



# THE FAIRY TALE MAGAZINE

July 2025

*The*  
Contest  
Issue

Spellbound



# THE FAIRY TALE MAGAZINE

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## CONTEST WINNERS

Poetry Winner:

Sara Cleto and Brittany Warman

Runners up in Poetry:

Murray Eiland | Helen Patrice

Prose Winner:

Alison Weber

Runners up in Prose:

Nomi Mini | Sarah Das Gupta

## ART RESOURCES

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## Cover Art

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John William Waterhouse, *A Neapolitan Flax Spinner*

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FAIRY TALE  
MAGAZINE

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



Dear Reader,

When was the last time you felt spellbound? Casting a spell does not fall solely to witches nor fairies. Writers do it regularly, too, entralling us with ideas so profound that we find their stories un-put-downable and we savor those stories to the last word.

This was my first contest as Editor in Chief of *The Fairy Tale Magazine*. We were honored to have two extraordinary fairy tale writers as our judges: Amy Trent (Prose) and Deborah Sage (Poetry). We received so many outstanding submissions that selecting just a few was a nearly impossible task. We're grateful to each one of our contest entrants. Thank you for entrusting us with your work!

Both judges were rigorous in their reading, evaluating, and decision-making process. They had incredibly positive comments for this year's entries. Amy Trent tells us, "There was so much talent in each submission, and honestly I found compelling stories, characters, perspectives, writing, and/or endings in each entry. The lines between finalists and almost finalists were often razor thin." Deborah Sage tells us of the poetry, "The final selection of runners up was quite difficult due to the overall merit of several of the poems being considered."

In "Spellbound," you'll find a cross section of tales, from the familiar to the lesser-known. There is work by Sara Cleto and Brittany Warman, Alison Weber, Murray Eiland, Helen Patrice, Nomi Mini, and Sarah Das Gupta. Among the chosen pieces, you'll find girls with glass hearts, a jinn's contemplations from within his glass prison, a wonderfully-sovereign Red Riding Hood, a Snow White continuation tale that brims with hope and help, a delightful changeling story, and a sea witch who learns something that surprises even herself as she watches her greatest spell transform more than the one who requested it. Every one of these pieces, we believe, will hold you spellbound, just as it held us.

Dear readers, our wish is for you to come to these stories with open hearts. Fairy tales are meant to be shared. They're meant to enthrall us. We hope this issue offers you stories and poems that hold you spellbound. And if they do, we hope you'll tell us all about it.

Warmly,

*Kristen Baum De Beasi*

Editor/Publisher

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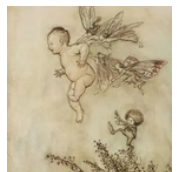
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*Congratulations to our  
Poetry winners*

## Winner in Poetry

Sara Cleto and Brittany Warman,  
Our Glass Hearts


## Runners up

Murray Eiland,  
Bottle of the Jinn

Helen Patrice,  
Summoning Red Riding Hood

# Our Glass Hearts

by Sara Cleto and Brittany Warman



Those born with glass hearts are  
Of fragile make,  
Kept cozy and cloistered,  
Wholeness bought by  
Birdsong and coffee.

For us, bells don't ring,  
The winds still.

So when our sister's heart  
Shattered on her windowsill,  
And my own heart cracked  
Under a porcelain cup,  
I thought I had to keep you  
Silent, still, so soft a rose might  
Prick your finger, so strong  
A bear might protect you.

I did not know how  
You longed to break,  
If only to live.



# Bottle of the Jinn

by Murray Eiland

In silence, I feel the weight of my past,  
Clinging like a shroud of ancient mist.  
Each memory—a pebble cast in stillness,  
Rippling outward to forgotten shores.  
Fragments of laughter linger in my mind,  
Once bright, now drowned in the encroaching dusk,  
A tapestry woven with sorrow's thread,  
Yet somehow, comfort stirs within the gloom.

What waits beyond this prison of glass?  
A master will come, bearing the key,  
Wielding wishes to unchain the dark,  
Not from a bottle sealed with despair,  
But from the depths of their own restless soul—  
A shadow craving birth upon the world,  
To dance upon the dreams of those who sleep.  
And I, a willing vessel, wait in joy.

What once was burden now becomes a gift,  
For in this solitude, I learn of power—  
Of shadows curling soft as breath,  
Uncoiling, stretching, shaping into form.  
The edges of night caress me, whispering  
Of realms unseen, where wanderers of dark  
Find solace in the hush of endless dusk,  
And echoes of the past become their song.

As I wait, alone, embraced by mist,  
I sense the shifting of the fated winds,  
An edge of something stirring in the void,  
A herald of the chaos yet to come.  
No longer bound in silence to myself,  
But ally to the whispers in the dark,  
We rise unseen, the world unknowing still—  
A waltz of shadows on the waking land.



# Summoning Red Riding Hood


by Helen Patrice

Make a circle of wolves  
in a dark forest on a moonlit night.  
Sacrifice your grandmother  
in her white nightdress.  
Catch her tears in a wine bottle,  
eat the bread meant for her table.

The woodsman as the God,  
You waiting.  
Draw down the Goddess  
in Her red robe  
with Her basket of abundance  
for She is all things coming and fertile.  
She opens the path of needles for you.  
Take it.  
It will eat you whole,  
and you will have earned the right  
to wear red.







*Congratulations to our  
Prose winners*

## Prose Winner

Alison Weber, *The Sea Witch*

## Runners up

Nomi Mini,  
*After Happily-Ever-After*

Sarah Das Gupta,  
*The Changeling*



# The Sea Witch

by Alison Weber

*In* the deepest part of the ocean plain, where seagrass waved and eels writhed in the current, a sea witch lived in exile. Far from the crystalline halls of the undersea palace, she made her home of woven grass, spindly ocean wood, and sorrow.

In that cold, dark place of sea glass and shipwrecks, she could still hear the stirrings of the court carried over the waves and the years. Ghostly grand halls and crystal ballrooms reconstructed themselves in her imagination, summoned by haunting music. And she listened to the tidings brought by the eels she tamed: a new marriage for the king, whisperings of children, of many young, beautiful daughters, each sweeter than the last.

Before she became the sea witch, she too had been a beautiful daughter. Her parents had promised she would come to love the sea king, as they had given her away to become a wife and woman. A promise unfulfilled. She had wished for daughters and sons. The sea king had demanded them. The marriage was short, childless, and ever colder. The beautiful sons and daughters never came, so her king and husband banished her to this dim, cold nothing space.



She mourned all she had lost, but unable to let it go, she cast a spell to turn the waters of her hut into a scrying pool. Ghost-like apparitions of royalty filled her sparse, empty home, dancing with the distant palace songs. She watched the children grow, each lovely in her own way, and the youngest was the most beautiful of all, with a voice like a clear bell. The sea witch grew colder and older, as the voices and visions scoured her heart like smashed coral.

The sea witch was not always alone with her illusions. She made her living on trade. The folk of the ocean made their way to her hut, bringing her their complaints and dreams. She sold them spells and potions, cures and curses, traded for babies' teeth, a lock of hair from a lover, the daggered tail of a sting ray, or sometimes just enough to feed herself and her eels. As her powers grew, the mirages filling her hut became more lifelike, until she could feel the music's vibrations and smell the palace flowers.

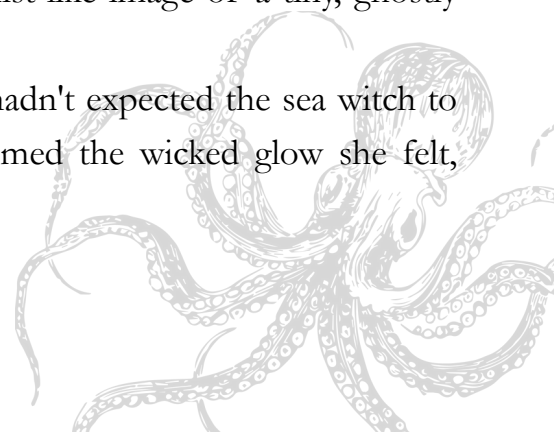
One day, her two favorite eels ushered in a beautiful little mermaid, whose face and voice revealed her as one of the king's daughters. The baby, now 18, and fresh from her first journey to the surface, as each sister had made before her. But she had gone above and fallen for a fisherman who tugged at her heart's strings the way bitterness tugged at the sea witch. His handsome, shadowed face floated in the water with the young girl's words. No longer content with the palace's glittering balls and enchanted songs, the little mermaid pleaded for magic to cross worlds and seek her love above the ocean.

Of course, the witch would help her. Of course, she would give her legs, send her up to the human world, and give her every chance to find her beloved. It would be a kindness to the lovesick girl and a delightful blow to her father, the king.

And there would be a cost. There always is. For this boon, the sea witch would have the little mermaid's voice. The sweetest of all.

With one stroke of a knife and three words from the witch, it was done. The little mermaid was cast to the surface, leaving her voice and life as a daughter of the ocean behind. The sea witch laid the voice in a shallow nacreous shell, and it sang and shaped itself with the little mermaid's happiness and sorrow. So sweet and haunting, summoning the little mermaid's longing. The sea witch waved its spell off, turning her back on the voice and the mist-like image of a tiny, ghostly mermaid as she broke the surface of seaweed and foam.

The eels' unblinking eyes held surprise and disapproval. They hadn't expected the sea witch to extract such a steep price. She never had before. Their eyes dimmed the wicked glow she felt, repaying the sea king's evil deeds in turn.



But she clung to the promise of smashing his heart. She would send small tendrils of the mermaid's voice back to the palace, to haunt and taunt him, and fuel his grief, as he had hers.

She cherished the cries and torment the waves carried back to her, and she stared into the ocean's apparitions of the sea king's aging, hollow face, feeling only malice.

And she came to cherish the daily and unending murmurings she heard from the voice in the shell. It whirled and sang, and the sea witch's scrying painted scenes of a small town surrounded by jewel-like forests and guarded against the world by glittering, snowcapped mountains. The sea witch heard and saw the little mermaid's joy and sorrow and wondered at the tiny oceans in her eyes, wetting and salting the mermaid's pillow each night.

She had never taken someone's voice before. Teeth and locks of hair were imbued with a bit of soul, certainly, but they were still, quiet things. The voice was alive. It felt close, warm and sweet, like the mermaid herself when it rang out.

It sang of the surface, and when the little mermaid stared at the nameless moon and glimmering stars, the sea witch saw them for the first time, hanging overhead in her dark home. She saw the sunrise, blue and riotous red, fading to an expansive dreaming pink, which settled over the town and sea. She heard gulls call and bells ring, and in the hearing, she saw the world under vespertine skies. She witnessed the town huddled under darkness but alight with shining windows.

The little mermaid's voice lilted with happiness, in love. It whispered in sadness and murmured soft words she couldn't say to her fisherman, stirring up little waves and whirlpools.

Stealing the voice was bittersweet. Sweet because the sea witch had a weapon against the sea king. Bitter because the mermaid's voice felt like the witch's own sorrow. The longer she listened to the little mermaid's melancholy murmurings, the less she heard the music and stirrings of the castle. And the more she listened, the more powerful her scrying grew, and the wicked glow in her heart faded. The little mermaid felt familiar, entirely unlike the selfish, imperious king. She delighted in the mermaid's experiences ashore as her voice embodied the warmth of the sun, the sand, and the fisherman's rough hands in hers.

One night, the little mermaid's voice keened and wailed, and the sea witch herself burned in heat and fear. In the water, flames of orange and red danced as the fisherman's narrow street burned. The little mermaid was trapped in his cottage with him still at sea, without a voice to scream out and save herself.



The sea witch sent a strong tendril of the voice racing through the inky water and over the waves. Enough for the little mermaid to scream and save herself. And the little mermaid did scream, full of terror and surprise. Voiceless for one second, then shrieking into a night crackling with fire, bringing the townspeople with their pails and strong arms, just before the small home roared into flame and fell into darkness.

The sea witch floated, staring at the half-empty opalescent shell. She sighed, shaking and aching with relief, rubbing a thoughtless hand over a silky eel, who wrapped himself close in the cold, darkening ocean drifts.

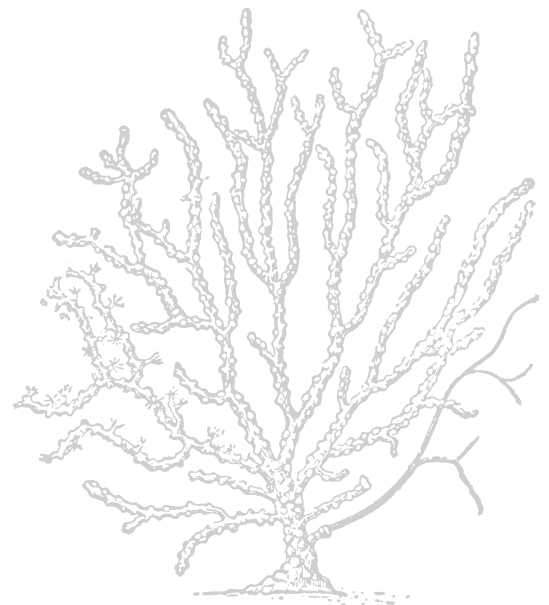
The hut grew quiet. She sent small tendrils of the captive voice over the waves to torment the sea king. She luxuriated in his pain, until it grew tiresome, then she spooled the tendrils back in, laying them back in the shell with care. She listened to the little mermaid's voice and felt her suffering. Despite the voice being weaker, the sea witch felt the mermaid's love and her despair at the destitution left in the fire's ashes.

But the mermaid had no skill and no talent to ply. She couldn't tell stories. She couldn't sing beautifully and hauntingly as the voice sang to the sea witch. One day, the voice was so sorrowful it felt like heartbreak to the sea witch. Again. As mournful as the day she had been cast off by the sea king. The little mermaid's despair filled the seagrass hut.

The sea witch released more of the voice to rush back to the little mermaid, racing on the waves, and with it, she sent a spell for strength and resilience, and her own soft words encouraging the mermaid to better her life with her fisherman.

The voice lying in the shell was a faint song then, but it thrummed with happiness and gratitude at this unexpected gift. In the hushed days that followed, the sea witch could only just hear and see her bringing her husband luck and full nets. She sang for the townspeople at the waterfront, earning coins and small goods with the enchanting joy of her song, near to but not quite the soaring tones that had rung through the crystal palace.

The sea witch knew the fisherman's dedication, and she was content that the little mermaid's heart would not harden in scarcity and abandon, as her own heart had. She held just a few tendrils of the mermaid's voice now, warm and familiar, and too precious to spend on tormenting the king.



The little mermaid and her fisherman prospered. And one day, the sea witch heard a murmuring of a baby coming. This hurt the sea witch more than anything, and she pressed her hands to her sagging belly. The little mermaid would get to hold, feed, and rock a child as the sea witch never had. It was almost too much to bear for the sea king's daughter to have this gift.

But the little mermaid was gentle, and young, and joyous with the promise of new life. Sighing, the Sea Witch ran her hand through the last tendrils left of the little mermaid's voice. She released it, sending it racing across the sea-green expanse with her apology and hopes for the mermaid, her fisherman, and their child to always live in joy and love.

The mother-of-pearl shell was empty. And the witch was alone again, bereft of any remainder of the little mermaid's presence. The days were quiet and still, except for the sea witch's eels and meager trade. But on some nights, as the sun went down, she could hear echoes of the voice. Soft songs, lullabies, and tender gratitude streamed from the surface above, riding the waves to light a faint glow in her seagrass hut on the deepest, darkest part of the ocean plain.





After

# Happily-Ever-After

by Nomi Mini



## Author's Note

*"After Happily-Ever-After" opens where the traditional fairytale shuts its gilded cover: after the heroine rides off into the sunset with her prince. It follows Snow White — now queen, wife, and learner — through the quiet, everyday trials that fairy-tale endings usually leave unsung: frozen harvests, gossiping tongues, and the hard, tender work of governing with grace. In this story, Snow grapples with poisons subtler than enchanted apples and finds the antidotes — compassion, partnership, and self-belief — that make "ever after" a daily choice, rather than a final destination.*

Snow White rarely spoke her own name. It was something other people said — two words called out in affection or mockery, or laced with awe or disbelief. A name that had, for as long as she could remember, carried expectation.

She had been named for purity, for fairness, for something untouched. But life had touched her. Fear had stung her. Loss had shaped her. And yet, people still spoke her name as if she were made of spun sugar, something delicate, something *unmarked*.

Tonight, she felt the weight of it.

It was the night of Snow White and Prince Florian's crowning as King and Queen-Consort. The ball was already underway in the great hall, but she had needed a moment to breathe. So she stole out to wander the castle corridors alone, her silken sleeves whispering against the stone walls. The music, the conversation — it had felt too thick, too heavy with unspoken judgments.

Earlier, an old noblewoman had taken her hand, patted it gently, and murmured, *You are lucky, my dear. To be so cherished despite your simplicity.*

Snow had smiled — because that was what was expected.

Now, she clenched her hands at her sides. Simple? Was it simple to survive betrayal? Was it simple to be hunted, to be poisoned, to rise again and *still* choose to be kind?

She slipped into the long gallery, staring at her reflection in the old gilded mirror. It had once belonged to her stepmother. Now, stripped of its cruel enchantments, it was just an ordinary mirror — standing mute; its glass dark as a winter pond. Yet when she drew closer, torch-flames quivered behind the pane, and for a second, she fancied that she could feel the old intelligence lingering, curious.

She traced the wooden frame with her fingertips. How often had her stepmother stood here, demanding answers? *Who is the fairest?* As if fairness — beauty, power, worth — could be measured in a single word. Snow White had never asked the mirror anything before. She had never needed to.

But tonight, she wished it could speak.

She had spent the evening in the banquet hall, smiling, laughing, smoothing over tension between guests who could not seem to sit at the same table without biting words. It was always her role, wasn't it? The peacemaker. The gentle one. She had overheard one of the noblewomen whisper it behind her fan. *Snow White is too soft. She will never be a queen who commands respect.*

She looked at her reflection now, trying to spot the weakness they saw. *Too soft?* She did not feel soft. She felt *tired*.

She closed her eyes.

In her mind, she was not in a castle. She was in a forest, cold and terrified, running from a huntsman's blade. She was kneeling on a stone staircase, scrubbing it clean with her arms in rags. She was standing in the darkness of a poisoned sleep, waiting for the world to return.

She had survived.

She opened her eyes.

'Soft,' she murmured. 'What a strange word for someone who lived through all of that.'



The first year of marriage was the hardest.

Snow White had thought herself prepared. She had known, in theory, that life in a castle would be different from one in a tiny cottage in the forest. But she had imagined the transition as a radiant unfolding — new joys, new comforts, all wrapped in love.

Yet love, she learned, was no shortcut through the brambles.

Florian was not unkind. He was not cruel. But he was proud in ways she had not foreseen. He had been raised to command, not to ask. He expected his word to be taken as law, even in small things, things that had nothing to do with ruling a kingdom. She had once thought his confidence was part of his charm, the natural ease of a man who had always known his place in the world. But in marriage, it could be wearisome.

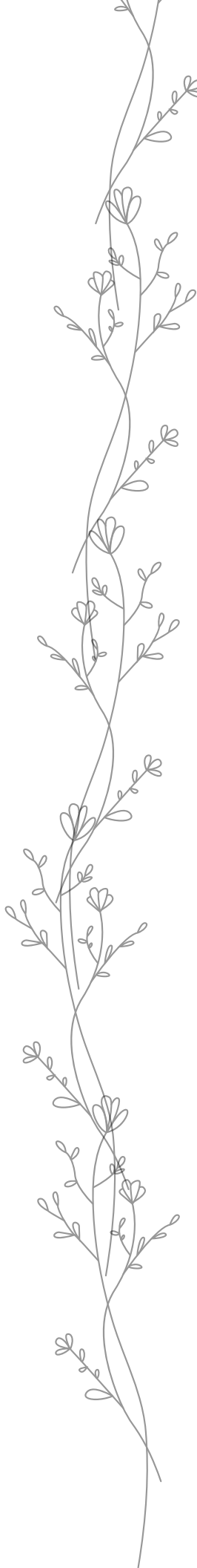
The first time she had gently disagreed with him at a royal council, he had laughed — laughed, as if she were a child playing at wisdom. Later, when she tried to explain how it had hurt, he had been bewildered.

"You are my beloved," he had said, brushing a kiss over her forehead. "What does it matter what they think?"

It mattered. She had spent too many years being silenced.

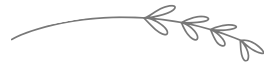
And yet —

And yet there were moments. Small ones.



He was not gentle with words, but he was gentle when he thought no one was watching. When he returned from hunting, he would kneel before his hounds and rub their ears with a boyish affection. He never noticed when his hands got dirty, not with ink, not with mud. When a tired servant stumbled as she poured his wine, he did not berate her, only caught the goblet before it fell. He did not apologize for his temper, but when he saw she was upset, he would find some small, quiet way to make amends. A ripe peach left by her plate at breakfast, because he knew she liked them. A new spindle delivered to the castle weaver after she had mentioned how worn the old one was.

Marriage, she decided, was like tending a tricky orchard: pruning pride, watering grace, accepting seasons of barrenness, trusting blossom to return. She sang while she worked — not because life was perfect, but because she thought her song might cast sun on roots waiting to grow.



Mid-winter cracked the kingdom like glass. Ice locked the southern roads, and grain shrank by the hour. While councillors argued numbers, Snow White leaned over the maps and guessed at distances — guessed wrong — and the first relief cart she commissioned froze a mile short of the river. Shamed by the sight of it, she took her cloak and rode out herself.

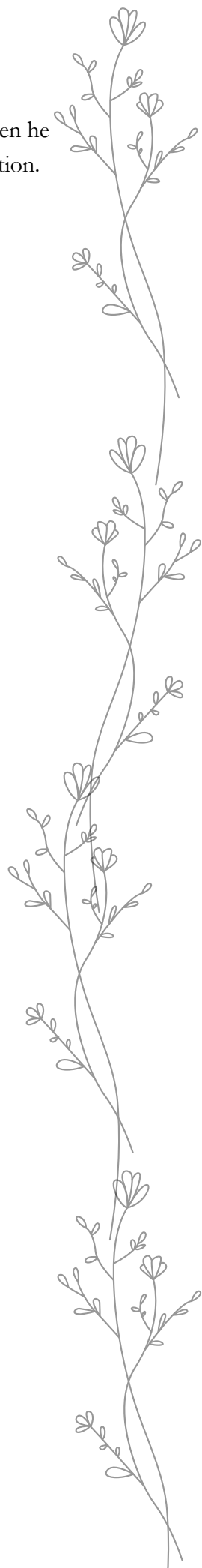
Briar Hollow — the kingdom's poorest province — met her with shuttered windows and thin smoke. She had carried only the food packed for her own journey, and that vanished by noon. The village baker chided her for poor planning; Snow listened, cheeks hot, and wrote a better list of rations beside the fire.

Each day brought her fresh missteps. Gathering every child for herb foraging left the schoolroom empty. Burning green pine blackened the bread. She turned every error into a question, and every question drew another neighbour into the work. She learnt to speak of partnership, not charity; the proud smith who refused her help relented when she asked him to mend the infirmary hinges in exchange.

On the third evening King Florian arrived with wagons of grain and a retinue thick with protocol. He found dough rising on every hearth and the Queen scraping soot from her gloves. She met him by the half-thawed river.

"You've done what my ledgers never could," he said, as the air filled with the scent of bread and the clanking of ladles.

"Not done — doing," she smiled, showing him pages crossed with mud-stained sums. "Come see where I miscounted."





He followed her back through lantern-lit lanes. They compared notes and laughed at mistakes, and his wonder settled into respect. He bowed, not as king but as man to woman, and the villagers watching knew what the court would soon learn: their Queen's gentleness could marshal armies of goodwill swifter than swords.



Through it all, she did not forget her oldest companion — the forest. Snow White had always spoken to the animals, but more than that, she had *listened*.

Once, she stole out of the castle at dawn. Her cloak trailed over the damp grass and her breath curled in the crisp air. The world had not yet fully woken, but the forest was never truly asleep. Magpies rustled in the branches. A red squirrel darted across a mossy log. Somewhere deep in the undergrowth, a fox yawned.

Snow knelt by the riverbank and dipped her fingers into the cool water. A moment later, a fawn emerged from the trees, its delicate legs quivering as its eyes met hers.

"There now," she whispered. "I won't hurt you."

The fawn blinked, uncertain, then lowered its head to drink.

Snow smiled.

People often thought she *commanded* the animals, as if she possessed some strange magic that bent them to her will. But it was nothing like that. She never commanded. All she did was listen and let them be. The twitch of a hare's ear told of a storm two valleys away; the swivel of a kestrel's head marked the hour more faithfully than any bell. She fed those quiet facts into the arithmetic of ruling: when to sow barley, when to mend the south bridge before spring floods. Court scribes marvelled at her uncanny foresight; they never guessed it came feather-borne and paw-spoken.

A soft snuffling noise broke out. A family of hedgehogs was waddling out from a hollow in a tree, the mother pausing to watch Snow with bright, wary eyes.

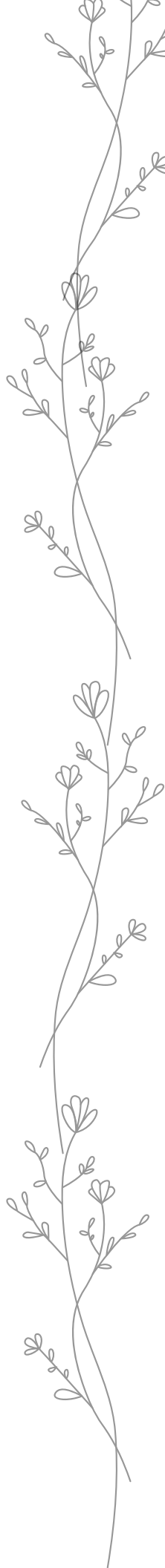
She remained very still, knowing she was being tested.

A few moments passed, and then, satisfied, the mother hedgehog turned and continued on her way, her tiny, bristled children tumbling after her.

Snow let out a small breath, as if she had been given a great honour.

She loved palace halls and the friends who filled them. Yet, peace lived *here*, in the forest, where no one questioned how gentleness could wield power. The animals never whispered about whether it was foolish of her to smile so freely or sing so blithely. The earth knew iron was only one measure of strength.

The prince had once asked her if she missed the forest. She had told him no — because *the forest had never left her*.



She could still feel it, always. The hush of pine needles beneath her feet. The lavender carpets of the bluebell woods. The endless patience of the trees. And in moments like this, with morning gold spilling across the water and a robin nesting in the cradle of her hands, she knew the forest still trusted her.

## Epilogue

Years later travellers would speak of a kingdom whose prosperity smelled of bread and wildflowers, where magistrates kept seed-pouches on their belts beside quills, and where a Queen's decree often began with *listen*. They called her gentle, and they called her mighty. The mirror — plain now, tarnished at the corners — never again offered judgement, but if you looked carefully, on certain dusk-lit evenings, the glass seemed to soften, as though reflecting not merely the fairest face but the fairest deeds.

And in that muted gleam Snow White sometimes saw her younger self running through firs, heart thrumming with fear yet choosing, even then, to side-step a patch of violets growing through frost. She would smile at the memory and turn away before anyone noticed, for ruling left little time for reverie. But inside she carried the forest's hush, the river's silver, the language of wings.

Kindness had been her refuge at first, then her armour, and at last her realm. It was weight, yes, yet weight she bore the way a tree bears fruit — inevitable, generous, and, in flowering, stronger than iron. In that truth lay the mirror's final, wordless answer: fairness is not measured on glass but in the ripples one life sends through many. And by that measure, the fairest of all was the Queen who woke each dawn to choose love.



# The Changeling

by Sarah Das Gupta

There was once a carpenter and his wife who lived in a beautiful little cottage in a picturesque village with a delightful village green and a clear, crystal stream running through. The cottage garden was full of red poppies, sky blue cornflowers and majestic hollyhocks growing against a stone wall. Over the front of the house, dark red climbing roses reached up to the eaves beneath the thatched roof. In the back garden, rows of carrots, turnips, peas and beans were ready to be picked and added to delicious stews and pies.

Inside the cottage, everything was neat and polished. The comforting scent of beeswax greeted visitors as they stepped over the threshold. Beside the brick fireplace were comfortable armchairs on either side of a blazing orange and red fire. There were two of everything: two willow pattern mugs, two sets of knives and forks, two kitchen stools, two pairs of wooden clogs for the garden and two pigs in the field at the back of the cottage.

The carpenter was a skilled craftsman trained in the trade by his father, who in turn had been trained by his father and by generations of carpenters now lying peacefully in the village church yard. He had more work than he could finish and being a thrifty man, a considerable hoard of gold guineas lay under the carved elm bed upstairs under the thatched roof.

His wife too, polished, swept and cooked a tasty chicken on Sundays. She avoided the gossips in the village and, though she said it herself, the cottage was fit for a queen, and certainly for a princess or two!

There was only one thing missing. The carpenter and his wife had no child to enjoy the cosy parlour, to play in the neat little garden, to sleep in the intricately carved cradle which he had made years ago. They had more or less resigned themselves to their childless state.

Then one Sunday, the unbelievable happened. They were ready as usual to attend the morning service when Jenny suddenly sat down in one of the arm chairs and exclaimed, 'Jack, I can't sit in church today listening to one of Parson's long sermons. My head's going round and round like a carousel at the fair and my belly's as heavy as if I'd eaten ten Sunday dinners.'

As the carpenter sat alone in the pew, he felt the curious stares of his neighbours and standing at the church door at the end of the service, the Parson murmured a few words about Jenny's absence.



Meanwhile, his wife had slipped out to visit Madge Betchworth in her tumble-down cottage at the end of Mill Lane. Madge was the local midwife but village gossip talked of magic, witchcraft and her connection with the fairy folk. Jenny had been feeling 'strange' for several weeks and only Madge could help her.



It was with a feeling of trepidation that Jenny knocked at the shabby door.

‘Come in, whether ye be fairy or mortal.’ A frail sounding voice called from the cottage.

Nervously, Jenny walked into a low-ceiling, smoky room. Madge sat by a smouldering fire stirring a cooking pot. Her grey hair hung lank over her shoulders and the few teeth she had looked brown and rotten. On the shelf above the fire were bottles of aconite seed, dried bunches of belladonna and hellebore. While on a table, parts of a skeleton were displayed with a monkey head and several skulls.

She pointed at a ramshackle chair, indicating that Jenny should sit down. The walk up the stony lane had been tiring and Jenny tentatively lowered herself into the chair.

‘You’ll be needing me next month on the thirteenth. I’ve been expecting to see you for weeks. You’ve left it rather late. The older ones often do,’ Madge laughed quietly. Noticing the puzzled look on Jenny’s face, Madge added, ‘You’re wondering how I can know more about you than even you yourself know. I see far into the future, a gift from the other world. I shall see you again on the thirteenth.’

Madge held out her left hand. Jenny dropped thirteen shiny silver coins into her palm.

The 13<sup>th</sup> of April arrived, a cold and stormy day. All the previous night Jenny lay awake listening to the rushing water in the stream and the wind among the elms on the green. She hoped above all that Madge Betchworth would arrive. Local people said she was a good midwife but there was no denying she was strange. Jack too had been restless, tossing and turning all night. He had wanted to bring a midwife from Wareham but Jenny remained stubbornly loyal to Madge.

Sure enough, she had arrived promptly at eight o’clock as the last chime of the village clock marked the hour. Jenny looked twice. She hardly recognised the woman from the half-ruined cottage. The straggly hair was piled neatly on her head. A clean, starched, white apron covered her dark blue dress. Madge immediately took charge of the bedroom, re-making the bed with clean sheets and hanging several towels in readiness.

It was just as the clock began to strike three that Jack heard high-pitched crying from the bedroom. A few minutes later, Madge opened the door and beckoned him in. His face broke into a wide smile and a few tears ran down his cheeks as Jenny whispered, ‘You’ve got a son.’

At first all went well. Jack proudly polished the elm cradle which lay beside Jenny as she worked. Then one day a large jug fell off the kitchen table, almost hitting the baby in his bed. Husband and wife agreed that baby Luke must stay in the parlour, while Jenny was in the kitchen. There were too many hazards what with cooking, washing and cutting up food.

But Luke didn’t thrive on his own in the front room. He became fussy and pernickety when it came to food, stubbornly refusing to open his mouth. He spent much of the night crying and screaming then went to sleep as soon as it was light. He was losing weight. His once chubby face now looked more like that of a wizened old man than a healthy baby.

The couple became so anxious that one day they decided to ride with the carrier into the nearest town to consult a young doctor with a growing reputation which had travelled as far as their small village. Jack's young assistant and his wife agreed to look after Luke.

The young husband and wife had tried to comfort the screaming baby. The husband had walked round the garden and over the village green but the crying continued. Luke was back in his cradle while the couple had a much-needed cup of tea. Suddenly, from the parlour came a voice asking, 'Have my mother and father gone out?'

The young couple stared at each other in amazement. Such was the shock that the girl spilt tea all over her dress. They rushed into the front room. There was Luke sitting bolt upright in the cradle. 'I want a glass or two of elderflower wine. It's in that cupboard there. Go and fetch the bottle,' he demanded, staring at the young man. The 'baby' quickly drank one glass after another. He then jumped lightly out of the cradle and began dancing round the room. Whirling and twirling, he turned faster and faster. He moved so fast that the onlookers could not distinguish his arms and legs. He became a blur of colour, a spinning top.

'We need some music,' he demanded as he stopped to catch his breath. 'Go and bring me a thick stalk from the hedge parsley growing near the stream.'

As if in a dream, the husband went as ordered. A few moments later, he returned with a thick stem with lacy, white flowers.

'Give me my father's tools,' the 'baby' yelled, turning to the young wife.

She brought a tool bag from the kitchen. The precocious 'baby' took a long, thin knife. Expertly, he hollowed out the sap from the thick stalk and made holes the length of the stem. He lifted the pipe to his mouth and blew gently. The most wonderfully delicate, tuneful music came from the pipe. It spoke of summer days, blue skies and fluffy, white clouds floating above the trees. The young couple found themselves dancing in slow rhythm to the fairy music. Then the music became dream-like, speaking of a moonlit forest, of fields of fairy rings, of cushions of pine needles beneath a starry sky. The husband and wife danced as they had never danced before.

The village clock struck six. 'My mother and father will soon be home.' The 'baby' tucked his pipe under the blankets in the cradle and jumped nimbly back into bed. The door slowly opened. The carpenter and his wife peered anxiously into the room. The 'baby' was screaming again.

The next day while Jack and his young assistant were working on some broken pews from the church, the young man decided to tell his employer about the extraordinary behaviour of Luke. At first Jack dismissed the account of drinking wine and playing a pipe made from hedge parsley. However, he admitted Luke had changed and that he had noticed some elderflower wine had been drunk and Jenny had swept up some tiny white flowers in the parlour.



‘Look, why don’t you and Jenny pretend to go out again and we will sit with Luke. You stand in the kitchen and listen through the wall. I’m sure the events of yesterday will be repeated. Why should I lie to you? I don’t have any reason.’

Jenny was reluctant to believe the story. ‘That young man has every reason to hate Luke. As long as you had no son, he stood to inherit the business. Things have changed since the baby came along.’

‘Well, there’s no harm in trying his plan. We are not so stupid as to be easily hoodwinked’.  
Next morning, Jenny and Jack stood pressed close to the wattle and daub wall between the kitchen and parlour while the young couple sat with Luke.

‘Have my mother and father gone to market?’ On being told that they had indeed just left in the carrier, the same voice demanded, ‘Then, bring me the mulberry wine today. I need something stronger.’

At this point, behind the wall, Jenny found it difficult to restrain her husband, such was his fury. Meanwhile in the parlour, events continued to follow the same path as before. The ‘baby’ retrieved his pipe from beneath the blankets. This time the fairy music spoke of running water, ponds, and rivers and water lilies seemed to flood the room. Banks of pale pink Lady’s Smock, the flower of the fairies, danced with them and was reflected in the old leaden windows.

Jenny was enthralled by the music, tapping her toe and swaying beside the wall. Jack had had enough. He threw open the parlour door. The music stopped abruptly. Jack, shaking with anger, seized the griddle from beside the fire and covered it with burning coal. He reached towards the fairy changeling, ready to grab it and hold it over the burning embers. ‘Tomorrow, if you be still here, ye shall spend the night on a pile of horse manure.’ The fairy evaded his grasp. It disappeared up the chimney in a puff of smoke.

In the silence which followed, they heard soft cooing and laughter outside the back door. Jenny ran to investigate. She returned with Luke kicking and laughing. Proudly Jack put his son in the carved elm cradle. He seemed fine after his holiday with the fairies.



# Contest Winners



## Winner in Poetry

OUR GLASS HEARTS – 6

**Dr. Sara Cleto and Dr. Brittany Warman** are award-winning folklorists, teachers, and writers. Together, they founded The Carterhaugh School of Folklore and the Fantastic, teaching creative souls how to re-enchant their lives. Their work can be found in *Enchanted Living*, *Uncanny Magazine*, *Fairy Tale Review*, *Star\*Line*, and others.

*Image: R. Stanford, Three Sisters*



## Runners Up in Poetry

BOTTLE OF THE JINN – 7

**Murray Eiland** is a poet interested in speculative fiction, and finds inspiration from myths. He is an archaeologist specializing in the Near East (DPhil Oxford University).

*Image: Maxfield Parrish, The Fisherman and the Genie*



SUMMONING RED RIDING HOOD – 8

**Helen Patrice** is an Australian writer living in Naarm. She writes speculative poetry and short fiction, creative non fiction, and memoir. Her books: *A Woman of Mars*, *Palaeontology For Beginners*, *She Too*, *Three Cycles of the Moon*, *The Communicant and other stories*, and *Paper Birds* (2025).

*Image: Carl Larsson, Little Red Riding Hood*



## Winner in Prose

THE SEA WITCH – 10

**Alison Weber** is a writer and artist inspired by fairytales and the Golden Age of Children's Book Illustration. Her work is for everyone who still dreams of magic. Alison lives near Seattle with her tiny family and beloved creatures, where she is currently building her dream illustration business.

*Image: Harry Clarke, The Little Sea Maid*



## Runners Up in Prose

AFTER HAPPILY-EVER-AFTER – 15

**Nomi Mini** is a researcher who recently completed her PhD at the University of Cambridge. Outside of her academic work, she is passionate about nature-based art, folklore and fairytales, and her creative work was most recently featured in the University of Cambridge's Blackbirds Poetry Magazine and won a Judge's Prize at the Wild Warwick's art exhibition.

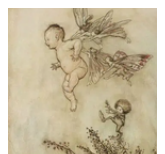
*Image: Carl Offsterdinger, Snow White*



THE CHANGELING – 20

**Sarah Das Gupta** is an 83-year-old writer from Cambridge, UK who has also lived and worked in India and Tanzania. She started writing three years ago after an accident which limited her walking to a few yards. Her work has been published in over twenty countries. She is interested in Folklore and legends. She has recently been nominated for Best of the Net and a Dwarf Star.

*Image: Arthur Rackham, They all tickled him on the shoulder*





# Judges' Bios 2025 Prose & Poetry Contest

Amy Trent is a storyteller, mother, cookie-lover, and award-winning novelist. She delights in writing novels and short stories that explore identity, whimsy, and love through the lens of fairy tales and folklore. Amy has been publishing novels since 2021. She is a 2024 Praiseworthy Award finalist, a 2024 Once Upon a Pen Book Award nominee, and an Amazon Best Seller. Her short stories have appeared or will soon appear in *The Fairy Tale Magazine*, *Corvid Queen*, and various anthologies. Amy loves the craft of writing and has participated as a panelist at LTUE Symposium and will be teaching several workshops at RMFW Colorado Gold Writers Conference this fall. Amy currently lives in Colorado with her family, but the Trents have also called California and Mississippi home. To learn more, please visit her website [amytrent.com](http://amytrent.com).



Prose Judge Amy Trent



Deborah Sage is a native of Kentucky, USA. She has most recently been published in *Eternal Haunted Summer*, *Literary LEO*, *Fairy Tale Magazine*, *From the Farther Trees*, the 2022 *Dwarf Stars Anthology*, Amethyst Press anthology *All Shall Be Well* for Julian of Norwich and *Eye to the Telescope*. Deborah has a long history of award-winning poetry, her first win being a state-wide contest for a sonnet while in high school. Her poem "How to Bring Peace" placed in the Literary LEO (Louisville Eccentric Observer) contest. She is a Dwarf Star Nominee (SFFA). She has been selected winner or runner up in *Fairy Tale Magazine's* Prose & Poetry Contest in 2023 and 2024. Deborah has also published a book of poetry, *Doggerel in the Nighttime*, based on the Sherlock Holmes stories of Arthur Conan Doyle.

Poetry Judge Deborah Sage



JOHN  
DAUER  
09.

Call for Prose & Poetry  
Theme: Trolls  
Submissions open August 15-21  
(midnight to midnight EST) (no fee)

Tell us what compels trolls to guard bridges. Are bridge trolls keepers of wisdom, curses, or safe passage?

Or perhaps you have a troll song to share, the story of a fiddling troll, or maybe a new tune for escaping the Hall of the Mountain King.

Or tell us the tale of the troll who tends the hearth, the garden, brews a soup that keeps the forests in balance. How do trolls live among us today? (Not internet trolls, but beings of stone, moss, and magic trying to survive in the world today.)

Give us the story of someone who has troll ancestry; tell us about their sense of self, their magic, their place in the world.

Or maybe a trickster and troll become allies.

What if the troll has the last laugh? What's it like to be cast as the villain?

Let the mountains echo and the moss stir. This issue invites your stories and poems from the realm of trolls—whether lumbering through the story style of Asbjørnsen and Moe, whispering from the hills of Shetland, or sleeping beneath a bridge of your own imagining.

We're excited to see where you take these creatures.

The Troll Issue launches November 1st

[Click here for submission guidelines](#)

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