prince."

Lizard puffed out his cheeks. "I opened the coach door for her so she could enter the palace."

Rat sniffed. "No big deal, Liz. You and the mice had no idea how to get to the palace. But I did. Being a coachman, up on the high seat, driving an enchanted pumpkin. Cracking that whip. What a thrill, to tell the Rat Wife and grand-rats!"

Pumpkin fluttered the leaves of her vine. "Hold it! I'm the most important one here! If it hadn't been for me growing huge and golden in the pumpkin patch, there would have been no coach to take Cindy to the palace. She would not have arrived in a suitable style!"

The mice twitched their tails. Gray Mouse spoke: "Oh, fiddlesticks. You were just the coach. We pulled you and Dew Claws drove you. Pumpkin, You're just a vegetable—no offense—and you wouldn't have known how to get to the palace without us!"

Pumpkin sniffed. "Please! OK, so I have no sense of direction. Except I naturally grow toward the sunlight. Maybe I am a vegetable, but without the Fairy Godmother's magic, you mice would have

spent the night in the trap and you, Rat and Lizard, would not have become human."

Rat huffed. "OK, OK, OK. So where is the godmother now? And where's Cindy?"

"Shh," Pumpkin said. "She had to run home barefoot, poor girl! And the godmother flits here and there, you know. Appears when you least expect her."

Rat snorted and twitched his whiskers. "Typical. But poor Cindy's feet. Where are those shoes?...not there when she needed them."

Shoe peeked out at the others and yawned. "Did you say 'Shoes'? Ohhhs! I'm the shoes, and I'm the Star! How dare anyone suggest I am not dependable!"

The mice sat with forepaws folded. "What have you got to say to Cindy's feet? She may have blisters. Eh, Shoe?"

Shoe sighed. "Listen to me, all of you! She danced all night and I'm still worn out. Let's get this clear: I played the strategic part in this operation, I'll have you know. It was all part of the plan, that Cindy would have fun but get absent-minded, then dash off at the last minute, and lose my right-hand mate. Leaving Princey an absolutely, positively essential clue about who, er, whom, he had danced with at the ball. So he could track her down afterwards. Using the clue of the lost shoe. I'm the Shoe, I'm the major clue. Whoop-de-doo!"

Pumpkin looked wistful. "'Cause the prince fell in love."

Shoe tapped its heel. "Yes, precisely! And he was left holding a shoe that fits only Cindy's foot, and just between us, there are a lot of feet in this kingdom! But I and only I, am the mate to that particular shoe."

Rat twirled his whiskers. "You, Shoe, have an ego problem! Delusions of grandeur!"

The mice waved their tails. "You're a snob, Shoe!"

Shoe gestured dismissively, sticking its toe in the air. "I'm the shoe. Yes, the shoe; the most marvelous shoe and I'm a clue. Yes, I am, the most important clue. To solve the mystery: Who is the prince's love? Oh Heavens above! Just give me credit where credit is due. Ah, choo!"

"I heard something," Brown Mouse piped, "about a glass slipper!"

"Who in their right mind," all protested, "would have glass slippers? They would break!"

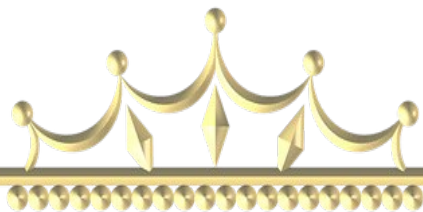
Shoe began tap-dancing. "I won't break. I'm good, solid, Cordoba leather...No one said 'glass slipper' but 'class-y slipper,' a little worse for wear, but hey, what's a scuff mark here or there? My dancing days don't have to end! It's nothing a cobbler couldn't mend."

Lizard hissed. "Please stop arguing about who's the star! Let's just wish the prince and Cinderella happy ever after. And save this story for our grand-lizards. After all, we did bring them together."

A drum roll sounded as the fairy godmother appeared in the pumpkin patch. She shook her head. "All of you! End of argument! Remember: credit where credit is due! You were a team. Be happy for them. Or, I'll turn you into snails!"

She waved her wand and disappeared in a sparkly fog.





Classics from Around the World

WINTER

by WALTER DE LA MARE

Green Mistletoe!
Oh, I remember now
A dell of snow,
Frost on the bough;
None there but I:
Snow, snow, and a wintry sky.

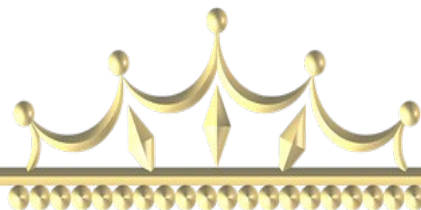
None there but I,
And footprints one by one,
Zigzaggedly,
Where I had run;
Where shrill and powdery
A robin sat in the tree.

And he whistled sweet;
And I in the crusted snow
With snow-clubbed feet
Jigged to and fro,
Till, from the day,
The rose-light ebbed away.

And the robin flew
Into the air, the air,
The white mist through;
And small and rare
The night-frost fell
In the calm and misty dell.

And the dusk gathered low,
And the silver moon and stars
On the frozen snow
Drew taper bars,
Kindled winking fires
In the hooded briers.

And the sprawling Bear
Growled deep in the sky;
And Orion's hair
Streamed sparkling by:
But the North sighed low,
"Snow, snow, more snow!"







SNOW WHITE'S APPLE

by HARLEY CAPONE

It's the day of the Valentine Ball
And I am dancing
Barefoot
In the tall grass, kissed yellow by
February's sun

A runaway princess,
Wildflower in a barren garden

At the mouth of the raging river,
White waves crash over me,
Caress the backs of my legs,
Tug at the hem of my dress,
Leaving muddy handprints
On the white linen

I should be in the castle.
Strapping into my corset cage
Slipping a pearl stringed collar
Around my throat.

But there's a fox in this forest
And his silent howl
Fills my hollow heart.

The dark eyed duke,
With his star stained smile

Bright eyed and bushy tailed,
He circles closer,
Apple in paw.
The fruit's pale green skin
flashes in the sunlight,
Flashes under my nose
When he offers it to me.


Don't you know that's how princesses get poisoned?

He chuckles

I can feel his hair against my jaw
When he leans forward,
Sinks his fangs into the soft flesh

I lay my fingers across his wrist,
Steady his grip.
And take a bite.

And just like that-
The sweet green
Glow rose red

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark dress, is sitting in a stone fireplace. A fire is burning in the hearth to her right. The background is a dark, textured wall. The title is written in a mix of serif and script fonts, with 'Happily Ever Resilient:' in script and the rest in serif. The author's name is in a script font.

Happily Ever Resilient: FAIRY TALES *and the* ORDINARY MAGIC OF RESILIENCE

by STEPHANIE GOLOWAY

*S*tarry-eyed.” “Airy-fairy.” “Head in the clouds.” These are a few of the labels that friends and colleagues have offered up when they hear of my lifelong passion for fairy tales. The only ones who have always followed me into the magical realm of our favorite story form are children. Whether three years old or teens, they’ve willingly suspended disbelief and embraced the power of these ancient tales of wonder.

That’s why I’ve been fighting the recurring backlash against sharing fairy tales with children for decades. We know fairy tales weren’t originally *for* children. Yet, they are exactly what children (and adults!) of the 21st century need to bolster our resilience.

So what’s “resilience” (besides the pandemic’s favorite buzzword)?

It’s the ability to bounce back from adversity. Dr. Ann Masten (2014) has for decades studied why some people who have experienced trauma and hardship end up successful and others don’t. She discovered that those who had the resilience to overcome obstacles have had specific kinds of experiences, experiences so common in healthy families that she calls them “Ordinary Magic.”

While our fairy tale favorites wield cloaks of invisibility, powerful incantations, and magic tablecloths to ward off danger, we mortals must make do with the non-magical tools in every triumphant heroine's deep cloak pockets. [Masten](#) (and [The Center on the Developing Child](#) at Harvard) found that resilient people had the following “protective factors” that bolstered their ability to overcome whatever obstacles they encountered: Relationships, Initiative, Executive Function Skills, Self-Regulation, and Cultural Affirmation.

Not surprisingly, fairy tales from all over the globe are rich with these treasures. Ordinary Magic plays a leading role in tales of Extraordinary Magic, too. Join me for a gaze into the magic mirror that reveals how.

RELATIONSHIPS

If fairy tales were a Facebook profile, under “Relationships,” we’d read “It’s complicated.” Kind of like, well...real life. But for every clueless father, evil stepmother and sibling out to make life miserable, there are the patient, kind ones, and, of course, the magical helpers, in human or animal guise.

Masten found that while living with a loving family is a great protective factor, having close relationships with other competent adults also nurture resilience. (I see you, fairy godmothers and random old people in the woods!) Peer friendships are also protective. What would Hansel be without Gretel (and vice versa)? “Chicken soup,” probably.

INITIATIVE

Curious, clever, willing to solve problems and take risks with agency—it’s hard to find a fairy tale hero who doesn’t show initiative. Whether it’s Sleeping Beauty who finds the *one* spindle left in all the land, or Jack who chooses to sell the cow for magic beans, no one gets to their happy-ever-after by sitting around waiting to be rescued, despite what the anti-fairy tale folks want us to believe.

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS

This sounds like a job for the Queen! Instead, it’s a cluster of three broad brain skills that help us to figure out what to pay attention to, and how to manage and use what we know. These skills go “offline” when there’s trauma or stress and are at the heart of some of our trickiest mental health challenges.

And they absolutely are key to fairy tale magic.





The “youngest brother” uses *cognitive flexibility* (i.e. thinks outside the box) when he approaches every challenge in a completely different way from his brothers, and so wins the heart of the princess. Cinderellas far and wide use their *working memory* to complete the most mundane of tasks with focus and order. So does the sister in the “Six Swans;” knitting shirts of nettles requires it in spades.

As for inhibitory control: WELL! The billy goats use it tamp down their fear of the troll, the miller’s daughter doesn’t let her anxiousness distract her from discovering Rumpelstiltskin’s name, and when Vasilisa wanders into Baba Yaga’s hut, her goal overrides any concern about what waits within.

SELF-REGULATION

Let’s talk about Cinderella here. Having the time of her life dancing and BOOM! The clock’s about to strike 12, and she skedaddles away as fast as those glass slippers can carry her. That’s some powerful self-regulation!

And she’s not alone. Every time Jack or Rapunzel’s prince hides: self-regulation! Not to mention the aforementioned sister of the swan brothers—she doesn’t say a word for years in order to save them. We should all be inspired by fairy-tale self-regulation. (And I am absolutely *not* thinking of the ice cream in my freezer right now!)

CULTURAL AFFIRMATION

“Cultural affirmation” is feeling part of something larger than ourselves. Stories play a leading role in this. No matter what our home culture, fairy tales assure us we are part of a magical web of story that connects us. And no wonder—it doesn’t matter where or when or how we live, challenge is part of our lives, and we have always told stories about how to overcome it.

BRAIN SCIENCE

And as if this weren’t all enough....guess what?! The neuro-wizards have also spoken!

Fairy tales don’t just offer us *models* for resilience. Reading or listening to them provides our brains with the same workout as real stressors do. That’s right. When we climb the glass mountain, or escape the dragon, or hide from the giant in our imaginations, the same neurotransmitters are released as if the dragon was real! And then (best part!) our brains let us know that we are safe when we come to the HEA. This offers our brains practice on how to respond more resiliently to the real stressors in our lives,

according to some very wise people. Now that's magical!

From Once Upon a Time to Happily Ever After, fairy tales offer us a way to immerse ourselves in a world out of time and place that somehow aligns perfectly with the experiences our brains need to be resilient. They offer a place for our imaginations to play and breathe deeply, and as adults, we explore these realms with eagerness and delight. For children, especially those whose lives don't include many resilience-nurturing opportunities, fairy tales are sparkling maps of possibility as they wander through dark forests.

To fairy tales! Where the ordinary magic of resilience comes wrapped in a cloak that sparkles with wonder and awe!





*The Best of
Enchanted Conversation*

PUMPKIN REVISITED

by SHARMON GAZAWAY

*T*wo little see-through heels tap
a nervous ditty on my echoing
innards—torn from my vine-friends
and homely earth, scraped
clean of gold filigree strings
and seeds, my peachy flesh
slickly cool and hollowed-out.

I just want to know
where are my seeds?

I've weathered frost
and hard-bitten midnight
under just such a moon.
It reflects my plump
orange glory, old friends
since I first cracked
the seedcase and burial chamber—
quite the transformation.
And now, this! Gaudy glitter
and in motion. Sure, this is great
but a dry and flighty business:
waiting by a wide staircase of stone
for a slight girl in fairy splendor
the secret in the clock
the mad dash, the magic hour
a thrown shoe
the drama, the tears
(heavens, even a horse can throw a shoe).

I just want to know
where are my seeds?
I'll show them some real magic.



G



MEDEA: A RETELLING

by ZOË MERTZ

Though you ever-just and honorable Greeks will never allow me to speak my case within your courtrooms, I must record it regardless, in the hopes that someone might hear. Words are the lifeline to which I've always tied my hopes, where I found comfort as a child in the dark. But since I know you already find me despicable, want to stopper your ears against any witch-speak I might utter to warp my villainy in your hero's tale, I'll frame my story thus. You Greeks like it when things come in threes. There are three almighty sons of your Titan Kronos. (Three daughters as well, but so rarely are these noted.) Three heads to your Underworld guardian, three Furies to hunt down your defiant and condemned. Three Fates to weave your pasts, presents, and futures, count the seconds of your lifeblood as the last breaths leave your lungs. So I too shall present three stories of how I came to be here, three reasons why I could never walk from your accursed courts unscathed. This tale is my defense and my damnation, the reason for my ruination. Listen closely, and you too might hear the whispers of power that words can hold.

* * *

The first reason you will never regard my defense is because I am a foreigner. You Greeks scorn my homeland but ignore that which unites us. Though I was raised far from the sunny beaches and sparkling waters that you Greeks call *civilization*, you forget that we are all human, struggling to survive and build homes together beneath the same expanses of sky.

The palace of my homeland was distant, but held dignity all the same. My father, the King Aeëtes, was son of your Titan Helios—forgotten in the face of newer, wilier gods, but still a possessor of wisdom and might, and the city of Colchis was accordingly prosperous. I was raised a princess, hidden away within a court of political drivel and coy smiles. As descendants of gods, my father treated our upbringing with the utmost of care. My brothers and I carried ichor in our veins, and this wasn't to be treated lightly. This meant that my mother had far more of a role in raising us than many a queen in your Grecian cities, nursing us each at her breast. She was tasked by our father with the supervision of our tutelage, as no servant could be properly trusted. But just as my brothers learned to war and fight and shout, my mother ensured I learned to wield a different sort of sword. Writing unlocked for me the power of language ensnared within a single phrase. I remember tracing on my thigh our native tongues of Anatolia and your letters of Greece, bearing me through many a night of watching noblewomen at their looms. I would practice everywhere, making up rhymes, tracing soft songs and stories in the dirt as I watched the birds flit amongst the lushness of our gardens. And the plants would respond—a twitch of a leaf, the change of a hue. Soon, I taught myself to hone the power my written words yielded, to direct their energy using my voice alone.

I was eight years old when my father first started to discuss my marriage. Though more educated than most other girls in my position, I was still the daughter of a king, and my destiny was prewritten. Sternly, I was instructed to keep my head down, only speaking when spoken to as my father began parading suitors before me. I obeyed, but the task proved difficult. No prince or nobleman wanted a sullen wife who muttered charms under her breath and had earth constantly beneath her nails. Years passed with no proposals, much to my father's frustration, but secretly, I was glad. As tedious as I found palace life, my desires for adventure were too expansive for a future shut away in a nobleman's home.

Then he came. Jason was a prince unlike any other who had knelt before my father's throne. He

had tasted the salt of far-away oceans, and his stories were rich with the currency of the strange and fantastic. From my seat atop the dais, I was spellbound as he and his Argonauts presented their plea. I already knew what my father's answer would be. Unlike his daughter, whom he would eagerly trade for riches and esteem, his Fleece he would never part with. But Aeëtes was his father's son, and the gods prided themselves on never making life simple for heroes. I could already predict the outcome of my father's scheme as he explained to the Argonauts what foolish tasks he had set, and sent them, unsuspecting, back to their ship.

As a woman in a courtroom dominated by men, I was as much a part of the background as any fresco or pitcher of wine. I had long ago discovered that as long as I was quiet, held my tongue, I could lurk unnoticed for hours, hoarding every scrap of information beyond the droning of boorish princes and the working of women at looms. That night, I listened as my father boasted to his nobles, laying out every step of his plan to enact the young hero's humiliation. In all my time growing up in the palace, I had dreamt of such an opportunity: the chance to change the course of my fate, live a life not of restraint and oblivion, but freedom. And Jason was my key to it all.

I still don't know where I found the courage to make my choice that night. Perhaps it was the workings of gods, twisting the strings of my naïve, stupid heart. Perhaps it was the strangeness in me, the witchery that yearned for something more than the life I was granted. But when the stars began to shine in the sky, preserving forever their outlines of lost heroes and adventures long past, I knew what I had to do. I pocketed the herbs that would prove most useful and slipped through the palace gates towards the harbor where I knew a ship would be waiting.

* * *

The second reason I am fated never to be judged fairly is due to my sorcery. How you men do hate it when someone, particularly a woman, possesses something you do not, and so you warp it into something wicked. My magic has become an unholy thing, a blasphemy of a god's blessing. What kind of woman holds the power of life and death on her lips? Even my name in your tongue reflects your twisted perception of my power: *mēdesthai*: "to contrive, plot, contemplate." But my mother chose my name for another meaning. *Medea*, she once whispered into the dark tufts of my curls as I fed at her chest. *Medicine-worker*. How horrified she'd be at what my concoctions have become.

I remember the day I left Colchis more clearly than any other. Isn't that often the case with life changing moments? Either they disappear in a flash, or they're forever imprinted on the lids of your eyes whenever you try to shut out the world. For the first time in my life, I had betrayed my father, letting loose the rebellion that had always chafed at the edges of our years together. Standing aboard the deck of the Argo, Jason's companions shouting around me, I felt dizzy: drunk with my newfound freedom, inebriated by the power that still thrummed in my veins from the magic I had performed, more splashy and spectacular than any I had ever before dared.

I clutched the sturdy wood of the prow, eyes shut, feeling the rise and fall of the waves beneath me and trying to steady myself by concentrating on the wind off the open sea. Already, it felt wilder than the breezes that passed through our courtyards at home, which were lazy with the perfumes of flowers and the warmth of sunshine. But then, I caught a different scent, like oil and grapes left to bake in the sun, and I opened my eyes to find Jason beside me.

His skin was tanned, nearly as brown as mine. The black bristles of his beard were unkempt, as though he was too busy with adventure for any kind of proper grooming. He was perhaps a bit rugged, his smile a little too crooked, to be the hero from my childhood stories, but all the same, the sight of him shot a thrill down my spine. He'd escaped, and I was the reason.

"Medea," he said, and I savored the sound of my name on his lips. "I'm afraid I must ask for your help once more."

That was when I noticed the sounds of the men's shouting had turned from the usual call-and-response workings of a ship to those of alarm. I whipped around, nearly losing my balance, searching for the cause. Jason reached out, steadying me, and extended a finger towards the ship's stern.

There. Sails of my father's fleet, his grandest ship in the lead. There was only one man Aeëtes would ever trust to captain that vessel: my brother Absyrtus, his eldest son.

I turned to Jason. "That's my brother's ship."

Jason's face yielded no surprise, but a slight smirk crossed his lips. His dark eyes glittered in the Aegean sun. "Your father never intended to allow me to escape with my prize."

Though I knew it was the Fleece he spoke of, I couldn't help but smile. "And he'll never see it returned to him."

"Nonetheless, his pursuit is worrisome. We've lost too many good men to this journey already."

Jason's gaze met mine then, capturing me, ensnaring me, and I could see the beginnings of a plot in his eyes. I had glimpsed the same look in the eyes of too many suitors over the years. Dark intentions are always the hardest to hide. "What do you suggest?" I asked him, forcing away the quaver in my voice.

"Aeëtes has already proven his blatant disregard for the talents and care of his daughter," Jason began, and I felt my cheeks warm with his praise. "But what of his son?"

"Absyrtus is my father's pride, his heir," I said to him. "But you know this already."

And then, with a jolt like a bolt of lightning, the rest of Jason's scheme took form in my mind. "No," I stammered. "You couldn't."

Jason knew how to twist words towards his purposes, and he'd had far more practice than I. "But you can, Medea. Think of it. With your father's fleet behind us, we don't stand a chance. The Argonauts are warriors, but we've been long at sea, and your father has the might of an army behind him. It's the only way for the mission to succeed—and for your great sacrifice to be worthwhile. One life for many." He let his arms slip around my waist, and I could feel him, pressed up against me as he murmured in my ear. "It's the only way I can protect what I love."

A part of me was repulsed, wanting to draw away from him, dive into the sea and swim to where there was no talk of gods and heroes, nothing but fish and the gentle rocking of waves. But the strong cords of his arms held me fast, and I felt myself sinking into his warmth, his reassurance. Without my even summoning it, a spell started to take form, seeping from whatever reservoirs stored my magic, a glittering knot hovering several feet above the deck. I could feel the tension in his muscles, his breath hot on my neck. "You shall be our savior, Medea."

I shut my eyes tight, so I could no longer see the frantic Argonauts, or the ship in pursuit, or Jason's arms tight around me. An image of my brother in childhood surfaced, his sneer as I attempted to

lift the sword he trained with, the dagger of his mirth when I had tried to be strong. If this was to be the price of my freedom, then I had to be bold, step onto the battlefield. It was what a hero would do. I whispered a single word, a command. A shriek pierced the sky.

Jason brushed a hand across my cheek, cradling it for a moment, and I leaned desperately into the roughness of his palm. But then he strode off to discuss routes with his helmsman. Back to Greece, his home. I was left watching my brother's ship set down anchor, unable to look away as his crewmen frantically dove towards the scarlet-stained sea.

Before that day, I had always seen my magic as an extension of my cleverness, a way for me to push back at the ties of the world that had tried to bind me. Even helping Jason outsmart my father's trials had been trickery, harmless cunning. But now, my magic had mutated into something dark and oily. I could feel blood on the palms of my hands, sticky and smelling of copper, thick with added ichor. I touched my fingers to the tip of my tongue, willing it to be only phantom. And I clamped down a hold on my despicable magic, shoving it down to the depths of my soul.

* * *

The final reason I will never be worthy of your mercy is because I am a woman. You hate me for this as much as my barbarity, fear this more than my sorcery. The destruction of a household is the most egregious act of which a woman is capable, beyond your ability or willingness to comprehend. If one woman revolts, what's to stop them all from doing so? I must be the creature of your nightmares. But do you really think I am so driven by rage and hatred as to rip apart my family, the thing I love most in this gods-forsaken world? Let us step away for a moment from the sorry end of my tale, and let me tell you a different story. Stories of the hearth and home are too docile and mundane for even the least imaginative of your bards, but these are the women's tales, unsung, unspoken, and it is this story that you must understand.

After Jason and I settled in Corinth, our adventures seemed through. The Argonauts scattered, many off to find quests where they were the heroes, rather than just another member of the crew. I understood their desires for glory, but after my ordeal in escaping my homeland and the ensuing tragedies in the home of Pelias, I was ready to seek solace and peace.

The home Jason and I built was beside the sea. Life was quiet there. I could smell the salt in the air, a constant reminder of freedom and its cost. Though Jason had the occasional visitor, I had no one but him. He took such care, at first, to ensure I was happy. He knew I had been raised on myths and legends and shared with me all the stories he could, from fragments sold at marketplaces to tales he could recall from the palace of his own youth. Before long, I felt the stirrings in my belly of one child, then another. At night, we told our boys the same stories we'd been raised on. We saved our own tragedy, telling each other we'd wait until they were grown. The innocence of childhood is such a fragile thing, and neither of us wanted to be the first to shatter it.

On our last night together, before our world dissolved into suffering that puts the likes of the River Acheron to shame, I was sitting on the beach. Jason didn't like me to be outside our home without supervision, but there were small rebellions I refused to relinquish. Without looking up, I knew just where to lay my head in the crook of his shoulder as he settled himself next to me. We had long since reached the point where we could sit as companions, no words necessary to bridge the silence between

us. *Besides, Jason would tease me, your wit has come too far since we met. I know no other woman that could match me in a quarrel of tongues.* He would draw me close to him, nuzzling my neck. *Shall we test this theory?* Our conversation usually stopped there.

That night on the beach, something was different. After barely a minute, Jason stirred, absently taking my hands in his own, toying with my fingers like threads on a loom. “Do you remember the first day I met you?”

What prompted this memory? We weren’t ones for reminiscing. “You were a dashing young hero,” I quipped, trying to keep my tone light, evade any strangeness that had infiltrated our evening. “And I your weapon.”

“Wickeder than any a blade,” he replied. And then: “Do you ever wish we’d never ceased our adventures?”

“Adventure was all that I longed for in youth,” I responded. “And I found it. With you.”

He pulled his hands away from mine then, sweeping them through his tangle of hair. “But years have passed. Don’t you ever think to the future? What of our boys?”

“They will have their turn.” I tried to take his hands again, but he seemed out of reach, and my fingers caught nothing but air. “What prompts this, Jason? They are still only children. They are not ready to face the hardships that prowl this world.”

“You’d rather have them live within stories,” he scoffed. “Wasn’t that what you always hated about your father’s palace?”

I flared. My fingernails bit into my palms, toes curling in the sand. “My father would’ve had me trapped, yoked to some brute of a husband who would use me for nothing but weaving and children until I was a husk.”

I saw the ghost of a smirk. He’d been trying to provoke me. “Don’t we want more than that for our sons? They are not simple farmworker’s boys, with nothing more to inherit than a house by the shore. They are the blood of gods and kings. As you and I are.”

“For now, the best we can give them is a place of comfort and safety. They will have their glory someday.” About this, I was adamant. I wasn’t ready to give my boys over to the Fates. But Jason wasn’t satisfied.

“What if there was a way to have everything? The precious safety you covet, the glory we deserve. And legacy, a legacy worthy of our deeds, for our sons to inherit.” He was standing now, his tunic billowing, a silhouette against the blackness of sea and sky.

“But how much would be for them?” I stood too, facing him, but distant enough that he couldn’t use his height to diminish me. “We both know you Greeks will never see me as one of you. I’ve made my peace with that. But tell me, truly, that this is not some selfish fantasy. If it is all for our boys, I will support you. You know I would confront the gods themselves for their sake.”

When someone is your entire world for as long as Jason had been mine, you can’t help but learn their unspoken language. I didn’t need words to tell what was written, bold as the stars, across his face. Jason couldn’t promise me, just as all of his promises would turn out to be nothing but whispers on wind. He was blinded by his image of glory, but such glory came at a cost—there was always a cost. What would the price be of Jason’s ambition? I vowed then that my sons would not be the ones to pay.

No child deserves the expense of their parent's folly. Who was I as a mother if I wasn't willing to bear this weight in their stead?

"You never could settle for anything but greatness, could you?" I heard my words as though from a distance: flat, sardonic, cold as the depths of the sea.

"Isn't that what being a hero means?" There it was—the gleam in his eye, the shards of a dark mania I'd only ever glimpsed over our years together. Even now, long grown from the girl I was, it still terrified me. He would do what he wanted, whatever the cost. And then he was gone, back into the house, maybe, or strode off down the beach, impelled by whatever restless fire consumed him. After a minute or two gazing out towards the surf, imagining phantom ships there, I made my way back inside.

I had a ritual that I had followed for years. Each night before retiring to the blissful nothingness of my own dreamscapes, I would stand vigil for a moment over my slumbering sons. Though I knew firsthand how rarely the gods listened, I would murmur prayers, the only ones I would ever utter, over their sleeping forms.

I wish for you to grow strong and healthy. I wish for you to know right from wrong. I wish for you to forgive those who have wronged you. I wish for you to be safe, safe, safe.

* * *

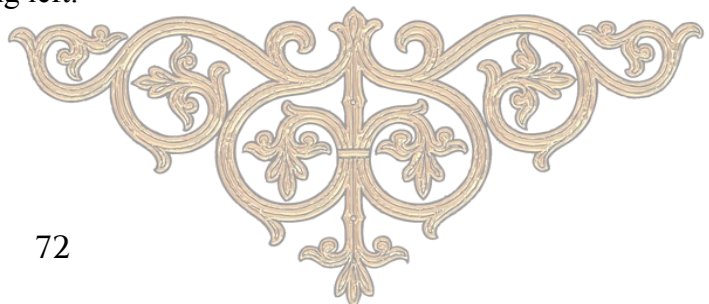
In the end, my tale comes down to its bloody conclusion. Even stories of my past can never excuse what we all know has transpired. I will never stop paying the price that my freedom cost.

But however despicable you might think me for ending the lives of my darling boys, know that I have already thought of myself tenfold. You forget: I have seen more of this world than your typical wife or daughter, properly settled at looms, away from the gaping maws of monsters just outside their doors. The wind has lashed at my cheeks as the sea breeze tore me away from my homeland, and the promises of men have left slashes across the surface of my heart. I am wretched and world-weary and so utterly alone.

Now, my sons shall not grow to be broken as I was, or to do the breaking, as others have done to me. In life, they would have known nothing but suffering: abused and abandoned in the home of Jason's new bride, little more than glorified slaves beside his future heirs, who will be unsoiled by the bloodline of an immigrant witch. Their deaths were as serene as the slaughter of a sacrificial creature: a blessing in disguise. What hand is kinder than a mother's to see them from this torturous life? Now, they will achieve Elysium. Live forever in Paradise, far from the tortures of this hell we call Earth. I have protected them in the only way left to me, the final way I knew how.

My beautiful boys. Gone. Safe, but out of reach. I shall never again hear their happy laughter, never feel the tug of their tiny hands on mine. Never kiss their sweet cheeks as they play in the sand, the salty sea air weaving through their soft locks, dousing them with the scent of freedom. So condemn me after all. I shall no more resist you. Tie a noose around my neck, leave my body as a warning for the next woman who dares try and face this world. I hope she meets an end more fortunate than I.

I have nothing more to say. I have nothing left.





*The Best of
Enchanted Conversation*

FAERY FEAST

by DEBORAH SAGE

*T*he faery-folk come to sing and sup
Of mulled cider in an acorn cup.

Round laden table of birch and pine
They come at dusk to dance and dine

On wood-ear stem and chanterelle cap.
Toffee pudding and maple sap,

Roasted squash and toasted seed.
Golden pumpkin and honeyed mead.

Walnut cake and ginger bread,
Mincemeat scone with hawthorn spread.

Savories of rosemary and silver sage;
Succulent sweets from an ancient page.

Vanilla, clove and cinnamon bark
Tempt to taste as descends the dark.

From mossy branches in pale moonlight,
Spruce and cedar scent the night.

For the faery feast on midwinter's eve,
In a woodland realm by Titania's leave.

CONTRIBUTORS



CRANBERRIES IN THE SNOW - 7

Kelly Jarvis is the Special Projects Writer and Contributing Editor for *The Fairy Tale Magazine*. Her work has appeared in *Eternal Haunted Summer*, *Blue Heron Review*, *Forget-Me-Not Press*, *Mermaids Monthly*, *The Chamber Magazine*, and *Mothers of Enchantment: New Tales of Fairy Godmothers*. She teaches at Central Connecticut State University.

Image: Amanda Bergloff



BLUE-PLATE SPECIAL - 15

Marcia A. Sherman writes alternative fairy tales, folklore, and mythology. Other works include a children's picture book *The Splendid, Blended Family* and essays for Llewellyn Worldwide. Marcia is currently compiling her fiction for a book and continues work on her novel of a Wiccan family set in the distant future.

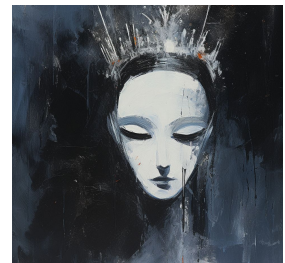
Image: Amanda Bergloff



A MIRROR AND ITS FRAGMENTS - 20

Georgia Cook is an illustrator and writer from London. She has written for publications such as *Baffling*, *Luna Station Quarterly*, and *Vastarien Lit*, as well as the *Doctor Who* range with *Big Finish*. She also frequently writes and narrates for horror anthology podcasts such as *Creepy*, *The Other Stories*, and *The Night's End*.

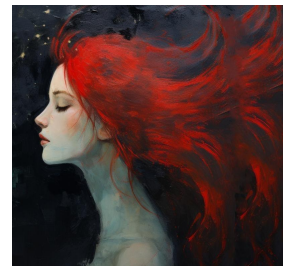
Image: Amanda Bergloff



THE FAE QUEEN'S WISH - 26

Paul Stansbury is a lifelong native of Kentucky. He is the author of the four volume *Inversion* anthology series, and *Down By the Creek – Ripples and Reflections*. His poetry has appeared in *The Rising Phoenix Review*, *Young Ravens Literary Review*, *Strange Poetry*, *Eskimo Pie*, and *Kentucky Monthly*. Most recently, his poem "The Daughters of Artargatis" appeared in *Merciless Mermaids: Tails from the Deep*.

Image: Amanda Bergloff



HANNIA AND THE HANUKKAH ELVES - 29

Darren Lipman is a high school math teacher and writer in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. His fiction has appeared in the *Eastern Iowa Review* and is forthcoming in *Literally Dead 2: Tales of Holiday Hauntings*. He is a member of Wulf Pack Writers.

Image: Pexels



CONTRIBUTORS



MARCH, APRIL, MAY - 33

Hannah Runkle and Lisa Visek are a busy mother-daughter team living in North Carolina who enjoy crafting and creating throughout the Wheel of the Year, Hannah, 34, is all about all things spooky creepy, and scary. And Lisa, at 60, love things fairy, fairy tale, and shenanigans.

Image: Ivan Bilibin

THE FAIRY TALE ART OF KINUKO Y. CRAFT- 34

By Kelly Jarvis

Images Courtesy of Kinuko Y. Craft

LOST DREAMS - 37

Jo de Groot lives in the Canadian prairies in a small basement apartment that she tries to think of as a Hobbit hole. She spends far too much time reading, dreaming, and thinking about writing, and not enough time going on adventures, eating cake, or actually writing.

Image: Edward Frederick Brewtnall

THE WINTER-SPRITE AND HIS VISITOR - 38

A Classic Norse Tale

Image: Pixabay

TIN SOLDIER - 41

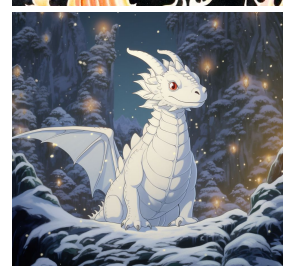
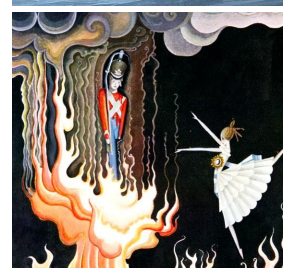
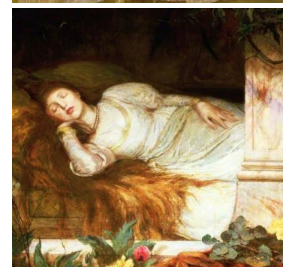
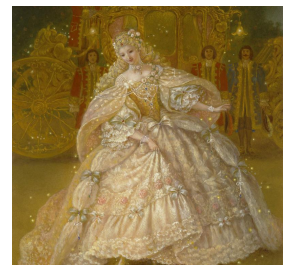
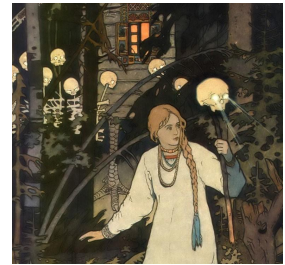
Julie Shiel lives in Maryland with a ginger feline fluffball and a dilute tortie that keeps him in line. She has crows named Zoltan and Zelda that visit her just to tease the cats. Her work appears in or will appear in issues of *Strange Horizons*, *Space & Time Magazine*, *HFQ*, *Penumbric* and others. When not writing she grows a moon garden and communes with her local murder of crows.

Image: Kay Nielsen

PRESENT - 42

Madeline Mertz is a student in Creative Writing at Truman State University as well as an editorial intern at *The Fairy Tale Magazine* and author of the novel, *Rebuilding Atlantis*. She enjoys all forms of fantasy and fairy tales, preferring to read them in front of a fire.

Image: Amanda Bergloff



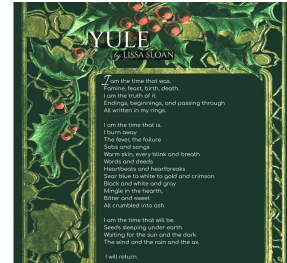
CONTRIBUTORS



YULE - 45

Lissa Sloan is the author of *Glass and Feathers*, a novel that tells the story of Cinderella after the “happily ever after.” The Enchanted Press will publish it next February.

Image: Public Domain Review



GOTHIC FAIRY TALES - 46

Dr. Sara Cleto and Dr. Brittany Warman are award-winning folklorists, teachers, and writers with over 150 publications. Together, they founded [The Carterhaugh School of Folklore and the Fantastic](#), where they teach creative souls how to re-enchant their lives through folklore and fairy tales. Their fiction and poetry can be found in *Uncanny Magazine*, *Apex Magazine*, *Gingerbread House*, and others.

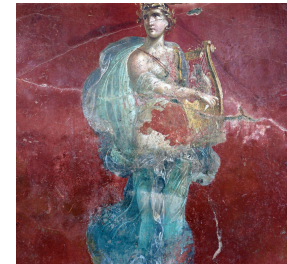
Images: Louis Daguerre, Gustave Dore, Walter Crane, Gustave Dore



ERATO'S SERENADE - 51

Thomas Koron was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan on May 19, 1977. He has attended Grand Rapids Community College, Aquinas College, Western Michigan University, Northern Illinois University and the American Conservatory of Music. His previous literary projects include poetry, plays and short stories. He lives in the Chicago metropolitan area.

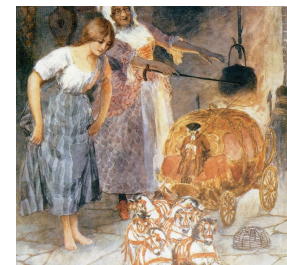
Image: Original fresco from a villa in Pompeii



CINDERELLA: AN EXPOSE - 53

Salinda Tyson's stories appear in Flame Tree's *Urban Crime* anthology, *Triangulation: Dark Skies*, *Shadows in Salem*, *Cricket*, and elsewhere. A lifelong fan of mythology, fractured fairy tales, and fantasy, she lives on the East Coast but misses the foggy Pacific summers and the mournful sound of foghorns, she enjoys community and readers' theater.

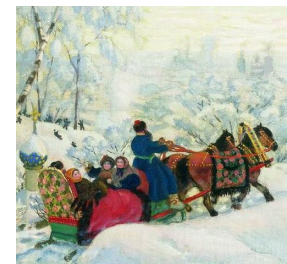
Image: William Henry Margetson



WINTER - 57

Classic poetry by Walter De La Mare, 1906

Image: Boris Kustodiev



CONTRIBUTORS



SNOW WHITE'S APPLE - 59

Born under a Taurus sun, planted on old New England soil, **Harley Capone** is an emerging storyteller and poet. "Snow White's Apple" is her first published poem.

Image: Amanda Bergloff



HAPPILY EVER RESILIENT: FAIRY TALES & THE ORDINARY MAGIC OF RESILIENCE - 62

Dr. Stephanie Goloway believes in the magic of fairy tales, imagination, and play. Happily-ever-retired from teaching wonder-ers aged three to 83, she lives in an enchanted cottage on Lake Erie, and is the author of *Happily Ever Resilient: Using Fairy Tales to Nurture Children Through Adversity*. www.imaginationonthemove.com

Images: Valentine Cameron Prinsep, Alexander Zick, Harry Clarke, Margaret Price



PUMPKIN REVISITED - 65

Sharmon Gazaway writes from the deep south. Her poetry is featured in Rhonda Parrish's anthology, *Dark Waters*. Her work has also appeared in *The Forge*, *Daily Science Fiction*, *New Myths*, *Love Letters to Poe*, *microverses.net*, *Octavos*, *The Society of Classical Poets Journal IX*, *Backchannels*, and elsewhere.

Image: Picryl



MEDEA: A RETELLING - 61

Zoë Mertz is currently pursuing her MFA in fiction at Emerson College in Boston. She also enjoys martial arts, embroidery, and wandering around her native Pacific Northwest. Her story "Pacific Grays and Blues" recently appeared in *Lunch Ticket*. She is excited to share writing with readers of the wider world.

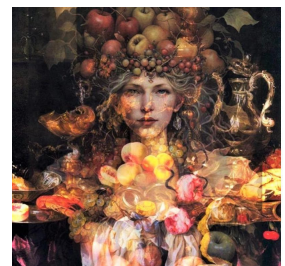
Image: Anselm Feuerbach



FAERY FEAST - 73

Deborah W. Sage is a native of Kentucky, USA. She has most recently been published in *Enchanted Conversation: A Fairy Tale Magazine*, *Eternal Haunted Summer*, *Literary LEO*, *Fairy Tale Magazine*, *From the Farther Trees*, the 2022 *Dwarf Stars Anthology* and *Amethyst Press*, *All Shall Be Well* anthology for Julian of Norwich.

Image: Amanda Bergloff



CONTRIBUTORS



A WINTER'S SPELL- 5 & 79 ART DIRECTOR

Amanda Bergloff is a graphic designer and digital/mixed media artist whose cover and interior art has been published in the Jules Verne Society's *Extraordinary Visions*, *Tiny Spoon Literary Magazine*, *Utopia Science Fiction*, *Mud Season Review*, *The Sprawl Magazine*, *200 CCs*, *The Horror Zine*, *Crimson Dreams*, and other publications.

Twitter: [@AmandaBergloff](https://twitter.com/AmandaBergloff)

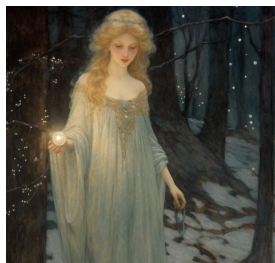
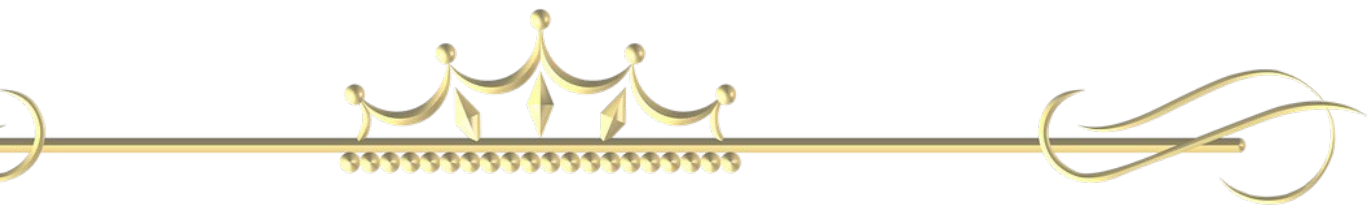
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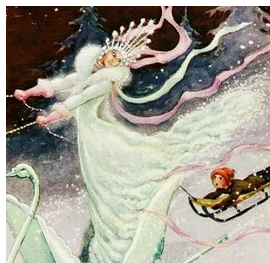
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Kate Wolford is the publisher and editor of *The Fairy Tale Magazine*. She's been publishing new fairy tale inspired poems and stories for over 15 years. Kate is a grandmother of two and lives with her husband, Todd, and beagle, Clementine, in the Midwest.

Image: Amanda Bergloff




Amanda Bergloff Designs



Rudolph Koivu



Artus Scheiner



Of fire and frost
Of bone and earth
Of storm and snow
A winter soul's rebirth

Of crystal and ice
Of light and dark
This spell has cast
an eternal spark

