

THE FAIRY TALE MAGAZINE

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DEBORAH SAGE - MARCIA SHERMAN - MARGARET FISHER SQUIRES
LAREN STOVER - BRITTANY WARMAN

TALES FROM THE
NIGHT QUEEN'S REALM

SEPTEMBER 2023

THE FAIRY TALE MAGAZINE

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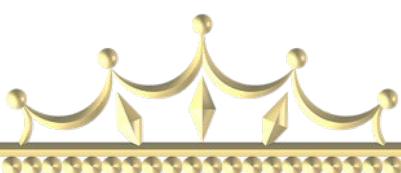
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FORMERLY ENCHANTED CONVERSATION

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Hello Enchanted Friends:

Autumn, the most glorious time of the year, is almost upon us. I'm not sure what it's like where you live, but here in Northern Indiana, it's unbearably hot in July. Temperatures in the 90s are commonplace now, but that was not true even 25 years ago. August is slightly better, but September and October are beautiful—especially October, which for me, is the best month of the year.

The light here in October makes everything seem both slightly shadowed and golden at the same time. The grass is still green and mums and sedums are at their best—altogether magical and inspiring.

“Magical” and “inspiring” are two perfect words to describe this issue. “Tales From the Night Queen’s Realm” is packed with stories of love, romance, mystery, and beauty. It also has a couple of pieces that could fall into the “dark” category, which is perfect not just for the Night Queen, but also for the other side of fall: Gothic splendor.

Halloween may be the main event during the fall, and naturally makes us all enjoy a good shiver, but the darkening days and nights, the colorful decay of leaves and flowers, and the sense that winter is coming all add to the excitement and enchantment of my favorite season. Is there a better time or setting for stories of the underworld or vengeance or lost love or Gothic romance? It’s a deliciously shadowed time for the Night Queen to hold her court.

Fairy tales, myth, and folklore shimmer in the darkening days of this season, and in this delightful issue, you’ll find stories and poems perfect for the Night Queen’s life of Gothic pleasures. I’m proud to say that none is more deliciously Gothic than Kelly Jarvis’s “The Ghosts of Milden Hall.” It’s a grippingly atmospheric tale of love and loss on a college campus aswirl with history and mystery and romance and darkness. I’m always proud of every piece we publish, but when one of our staff members delivers such a story, I’m even happier.

And just who is the Night Queen? She’s the creation of our Art Director and Managing Editor, Amanda Bergloff. Amanda doesn’t just design and create beautiful art—though she is *entirely* responsible for the ravishing look of this issue. She’s also a highly accomplished writer, as you’ll note when the Night Queen pops up in this issue. In fact, I first met Amanda many years ago when I published a terrific story of hers in an anthology I edited, *Frozen Fairy Tales*. It’s quite a staff we have at FTM.

Enjoy fall and enjoy “Tales from the Night Queen’s Realm.”

Yours in enchantment,

Kate Wolford

Editor / Publisher



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There are stories that exist in a place
where dreams become reality
and reality becomes the landscape of dreams.

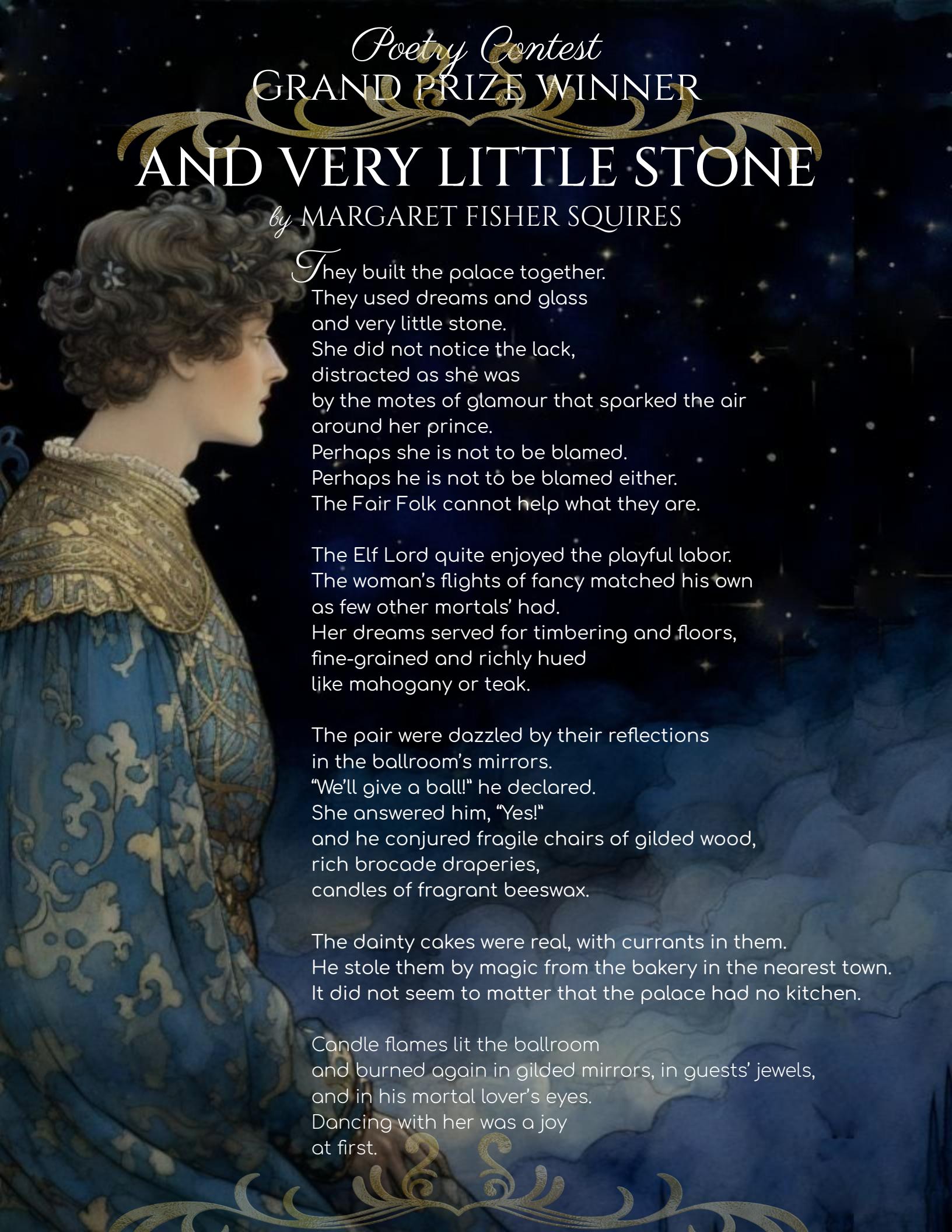
This is the Night Queen's landscape
A place where light and shadow mingle
to dance upon stardust,
and the place where she weaves
her stories of happiness and sorrow
into the velvet fabric of forever.

The Night Queen has many tales to share,
and she is beckoning you to enter
into her realm of Eternal Night....

Poetry Contest
GRAND PRIZE WINNER

AND VERY LITTLE STONE

by MARGARET FISHER SQUIRES



They built the palace together.
They used dreams and glass
and very little stone.
She did not notice the lack,
distracted as she was
by the motes of glamour that sparked the air
around her prince.
Perhaps she is not to be blamed.
Perhaps he is not to be blamed either.
The Fair Folk cannot help what they are.

The Elf Lord quite enjoyed the playful labor.
The woman's flights of fancy matched his own
as few other mortals' had.
Her dreams served for timbering and floors,
fine-grained and richly hued
like mahogany or teak.

The pair were dazzled by their reflections
in the ballroom's mirrors.
"We'll give a ball!" he declared.
She answered him, "Yes!"
and he conjured fragile chairs of gilded wood,
rich brocade draperies,
candles of fragrant beeswax.

The dainty cakes were real, with currants in them.
He stole them by magic from the bakery in the nearest town.
It did not seem to matter that the palace had no kitchen.

Candle flames lit the ballroom
and burned again in gilded mirrors, in guests' jewels,
and in his mortal lover's eyes.
Dancing with her was a joy
at first.

The time came when her every kiss, her every hand-brush
felt like the peck of a small, hungry bird.
Her eyes, bright with hope
drained him.

Besides, the party seemed to last almost a whole night
or almost a whole year.
(Despite long interludes with mortals, he still tended to confuse
the two.)
He knew,
or believed in his fine ivory bones,
that if he stayed a whole night
or a whole year
in one place,
time would enspell him,
stiffen his flesh until he was trapped in panicked immobility,
an Elf Lord shaped entirely of something
like mahogany or teak.

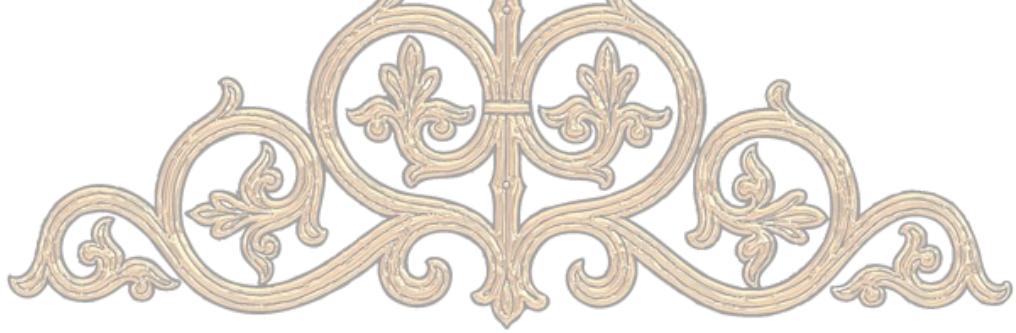
Her chatter carved a numb hollow in his chest,
He felt approaching dawn.
He left her
while the dance swirled all around them,
slipping away through one of the tall glass doors
into the darkness.
He left her
dancing with his reflection.

Outside, he paused,
and glanced back through the glass
at the bright-eyed comely woman
circling alone in her graceful dance.

He heard a distant fiddle
swinging into melody over the hill.
He felt the music fill his chest with fire.

His heels barely touched the earth
as he crossed the hill
but he remembered the woman
for almost as many years
or hours
as it took for the palace's timbers
to collapse into dust.





THE RUG MERCHANT'S TALE

by MARCIA SHERMAN

*G*ood day—how are you this fine afternoon? This appears to be a friendly café, but also very quiet. Must be the time of day, too early for some and too late for others, am I right? Thirsty? Yes, we are, thank you. You can tell from our dusty clothing that we have traveled some distance. Might we get some arak with a pitcher of cold water? As I am sure you know, arak is potent, and we do not want to become muddled so early in the day. What is that? You have smaller bottles of arak, a promotional item? Oh, how lovely. How very kind of you. That will do, and we can take a bottle with us. Always in the market for a decorative high-quality bottle. The cork is rather upmarket, and sturdy. It will travel well.

Is it possible you can join us at the table? Your company would be welcome. And one more question—do you employ someone to care for livestock? Our camels need water and feed. Is there any chance they could partake of some sweetgrass with a few dates? It may seem strange riding camels when we could be enjoying a faster mode of travel. Nonetheless, we have found camels are best for desert travel. Thank you; we are all gratitude.

This plate of figs and fruit, cheese and pita is most welcome. You have anticipated every need. I am so taken with this bottle of arak, for the outside as well as what is contained within. You see, I have a fondness for bottles. There can be a healthy living to be made in buying and selling pretty bottles. Husbands want them for their wives, sultans for their households. Children wish for a jinn in a bottle. Yet it is surprising how many bottles are discarded simply because their original purpose is complete.

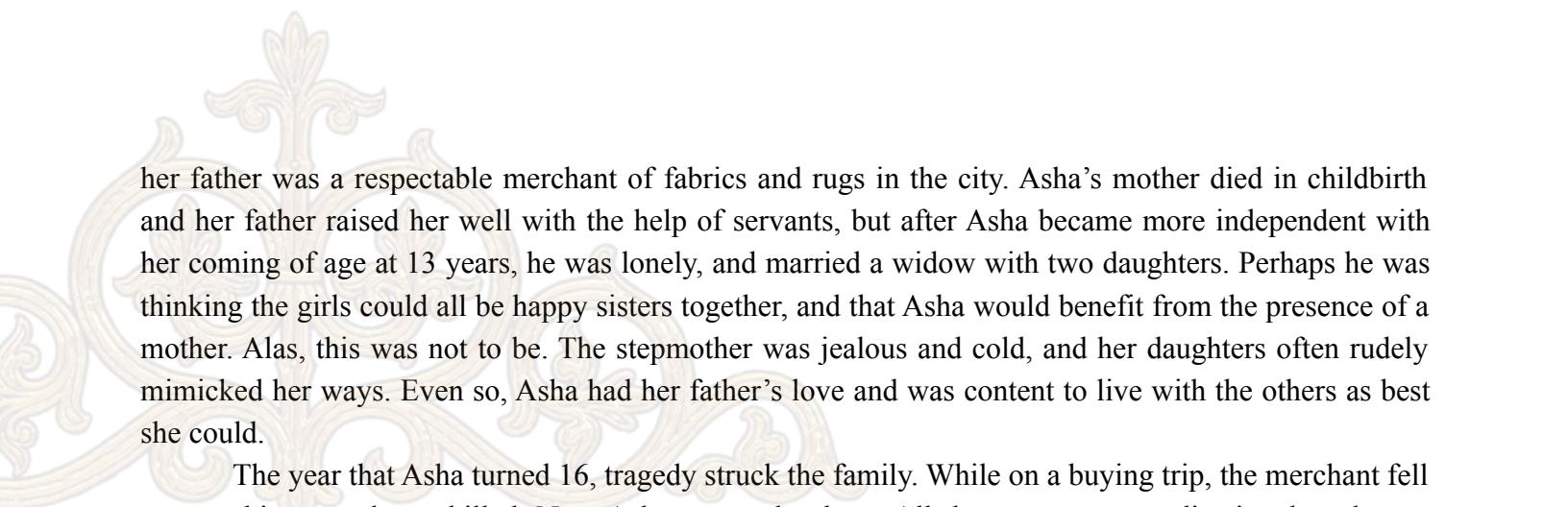
You have met our needs so graciously; will you permit the telling of a story? A story which includes a charming bottle...

A young woman hurried through a desert city, her purpose to fill a water jar for the evening meal and nightly bathing. To save time, she took a different route to the well, by way of an obscure alley, rarely used. Walking quickly, she tripped over an object on the ground. Annoyed that anyone would so carelessly leave something for others to fall over, she bent to see and was amazed to find an exquisite bottle made of glass, encased in scrolled metal, the sparkles of the glass shining as if through little windows. Of medium size, not too heavy. A striking yet practical stopper of blue glass shaped like a gem. She attempted to remove the stopper, but it was stuck fast.

The woman looked around the alley, seeking a door or window to indicate from where the bottle may have become lost, and saw only blank walls. Someone using the same shortcut must have dropped the bottle in haste. Unfortunate. However, she owned so few lovely objects, and seeing no one to claim the bottle, she slipped it in her pocket.

Now, what I have not mentioned before is the life this young woman led. Her name was Asha and





her father was a respectable merchant of fabrics and rugs in the city. Asha's mother died in childbirth and her father raised her well with the help of servants, but after Asha became more independent with her coming of age at 13 years, he was lonely, and married a widow with two daughters. Perhaps he was thinking the girls could all be happy sisters together, and that Asha would benefit from the presence of a mother. Alas, this was not to be. The stepmother was jealous and cold, and her daughters often rudely mimicked her ways. Even so, Asha had her father's love and was content to live with the others as best she could.

The year that Asha turned 16, tragedy struck the family. While on a buying trip, the merchant fell among thieves and was killed. Now Asha was truly alone. All the servants were dismissed, and even with money the merchant had provided for the future, the house and many items had to be sold, and the four women moved into a smaller residence. This dwelling had only two proper sleeping quarters. Asha was forced to bed in a tiny room next to the kitchen. Soon it became routine that Asha lived with her stepmother and sisters as if a servant. It was not the life she had expected, but it was not begging in the streets—thus, she made the best of it. Asha knew that her father, and even the mother she had never known, would want her to have courage and be kind, and await the day her life would surely improve.

Two years passed this way. And now we return to the alley and Asha, on her way to fetch water, tripping over a bottle. With the bottle secured in her pocket, she ran to the well. Jar filled, Asha could not run home. She resigned herself to the berating which will surely fall upon her ears. Without thinking, she expressed aloud a wish to somehow know true contentment.

I will stop my story here because I see you think you can tell where this story is leading. To continue would only be boorish. It is a childhood fable, oft repeated and altered over time: a widowed merchant, a cruel stepfamily, a child released from servitude by magic. You imagine you know of the happily ever after Asha achieved by marrying into the royal household. Some of the stories tell of a horrible end to her stepfamily. Others have them banished to a small village, living a quiet life. Comfortable, but cursed to live simply, maybe all three, maybe only two.

However, the truth of this tale is exactly how Asha was raised before her father remarried. Intent on imparting his knowledge, Asha was taught the family business. She learned fabrics and rugs, warp and weave, blending colors; she studied buying, selling, and the importance of fair and honest dealing. She acquired a respect for money. One important lesson Asha realized was keeping this education to herself, for inevitably that knowledge would have been exploited and turned to bad use by her stepmother. Best of all, her father schooled her in the art of disguise, for not everyone would deign to do business with a female merchant.

And now, we come near the end of this story. Once the bottle was opened Asha discovered no benevolent or grateful spirit eager to transform a cinder and dust covered girl into a sultan's dream of womanhood. No fancy litter transformed from a gourd; no servants transformed from lizards to carry the litter. There was no gala event from which a mate was chosen for the royal scion. No chiming clock, nor a lost shoe made of the finest satin brocade. There was nothing that Asha could clearly point to as magic, and yet, isn't her rise to success from such difficult circumstances a kind of magical outcome? For rise she did.

In any case, while her stepfamily attended a royal soiree, Asha visited the local bottle merchants.

These men had become mentors to Asha, sort of godfathers, one might say, and taught her about glass and metals and precious stones. As I mentioned before, there was no clear magic to the bottle; nevertheless, it held a very special value. The “glass” stopper was actually a sapphire of such size and perfection, Asha realized her wish for a happily ever after had come true. The bottle merchants arranged a sale—taking a modest finders’ fee, of course—and Asha was free to bid her stepfamily farewell. Only the stopper was sold, a modest cork worked just as well, and Asha kept the bottle with her always as a reminder of her good fortune.

What do you think? Does our story enchant you? Good! There are so many ways to find or make a happily ever after in this modern world. Marriage is not the only path to wealth, recognition, and joy.

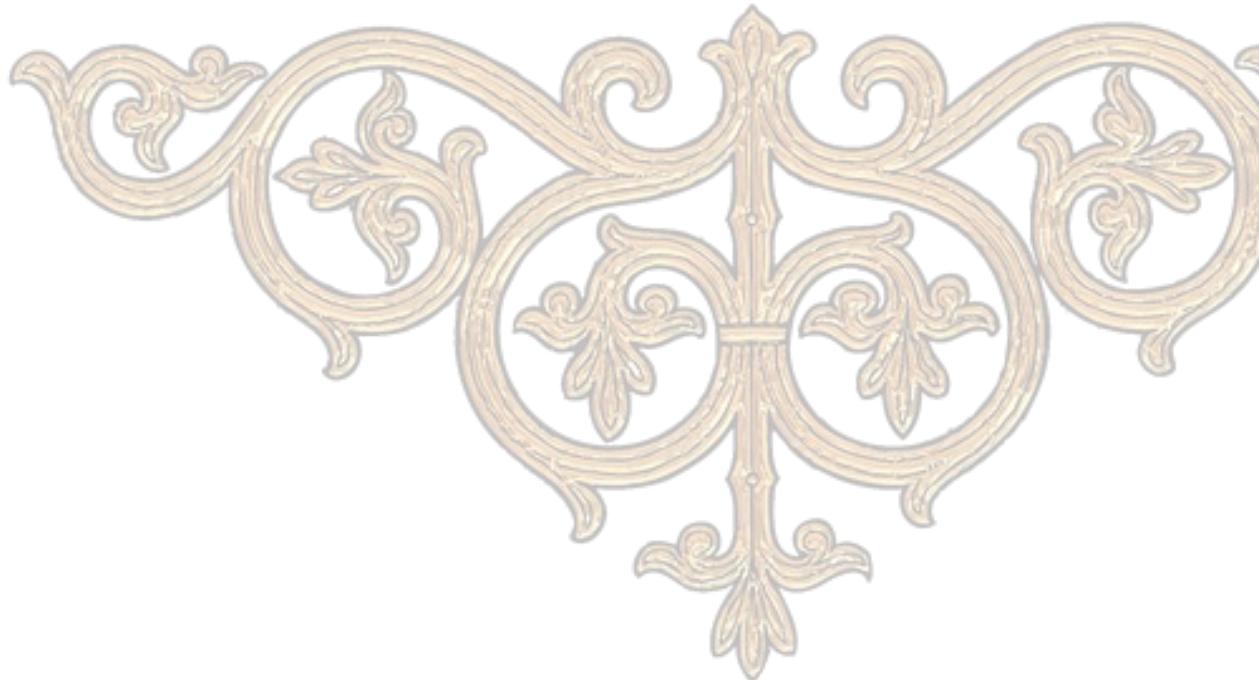
It has been delightful to spend some time in your attractive establishment. We are refreshed, the camels cared for, it is time for us to continue our travels. We must be going if we hope to reach the village before nightfall.

Oh! I am so sorry. In all this time together, we have rudely never introduced ourselves. Removing our hoods will explain. This is my sister, Creaza. My stepsister, actually. It seems that we were able to overcome some of the antipathy of our childhood, and she and I, at least, are on good terms.

And I am Asha, just Asha. Purveyor of the finest fabrics and rugs in all the land.

I have an idea... This has been such a relaxing interlude; how often do you find a patroness of a café instead of a patron? Here is a rug as a gift, the instructions are on this scroll. Use it well. Your kindness and good listening skills deserve a reward. We will be sure to stop by this way on our return journey, it will be our pleasure to visit Scheherazade’s again.

And then, you can tell us your story.



Poetry Contest
RUNNER UP

TO SURVIVE A FAIRY TALE

by DEBORAH SAGE



Wear a cloak fashioned of a thousand furs
Or a mask of illusion edged with
Owl feathers and innocence. Always
Erase your traces.

Cast no shadow in moonlight. Sleepwalk
Barefoot, across frosted fields, clad
In gossamer and thistle-down.
Tell no one your true name.

Ask for no red roses. Choose camelias instead.
Never unlock forbidden doors even
If given the keys.
Chain your heart with iron or
A lover's infidelity.
Three bands of either are enough.

Conceal your radiance. Cast a glamour
To avoid the gaze of your mother, or
In extreme cases, your father.
Obscure your scent with Dragon's Blood
And Moroccan mint, best obtained from
A disreputable source.

Wear a gown of ashes, or choose
One of ruby silk to blend with spilled drops of cabernet
And bloodstains.
Carry a carving knife for pumpkins,
And wolves. Do not lose your slipper.



Sleep in a canopied bed carved
From the point of a spindle carved by
A fairy's curse. Braid your hair with
Briars or threads of time.
Wear a brooch of silver and shoes of iron.

Trade your wishes for golden coins.
Trade your voice to the sea
For your heart's desire and a crystal choker,
Always expect the worst.

Do not dance in Faerie forests, but if you must,
Leave a trail of vanishing diamonds,
Or starlight. Waltz all night
But do not tango.
Take care you are not followed.

Do not answer those who would call your name,
Willing you to let down your guard alongside
Your hair. Flee before the clock strikes
Midnight. Remember the power of passivity;
Stay in the tower.

Break the queen's mirror. Risk the
Seven year's bad luck.
Do not comb your raven locks with
A poisoned comb. Leave the tangles.

Never eat apples from a chest
Nor a house of cakes and sweets.
Despite your cravings,
Do not steal from
A witch's garden. Starve instead.

When pursued, seek shelter in deep forests.
Hide between the roots of a rowan tree,
In a thatched cottage,
Or beneath a leaf.
Be on good terms with dwarves and witches.
Always dress for flight,
Or enchantment.

Speak in a foreign tongue but remember
Always to whisper,
Tint your skin blue; wear sapphires.
Reveal your thoughts only on
The promise of anonymity. Be certain
Your confidence will not be kept.

Stay on the path, drink no wine
Nor eat food proffered with a price
Greater than gratitude.

Do not engage in careless thievery.
Avoid spinning either
Straw into gold or
Men into princes.



Flash Fiction Contest

GRAND PRIZE WINNER

MEDICINE OR POISON

by ELLA ARROW

*T*he wise woman knows when she's called a witch.

They called my mother "a cunning woman," gladly buying her elixirs and simples on market day. But the village has changed since I took her place. Now more whisperers than customers pass my cart. A woman who lives alone has become a specimen strange and not always good.

Simple people see what they want, the best or worst they can imagine. Salt is essential to the life of a man but kills the poor slug that eats the same cabbages. Poison or medicine. Witch or wisdom.

Perhaps apple tarts with elderberry and feverfew will sell as a remedy for the chills. Slip medicine in with the mead.

I lean deep into my bread oven and ash catches in the back of my throat, clings like a bat to the sore folds there. I hold my breath until the tarts are out and I can finally cough.

The windowsill is already brimming with market day pastries, but as I set down the tarts, I noticed a gap in my pile of scones. "Nibble, nibble, little mouse. Who's been nibbling at my house?"

"Never mind. It is the wind."

I'm so shocked at the tiny voice that answers, I have to gather my wits along with my shawl over my head before rushing out the door.

Two children stand outside my window, mouths agape, cheeks hollow, twigs in their hair.

I'm not used to visitors, much less youngsters. The best thing about living alone in the woods is solitude. It's also the worst thing.

The little girl steps back as if I were the one who frightened her. The boy's fist clutches a green sponge. Are they so starved they would eat gutter growth? "What is that? Don't eat that!" My throat is dry; I creak like a crow.

"You must be a witch," he whispers, "to have such a magical house."

Medicine or poison, witch or wisdom.

"Come inside," I say. "Eat and rest, whatever sweets you want."

They sidle past me, too exhausted to argue, eyes wide and glassy.

They fall on my food like wild things. I imagine them biting my fingers as I deliver extra pumpkin muffins. I've only one bed but I tuck them in, mother's quilt up to their chins. They seem nervous, thin arms around each other. Unsure how to talk to children, to help them feel safe, I stroke the girl's cheek and say, "Such sweet faces. I could eat you up."

In the dark of night, a crash awakens me from my chair. The boy's out of bed and has stumbled over the garden tools. He wrestles a rake, raining down crumbles of fragrant sage and henbane from their perch in the rafters.

I cry out and grab him. He raves and shouts, slapping me. His eyes are still unfocused, seeing nightmares or gingerbread houses. I wrap him in a bear hug and drag him toward the back of the house where the chicken coop opens by a little grate.

“Wolves will devour us!” he shouts. “In the woods, wolves and witches will devour us.” He looks straight through me, naming me as wicked. I shove him in with the chickens and slam the grate shut. Call and scream as he might, I do not let him out.

I search my books for what fruit of the forest could give them visions of sugar plums and baby-boiling witches. Finally, near dawn, I find the concoction. Purge and purify, thyme and burdock. Then restore: red clover, prunella, lady’s mantle.

I know the girl heard the ruckus last night. She only comes out for porridge, hunger overwhelming fear. I get her to tell me through tears how they heard their stepmother’s plan to abandon them in the woods. No wonder they’re mistrustful. On the second day starving, they ate white berries that looked like dolls’ eyes. They stumbled onto my little house, mistaking sweet smells and a window bakery for a candy cottage conjured from a starving child’s dreams.

They purge. I clean. If this is what having children entails, I’m glad my mothering is temporary. My magic can heal the body and salve the spirit, but it doesn’t mend their tiny broken hearts. Market day comes and goes. They’ve eaten my stores anyway. I try to think what to do with them; they clearly cannot go home. I try to put meat back on their bones, but my throat has gotten worse, my eyes are red and runny. I don’t speak much, but when I do, my temper is as brittle as a dried stalk.

The girl weeps on the little pallet I’ve made for her bed. The boy screams whenever I come near. I fear for my safety if I let him out. It doesn’t matter that the visions have passed, the toxins purged. The poison ideas have left a scar.

I’ve decided I’ll take them to the village. Someone there will help, take them in, someone who isn’t me. I haven’t told them, because I plan to give them a sleeping tea and put them on the cart. That way is safest, so they don’t run away and get lost in the woods again.

While I still have the extra hands, I ask the girl to help me clean my oven. I show her the brush and how to lean far in. I promise her a cookie if she helps me, but she knows I’ve got a secret. These children have no trust left to give. She pushes me with tiny might and mountainous fury. My head thumps the oven and I roll behind the door, moaning, out of sight.

She opens her brother’s cage and cries, “We’re free! The old witch is dead!”

“I’m not old,” I mumble, holding my head. “I’m 37.”

Knowledge is a knife that cuts both ways. People see what they want. You can’t feed them medicine if they believe it’s poison.

So says a wise woman.



Flash Fiction Contest

RUNNER UP

EVER AFTER

by TISH BLACK

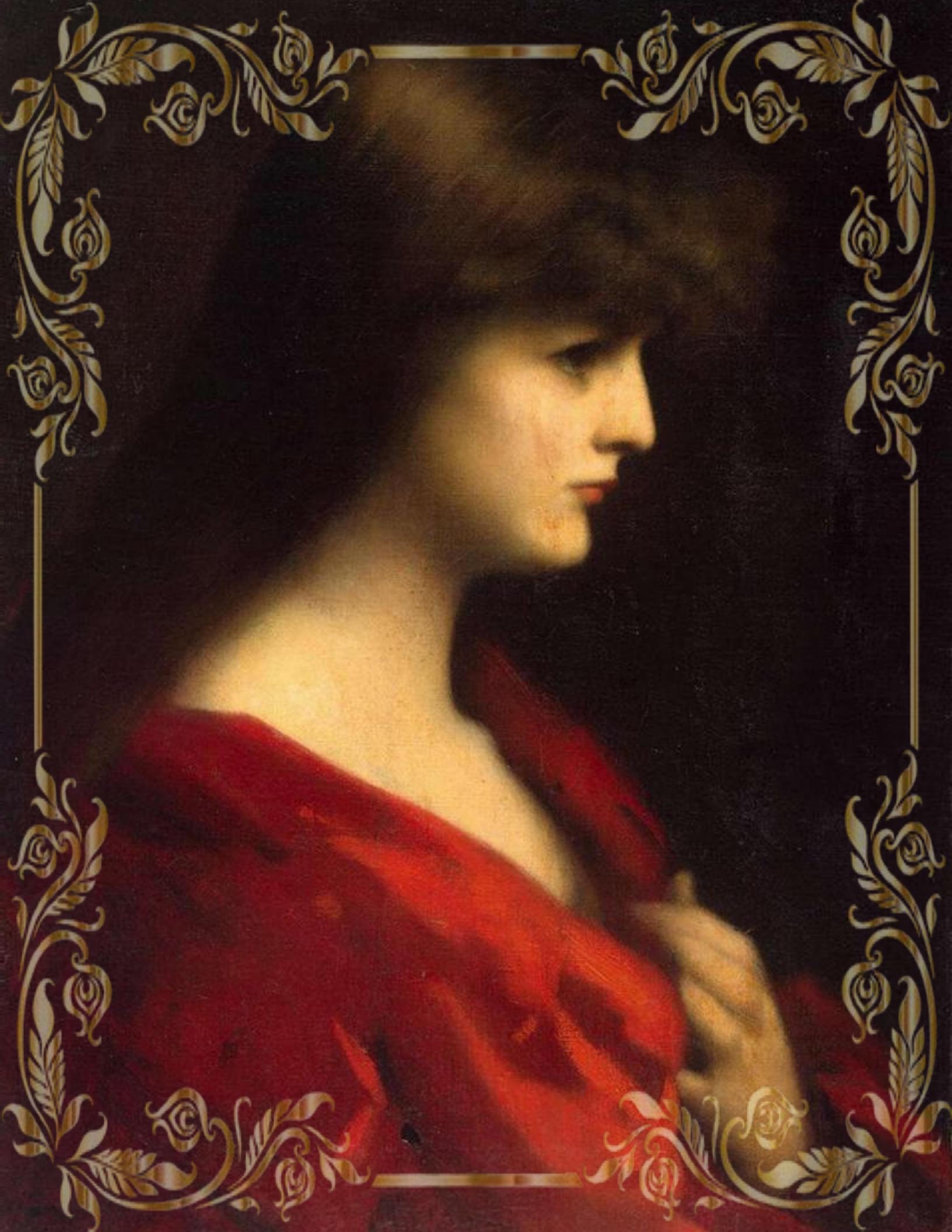
*Y*ou know, the people who write “they lived happily ever after” aren’t the people living the ever after. They don’t know. They just stop the story after the wedding and assume that marriage makes everyone happy and that happiness sticks around forever.

My father had promised my hand in marriage to whoever could rescue me from the ogre. A sensible transaction; without a daughter, his family line could not continue, and a man strong, brave, and clever enough to defeat an ogre is the kind of blood you want in your family line. Of course, I didn’t know I was being sold to the highest bidder, I had more pressing concerns at that moment. I wasn’t the only girl the ogre had stolen. Five of us huddled together for warmth at the back of the ogre’s cave, devising a plan of escape.

If anything, this guy ruined our plan. It’s amazing that we all still managed to escape. And rescue him from the ogre on the way out. This guy was a better storyteller than a rescuer. His recounting of the events didn’t sound familiar to me, but my father bought it, so the wedding was planned.

My fellow captives became my bridesmaids. We all agreed that the flowers were lovely, the dress was lovely, the groom was lovely, the castle was lovely. Yes, it was a much lovelier place to be held captive than an ogre’s cave. So, we huddled together and devised a lovely plan of escape.

And so, there was a wedding and the bride did live happily ever after. Just not with the groom.



LITTLE RED TO THE WOODCUTTER

For Jared Jones

by SARA CLETO

While I appreciate
Your strong hands that
Wielded the ax and their
Steadiness as you
Pulled me free

And how you held me
While I cried and raged

I am most grateful that
You never assumed I was dinner.

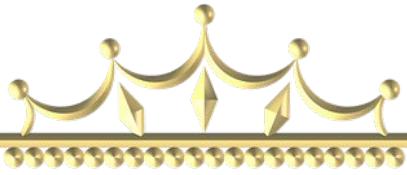
There are plenty of woodcutters
Who see girls in red
(or green or glitter)
As disposable, consumable,
Gristle for the mill of the forest
And its wolves.

You saw my humanity through
The veil of flesh and fur,
Through the darkness that
Ate me and
Boils inside me still.

You wiped my face,
My hands, with your handkerchief
And then, when the linen scrap was
Red, with your shirt,

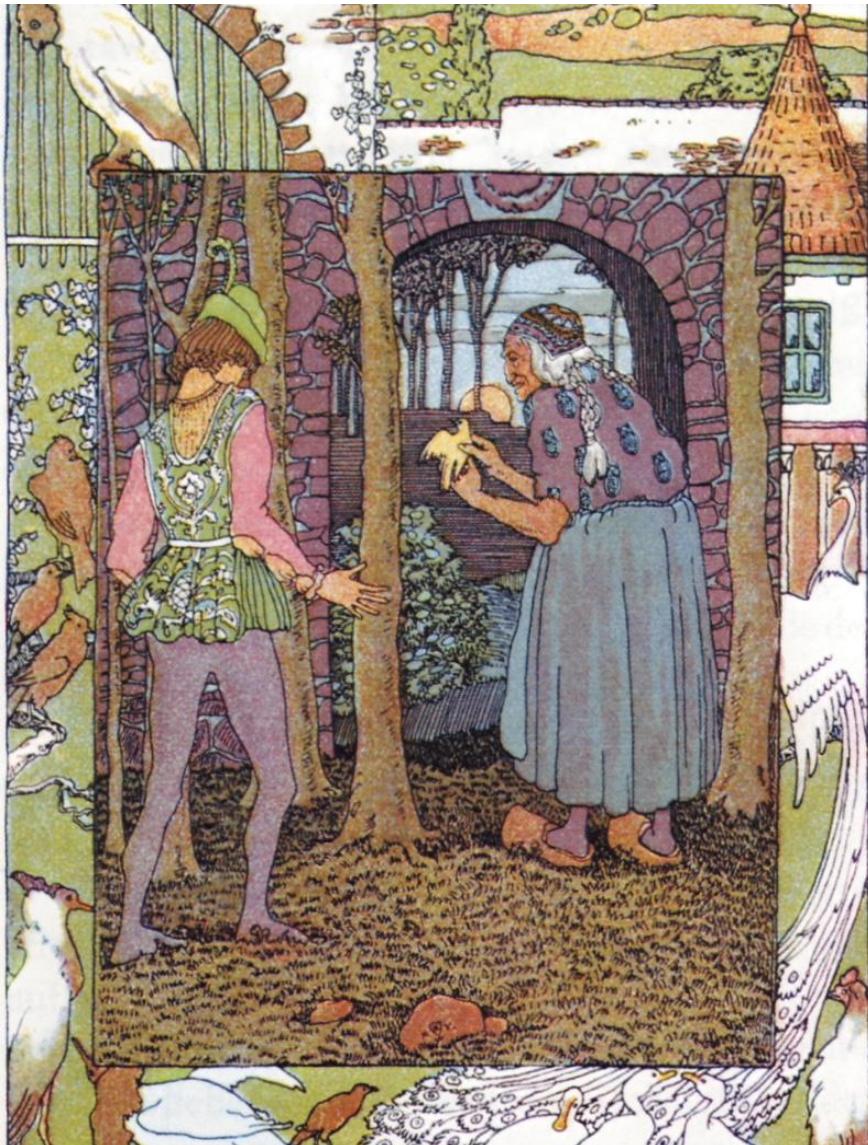
Listened to me scream and, later,
Listened to me talk,

Gave me a knife and
A red ribbon to
Tie it to my thigh and
Taught me how to use it.



Fairy Tales from the Brothers Grimm

JORINDA AND JORINGEL



There was once an old castle in the midst of a large and thick forest, and in it an old woman, who was a Witch, dwelt all alone.

In the daytime, she changed herself into a cat or a screech-owl, but in the evening she took her proper shape again as a human being. She could lure wild beasts and birds to her, then she killed and boiled and roasted them.

If any one came within one hundred paces of the castle he was obliged to stand still, and could not stir from the place until she bade him be free. But whenever an innocent maiden came within this circle, she changed her into a bird, shut her up in a wicker-work cage, and carried the cage into a room in the castle where there were seven thousand other cages of birds.

Now, there was once a maiden who was called Jorinda, who was fairer than all other girls. She and a handsome youth named Joringel had promised to marry each other, and their greatest happiness was being together.

One day, in order that they might be able to talk together in quiet, they went for a walk in the forest.

“Take care,” said Joringel, “that you do not go too near the castle.”

It was beautiful in the dark green forest. The sun shone brightly between the trunks of the trees, and the turtledoves sang mournfully upon the young boughs of the birch-trees.

Jorinda wept now and then. She sat down in the sunshine and was sorrowful. Joringel was sorrowful too. They were as sad as if they were about to die. Then they looked around them, and were quite at a loss, for they did not know by which way to go home. The sun was half above the mountain and half set.

Joringel looked through the bushes, and saw the old walls of the castle close at hand. He was horror-stricken and filled with deadly fear.

Jorinda was singing:

*“My little Bird, with the necklace red,
Sings sorrow, sorrow, sorrow,
He sings that the Dove must soon be dead,
Sings sorrow, sor——jug, jug, jug!”*

Joringel looked for Jorinda. She was changed into a Nightingale, and sang “jug, jug, jug!”

A screech-owl with glowing eyes flew three times round about her, and three times cried, “to-whoo, to-whoo, to-whoo!”

Joringel could not move. He stood there like a stone, and could neither weep nor speak, nor move hand or foot.

The sun had now set. The owl flew into the thicket. Directly afterward there came out of it a crooked Old Woman, yellow and lean, with large red eyes and a hooked nose, the point of which reached to her chin. She muttered to herself, caught the Nightingale, and took it away in her hand.

Joringel could neither speak nor move from the spot. The Nightingale was gone.

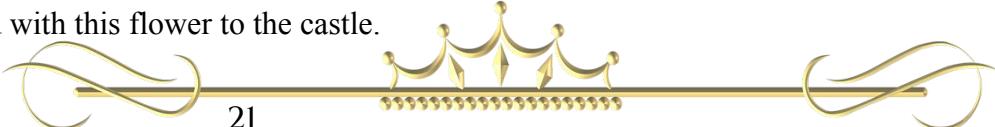
At last the woman came back, and said in a hollow voice, “Greet thee, Zachiel. If the moon shines on the cage, Zachiel, let him loose at once.”

Then Joringel was freed. He fell on his knees before the woman and begged that she would give him back his Jorinda. But she said that he should never have her again, and went away. He called, he wept. He lamented, but all in vain, “Ah, what is to become of me?”

Joringel went away, and at last came to a strange village. There he kept sheep for a long time. He often walked round and round the castle, but not too near to it. One night he dreamt that he found a Blood-Red Flower, in the middle of which was a beautiful large pearl; that he picked the flower and went with it to the castle, and that everything he touched with the flower was freed from enchantment. He also dreamt that by means of it, he recovered his Jorinda.

In the morning, when he awoke, he began to seek over hill and dale to find such a flower. He sought until the ninth day, and then, early in the morning, he found the Blood-Red Flower. In the middle of it, there was a large dew-drop, as big as the finest pearl.

Day and night, he journeyed with this flower to the castle.



When he was within a hundred paces of it he was not held fast, but walked on to the door.

Joringel was full of joy. He touched the door with the flower, and it sprang open. He walked in through the courtyard, and listened for the sound of the birds. At last he heard it. He went on, and found the room from whence it came. There the Witch was feeding the birds in the seven thousand cages.

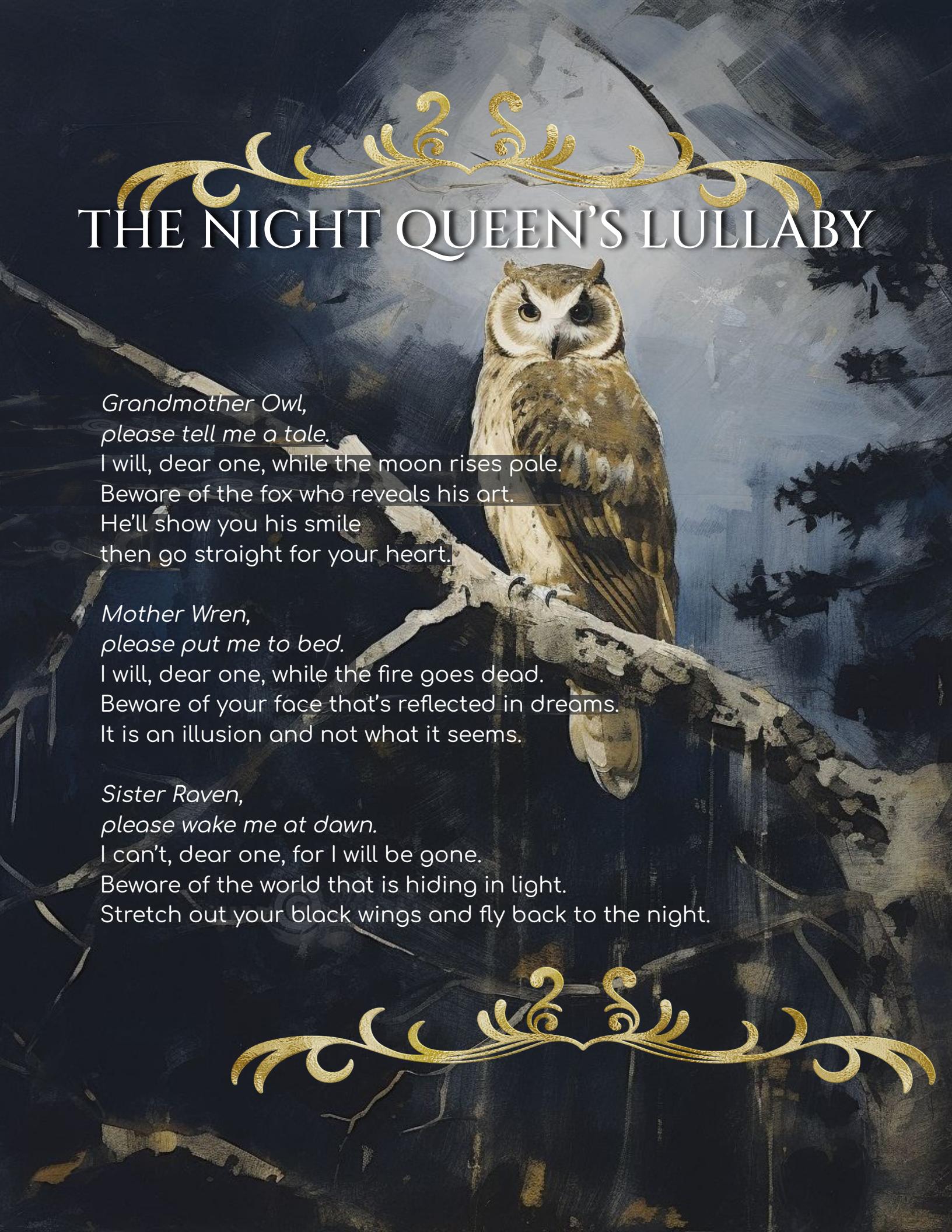
When she saw Joringel, she was very angry, and scolded and spat poison and gall, but she could not come within two paces of him. He did not take any notice of her, but went and looked at the cages with the birds. But there were many hundred Nightingales, how was he to find his Jorinda again?

Just then he saw the Old Woman quietly take away a cage with a bird in it, and go toward the door.

Swiftly he sprang toward her, touched the cage with the flower, and also the Old Woman.

She could now no longer bewitch any one. And Jorinda was standing there, clasping him round the neck, and she was as beautiful as ever!





THE NIGHT QUEEN'S LULLABY

*Grandmother Owl,
please tell me a tale.*

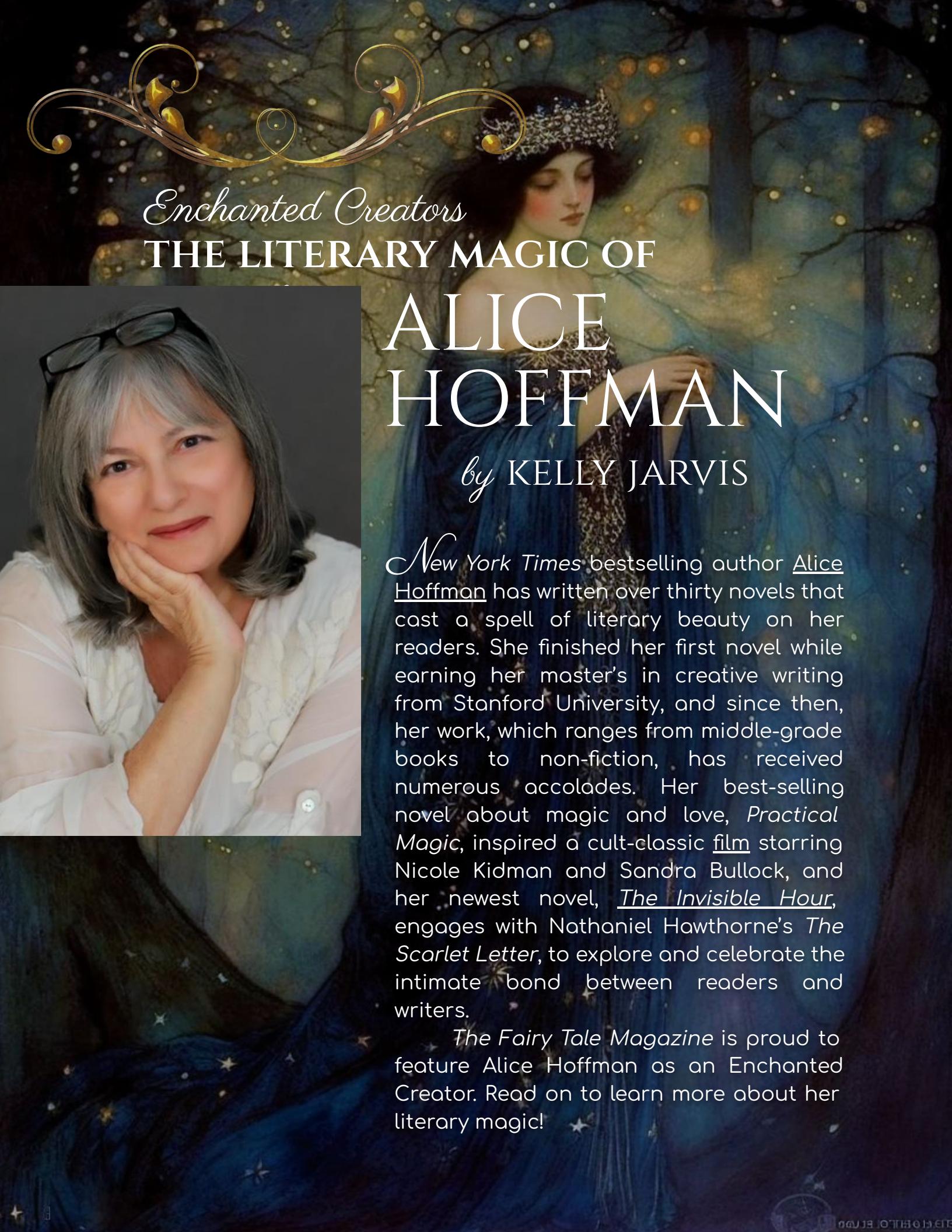
I will, dear one, while the moon rises pale.
Beware of the fox who reveals his art.
He'll show you his smile
then go straight for your heart.

*Mother Wren,
please put me to bed.*

I will, dear one, while the fire goes dead.
Beware of your face that's reflected in dreams.
It is an illusion and not what it seems.

*Sister Raven,
please wake me at dawn.*

I can't, dear one, for I will be gone.
Beware of the world that is hiding in light.
Stretch out your black wings and fly back to the night.



Enchanted Creators THE LITERARY MAGIC OF

ALICE HOFFMAN

by KELLY JARVIS

New York Times bestselling author Alice Hoffman has written over thirty novels that cast a spell of literary beauty on her readers. She finished her first novel while earning her master's in creative writing from Stanford University, and since then, her work, which ranges from middle-grade books to non-fiction, has received numerous accolades. Her best-selling novel about magic and love, *Practical Magic*, inspired a cult-classic film starring Nicole Kidman and Sandra Bullock, and her newest novel, *The Invisible Hour*, engages with Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, to explore and celebrate the intimate bond between readers and writers.

The Fairy Tale Magazine is proud to feature Alice Hoffman as an Enchanted Creator. Read on to learn more about her literary magic!

Your writing is filled with magic, and no series of books is more magical than your sweeping tales of the Owens family in *Practical Magic* (1995), *The Rules of Magic* (2017), *Magic Lessons* (2020) and *The Book of Magic* (2021). What first inspired you to tell the story of the Owens women, and when did you know their story would continue across two prequels and a sequel? Why do you think your stories of the Owens family have captured the hearts of so many readers?

It is interesting to me that the *Practical Magic* series has gotten more popular over time, and I think that one reason for that is that the stories have been shared between generations of mothers and daughters and grandmothers, which is, for me, a wonderful thing.

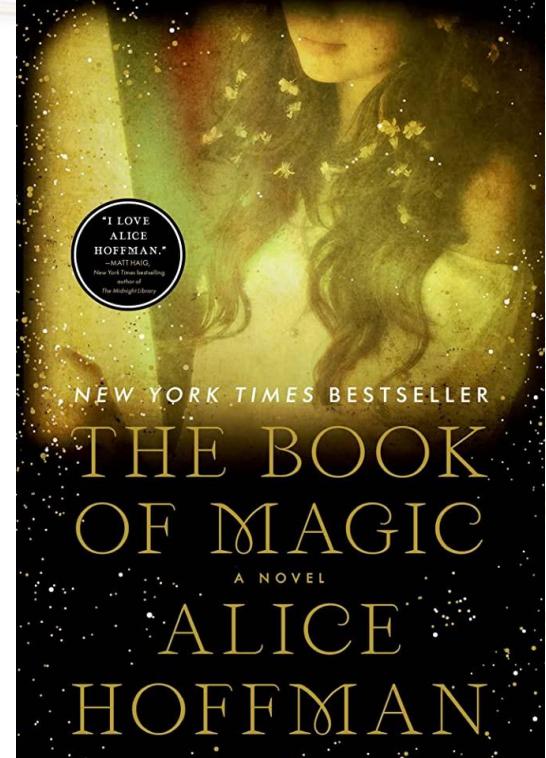
I grew up reading magic books. I always gravitated towards anything with magic in it and I especially loved witches. I think a lot of young girls are drawn to witches for lots of different reasons, but I have always felt like the witch is one of the only mythic female characters that has strength. I think the witch's strength is a big part of her popular appeal, but I really started writing *Practical Magic* because I had the title. I kept thinking about it and thinking about it, and then I just sat down to write and the Owens women appeared, so it was just very lucky for me.

I think it was about 25 years later that I wrote the prequel. I had never thought about writing another Owens family novel until my readers wrote to me and said that they felt like there was more to the story and that they wish there would be a sequel. I kept thinking about it, and after 25 years, I realized I really wanted to write a prequel because I'm interested in how the past shapes the present. I found myself curious about the two aunts, Francis and Jet, and I wondered what their girlhood might have been like when they were growing up, so I wrote *The Rules of Magic*. Once I finished writing that book, I still felt like there was more to the story. Now, even though the series is complete, I feel like I could write about the Owens family forever.

In addition to the Practical Magic series, you have written over thirty works including adult books (*The Museum of Extraordinary Things*, *The World That We Knew*), young adult books (*Indigo*, *Aquamarine*, *Green Heart*), middle grade books (*Nightbird*), collections of linked short stories (*Blackbird House*, *Faerie Knitting*), stand-alone short stories (*The Bookstore Sisters*), and nonfiction (*Survival Lessons*). What is your favorite genre of writing? Do you approach writing for different genres in different ways? Do you plan to write for a particular audience or does your finished story determine the way you categorize your work?

My favorite thing to do is link short stories together. I feel like you can create such a large world that way, and I love moving around through time and space. I'm thinking about doing a book of connected short stories again; I just really love doing that.

I don't approach the genres differently, but I do plan to write with a particular audience in mind. In all honesty, I think I'm always writing for myself. So, when I'm writing a young adult book, I'm

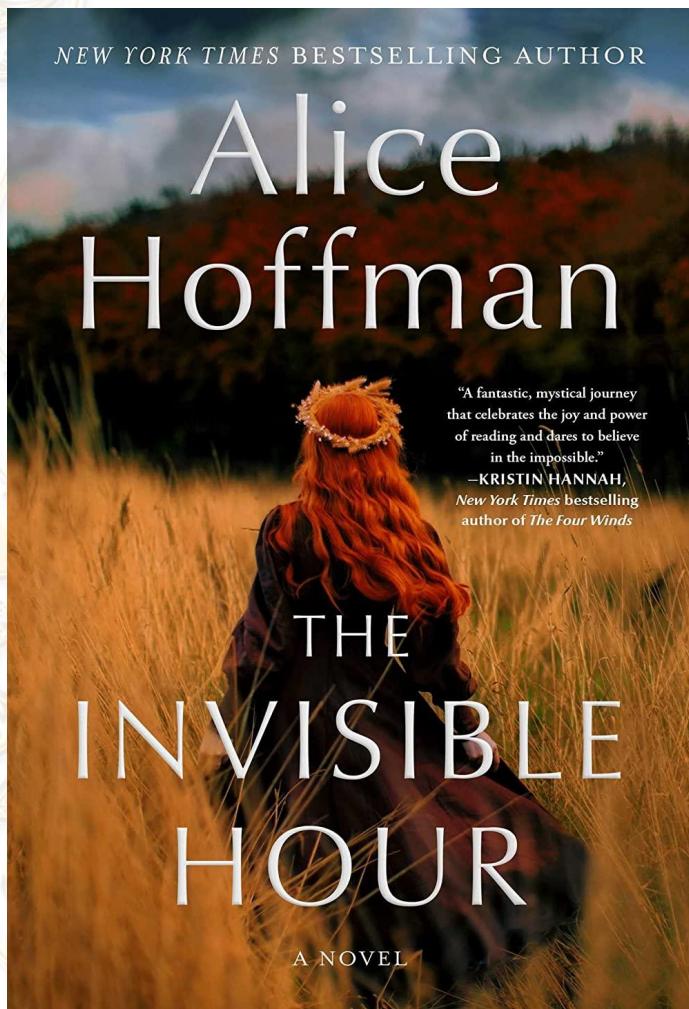


writing for my sixteen-year-old self. My sixteen-year-old self read adult books, and I think a lot of adults read young adult books because they are reading for the person they once were; they are reading for the young person that they still carry around inside of them. My books are really for every reader. I may envision an adult or middle-grade reader when I start writing, but that doesn't mean the book is just for that readership.

The Invisible Hour returns readers to the town of Blackwell, Massachusetts, the setting of the stories in your book *The Red Garden*, and fans of your fiction may recognize the way distinct settings (houses, gardens, apple orchards) shape and reflect the lives of your characters. What inspires you to choose or create the settings for your novels? Have you been influenced by the places that you have lived or visited? Do you find inspiration in the natural world?

Sometimes I am inspired by my travels to a beautiful place, but sometimes I write about places that I've never been. I wrote about Saint Thomas in *The Marriage of Opposites* and I've never been there, so I don't think you really have to have visited a place to write about it. On the other hand, some places, like Lennox, inspire me to write. Lennox is one of the most beautiful places I've ever been, and *The Invisible Hour* allows me to share a place that I enjoy writing about.

I do find inspiration in the natural world, which is interesting because I'm not a gardener. Gardening has never been a part of my actual life. I grew up in one of those new suburbs that was created out of a potato farm after the war, and there was no nature. Finding the slightest bit of nature in those suburbs was so miraculous! I think that I may be so interested in nature and gardens in my writing because I grew up without them.



***The Book of Magic* opens by telling the reader that “all the best stories begin in a library.” Your characters read Edward Eager, E. Nesbit, Ray Bradbury, Emily Dickinson, and Andrew Lang’s Fairy Books, and your novels *Here on Earth*, *Blue Diary*, and *The Invisible Hour* have taken inspiration from *Wuthering Heights*, *Bluebeard*, and *The Scarlet Letter*. In what way have libraries, and the stories you have found within them, shaped your life? Do you have a favorite fairy tale?**

I don't think I could have survived my childhood without a library. First, it was my school library. My librarian was amazing, and the library was a place that I could escape to. Reading was an escape from my real life. I also went to a library in the next town over, where the librarians let me have a library card even though I didn't come from that town, and my mother had a bookshelf filled with books. There was no one else that I knew growing up that had bookshelves, my mother was the only one. My proximity to books allowed me to think

about different possibilities. It utterly changed my life. My life changed radically because I was a reader, and this just surfaces in my writing and my books.

I don't know if I have a favorite fairy tale, that is a hard question to answer, but I grew up listening to my grandmother's Russian stories which were like fairy tales. I read somewhere that eighty to eighty-five percent of fairy tales feature girls who save themselves or save someone else. Fairy tales present girls in a more empowered way than many other forms of literature, and I think that is a part of the appeal of fairy tales for me. In fairy tales, girls figure things out, girls save themselves, girls escape from terrible circumstances and change the world around them.

If I had to choose a favorite, I would say that *Beauty and the Beast* really appeals to me and has always appealed to me. I love the idea that you can't really tell who somebody is by looking at them. I love the idea that love conquers all, that love changes things, and that love can break a curse. But I also always loved *Hansel and Gretel* because Gretel is the smart one in that story. So many of the books I encountered in childhood (except for *Nancy Drew*) didn't feature female characters, or, if they did, female characters were the helpers, and they didn't really matter. I found that in magic and myth and fairy tales, women mattered and this opened the world for me.

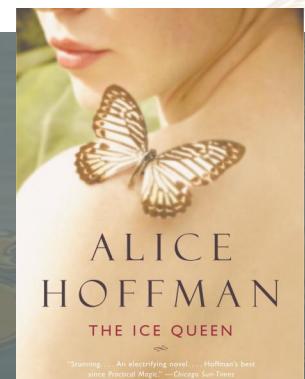
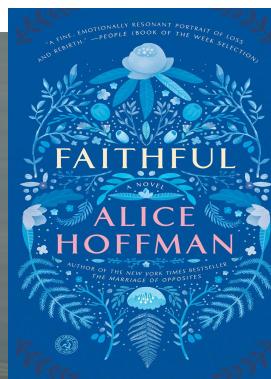
Your work recognizes the presence of both natural and supernatural magic, but your stories are often propelled by deep, complex, and enduring relationships between women (mothers, daughters, sisters, friends) across generations. Are any of your characters inspired by women in your life, or were any of the women in your life instrumental in helping you to become a writer?

I grew up in a house of women, so the women were always important to me. I was super close to my grandmother when I was growing up and I talked to her every day. I had a very mixed relationship with my mother; it was both very close and very far which I think is true for many mothers and daughters. Sometimes when you're writing a book, you don't even really know what it truly is until you finish it. I think *The Invisible Hour* is this kind of story. In some ways, it is the story of my mother and myself.

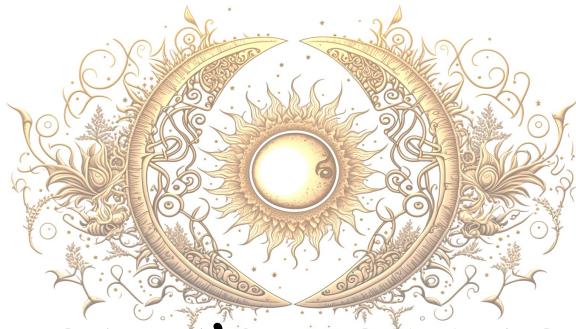
Your latest novel, *The Invisible Hour*, begins with a letter to your readers which says "The bond between writer and reader is a cherished and mysterious one. A book doesn't live when it's written. It lives when it's read." What do you most hope your readers will take away from your beautiful new story?

I just hope that my book can mean to some readers what other people's books have meant to me. I think that every time a book is read, it is a different book. The meaning of the book depends on who is reading it and when they are reading it. I know for me there were certain books that really spoke to me. It wasn't just that I felt the same as the writer. It was that when I read those books, I felt known. I felt like somebody understood me and knew me. That is what I hope for my readers. I want them to feel understood and known.

Alice Hoffman's writing will enchant readers looking for stories of love, friendship, and magic. Her carefully woven tales will transport readers to new worlds while reflecting life's deepest truths. We know that you will enjoy her spellbinding fiction as much as we do!



"Stunning... An electrifying novel... Hoffman's best since 'Practical Magic'." —Chicago Sun-Times



PERSEPHONE'S POMEGRANATE

by JAYNE COHEN

*I*t was the time before time when every day was summer soft, each one melting into the next like sugar into water...when moist furrows stretching to the horizon swelled with waves of barley and the sweet smells of ripe apricots and almonds were everywhere...when Demeter, goddess of all that grew on earth, lavished her dominion with a mother's love and made the world her eternal garden where everything would bloom at once.

But greater still was Demeter's devotion to her own beloved daughter, the slim-ankled tender beauty Persephone. Ever protective, Demeter kept her under watchful eye, away from predatory gods and jealous goddesses, leaving the girl with the graceful nymphs, daughters of Oceanus, as her sole companions.

On that day Persephone and her friends were picking flowers, a gift for Mother Demeter. But even as the maiden goddess gathered armfuls of roses and sweet violets, crocuses, lilies and fragrant hyacinths, a giant exotic bloom pulled Persephone lodestar-like just beyond and ever ahead. At last she reached it: a gorgeous narcissus, the stalk swollen with a hundred blossoms. Enveloped in its powerfully seductive fragrance, she laughed and reached out to pluck it.

Suddenly the earth cracked apart and a golden chariot burst from the unknown depths below. The driver grabbed the girl and carried her off. And yes, Persephone did scream for her mother for she recognized her abductor as the formidable god of the underworld, Hades.

The air grew colder and colder still during the chariot's headlong descent into the netherworld. Hades saw his captive's fragile body shiver and he drew his voluminous cape protectively around her.

Finally entering his realm, they sped past the roiling pools and inky rivers until the fearsome steeds pulled up before the somber palace. Hades brought the frightened goddess into a night-dark room filled with couches and soft pillows and bade her make herself comfortable. Then he knelt before her.

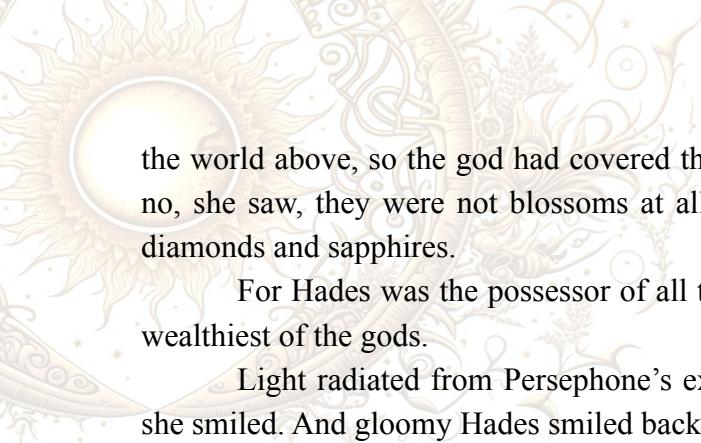
And he murmured that during his infrequent trips to the world above, he would watch her dance joyfully with the daughters of Oceanus. "Afterwards I would dream that same vital spark might one day light up my dark kingdom. Because one day you would greet the new arrivals here and rule over the dead souls of the netherworld with me."

And, then he confessed, he went to Zeus, his brother and father to Persephone, and told him of his desperate loneliness and melancholy. "At last Zeus relented and devised a plot. It was Gaia, the Great Mother of All, who planted the marvelous narcissus to entrap you."

"So now I ask but humbly for your forgiveness. I love you: that is my only defense. Persephone, be my partner and share my kingdom with me. And one day I hope you will consent to be my bride."

By now she was weak with hunger, her bones aching from the dank underworld cold. Yet still Persephone was mesmerized by the room where Hades led her next. He knew she loved her flowers in





the world above, so the god had covered the ebony tables here with a profusion of strange blooms. But no, she saw, they were not blossoms at all, but dazzling imitations carved from emeralds and rubies, diamonds and sapphires.

For Hades was the possessor of all that is found in the subterranean world beneath the earth, the wealthiest of the gods.

Light radiated from Persephone's exquisite face and bounced about the glittering gems. Slowly she smiled. And gloomy Hades smiled back.

"Come, my Queen. Take something to eat. You have not tasted anything all this time."

In between the jewels on the tables she saw platters of beaten gold that beckoned with the food of the gods: fragrant ambrosia from Mt. Olympus and decanters of silken nectar. There were silver platters too, and these held the favored food of mortals. Soft goat cheese drizzled with honey from thyme flowers, roasted baby lamb, purple figs and grapes big as fists. Olives and their grass-green oil. Amphorae filled with finest wine. And most seductive of all, pomegranates slashed open to reveal their juicy seeds, red as the ruby flowers. Red yes as blood.

And Persephone was sorely tempted. But she had heard the stories and would not taste anything at all.



In the world above, at the very moment the chariot had plunged deep within the earth, Demeter felt a piercing stab run through her heart. And she knew. She knew what she had dreaded most had come to pass. Despite her watchful eye, her tender child had vanished.

In vain the grieving goddess wandered the earth and roamed the seas in search of her daughter. And inconsolable with bottomless sorrow, Demeter refused to return to the other gods at Mt. Olympus. She would not eat the celestial ambrosia, or sip the nectar of the immortals. She would not even wash her body, so consumed she was with misery.

And then she raged, cursing the earth as she cursed herself. In place of her eternal garden, there would always be winter now, for not a single plant would she allow to live. And so crops died in the fields; flowers and even weeds could not thrive. Famine settled over a barren world. Every mortal—human and animal—was starving. Soon they would all die.

On Olympus, the gods knew that should the entire race of mortals perish, there would be none to offer up gifts and sacrifices to them, none to worship them and glorify their exploits. And to none of the gods was all this more important than to Zeus, the king and most powerful of them all.

And so it was that Zeus sent the gods one by one to plead with Demeter and shower her with gifts, but no one could melt her angry heart. And with each she sent back the same message: "Never will the earth bear fruit again until my daughter is returned to me."

So Zeus dispatched his messenger Hermes to bring back the girl.

But when the messenger entered Hades' palace, it was not a girl he found, but a Queen Consort. Persephone had grown into a goddess wise and strong as her mother, her girlish charms transformed into regal beauty.

Hades and Persephone, the King and Queen of the Underworld, looked at each other. "It is time, my dearest Persephone," he said.

She turned to Hermes. She was eager to be reunited with her mother again, but she had one small

request. "Please let me have but some time alone here before I take my leave."

And Persephone slipped into the room with the cut gemstone flowers.

A few moments later she flew back to Mt. Olympus with the winged messenger and into the arms of Demeter.

Her mother, overjoyed, was awed by the change in her regal daughter whom she scarcely recognized now. And all at once the earth began to bloom again.

But what was this, those lips so red as rubies?

Then did Persephone admit to Demeter that before she left Hades she had tasted his tart-sweet pomegranate seeds. It was their juice that still stained her lips.

Demeter sunk into despair, for all immortals know that if one consumes anything in Hades' kingdom, one is doomed to spend the rest of eternity there. But before the goddess could bring back eternal winter to the world, Zeus asked Persephone how many seeds she had eaten.

"Just four."

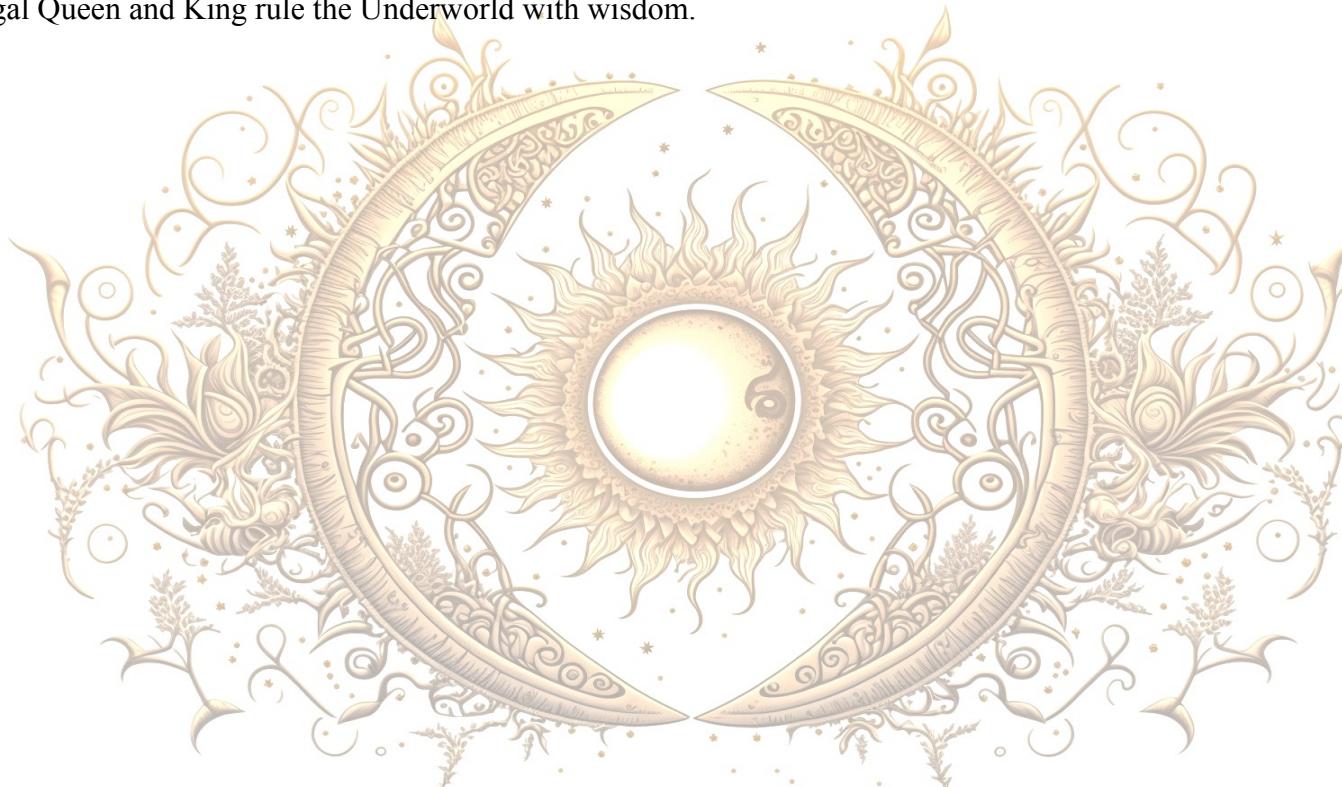
Now Zeus looked down at the mortals gathering the tender new green shoots of spring and tending the ripening barley stalks. White flowers spilled from the almond trees and scented the moist earth.

And the powerful king of the gods proclaimed, "For eight months of every year, Persephone shall join her mother. Then mother and daughter together shall bring every growing thing to life, just as the earth rejoices today.

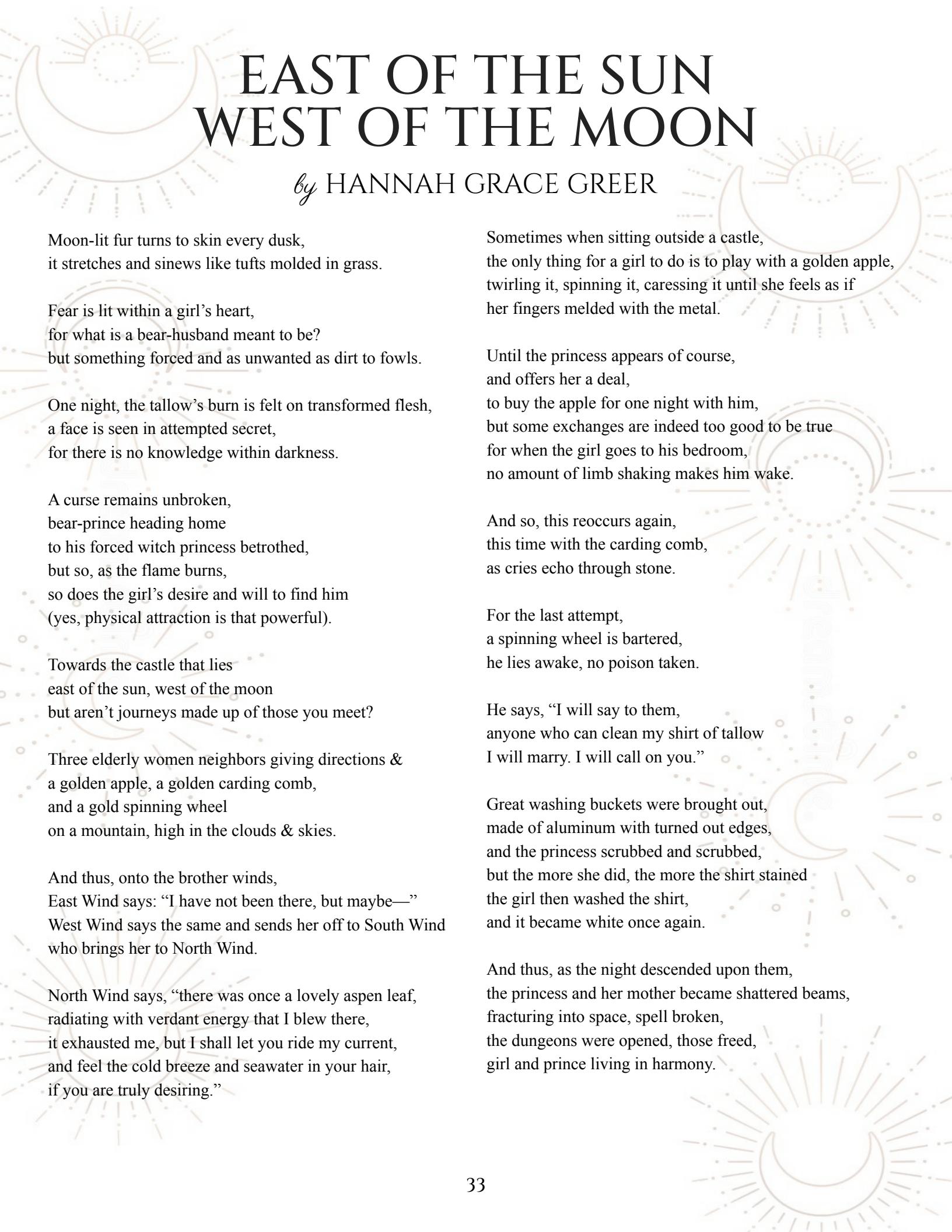
"But," he continued, "for the remaining four months—one for every pomegranate seed Persephone did swallow—she must spend below in the netherworld."

And so it is that every year when Persephone takes her leave, Demeter mourns her daughter's absence, bringing sad winter to earth with its barren fields and brown gardens...

...while below the earth, Persephone is reuniting with her husband, King Hades. And then side by side, the regal Queen and King rule the Underworld with wisdom.







EAST OF THE SUN WEST OF THE MOON

by HANNAH GRACE GREER

Moon-lit fur turns to skin every dusk,
it stretches and sinews like tufts molded in grass.

Fear is lit within a girl's heart,
for what is a bear-husband meant to be?
but something forced and as unwanted as dirt to fowls.

One night, the tallow's burn is felt on transformed flesh,
a face is seen in attempted secret,
for there is no knowledge within darkness.

A curse remains unbroken,
bear-prince heading home
to his forced witch princess betrothed,
but so, as the flame burns,
so does the girl's desire and will to find him
(yes, physical attraction is that powerful).

Towards the castle that lies
east of the sun, west of the moon
but aren't journeys made up of those you meet?

Three elderly women neighbors giving directions &
a golden apple, a golden carding comb,
and a gold spinning wheel
on a mountain, high in the clouds & skies.

And thus, onto the brother winds,
East Wind says: "I have not been there, but maybe—"
West Wind says the same and sends her off to South Wind
who brings her to North Wind.

North Wind says, "there was once a lovely aspen leaf,
radiating with verdant energy that I blew there,
it exhausted me, but I shall let you ride my current,
and feel the cold breeze and seawater in your hair,
if you are truly desiring."

Sometimes when sitting outside a castle,
the only thing for a girl to do is to play with a golden apple,
twirling it, spinning it, caressing it until she feels as if
her fingers melded with the metal.

Until the princess appears of course,
and offers her a deal,
to buy the apple for one night with him,
but some exchanges are indeed too good to be true
for when the girl goes to his bedroom,
no amount of limb shaking makes him wake.

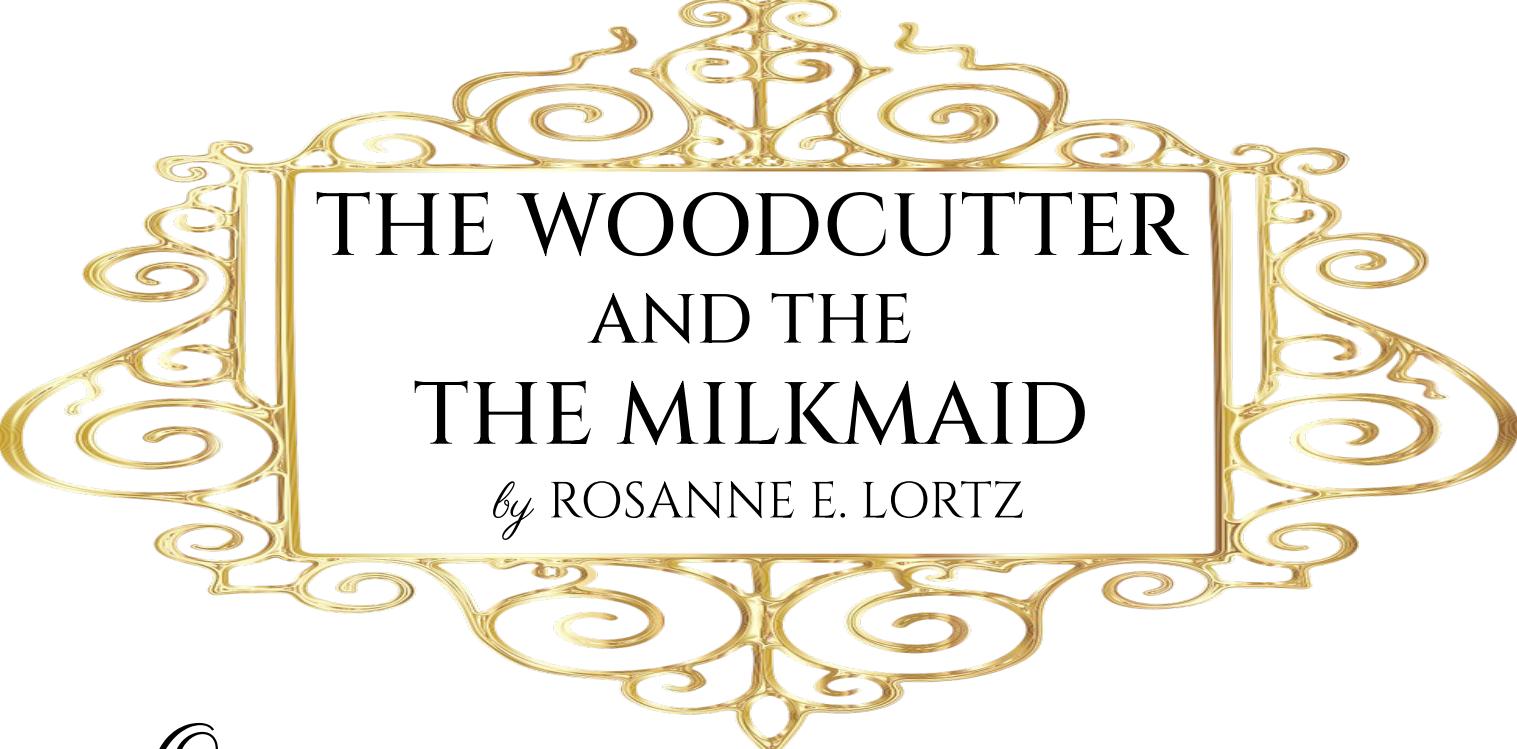
And so, this reoccurs again,
this time with the carding comb,
as cries echo through stone.

For the last attempt,
a spinning wheel is bartered,
he lies awake, no poison taken.

He says, "I will say to them,
anyone who can clean my shirt of tallow
I will marry. I will call on you."

Great washing buckets were brought out,
made of aluminum with turned out edges,
and the princess scrubbed and scrubbed,
but the more she did, the more the shirt stained
the girl then washed the shirt,
and it became white once again.

And thus, as the night descended upon them,
the princess and her mother became shattered beams,
fracturing into space, spell broken,
the dungeons were opened, those freed,
girl and prince living in harmony.



THE WOODCUTTER AND THE THE MILKMAID

by ROSANNE E. LORTZ

Once there was a woodcutter who lived in the village of East Wood. He labored long days cutting down trees and splitting kindling to sell for firewood to the neighboring villagers. He was too busy to stop for market days. He was too busy to stop for holy days. For in his house, he kept a chest of coin that was growing heavier and heavier until he would have a large enough fortune to marry the maiden beyond the forest who had caught his fancy.

Across the forest in the village of West Wood lived a pretty milkmaid. She milked her father's cows each morning and sold the milk to the baker. She milked her father's cows each night and sold the milk to the neighboring villagers. As long as the cows gave milk every day, the milkmaid labored every day. In her room, she had a large purse of coins. She was saving them for her wedding day to buy a silk gown, gold eardrops, silver candlesticks, and pewter dishes. For a woodcutter beyond the forest had caught her fancy, and he had promised her that he would come calling upon her very soon.

One day an old wise woman came hobbling through the wood clad in a green kirtle and a brown hood. Across the path lay a fallen tree. With her hunched back and shriveled form, she was too weak to clamber over it. She could hear a woodcutter whistling in the distance. "Good sir," she called, "will you help me climb over this tree?"

Between the blows of his ax, the woodcutter heard her speak. "I'm sorry, mother, but I have no time. This forest won't fell itself." Ignoring the request of the old woman, the woodcutter continued to cut firewood and split kindling.

But the wise woman was more than just an old woman. She had the powers of the fairy kind. Seeing the selfishness of the woodcutter, she threw back her hood and revealed her true nature. "Because you would not stop to help an old woman, you are cursed to never stop until every tree in this wood is felled."

As the words of the curse were spoken, the woodcutter felt a change come over him. The handle of the ax seemed to fuse to his hand. Whereas before he had felt a strong desire to work, he now felt an almost otherworldly compulsion. He began to swing his ax with fiendish fervor, and when night fell he did not cease his labors. The forest must be felled. The forest must be felled.

The wise woman continued through the forest until she came to the other side. There she met a



pink-cheeked milkmaid, hurrying with her bucket of milk from house to house. "Good maiden," she said, "will you give an old woman a drink of your milk?"

The lithe milkmaid tossed her head and looked the other way. "I'm sorry, mother, but my milk is only for sale. I have nothing to give away to those who beg." Ignoring the wise woman, she turned to take her bucket to another house.

Once again, the wise woman threw back her head and revealed her fairy power. "Because your heart is as hard as wood, you are cursed to become a tree at the edge of this forest. And a tree you will stay until the milk of kindness flows from your heart."

The milk bucket fell to the ground and the milkmaid felt her form changing. Her feet anchored themselves into the ground at the edge of the forest and became roots. Her arms and hair rose upwards and became branches and leaves. Her pretty figure froze into a hard, wooden trunk. But strangest of all was the fact that she could still see, she could still hear, and she could still speak.

A year went by and then another. The villagers in East Wood shook their heads at the mad woodcutter who kept them up all night with the thudding blows of his ax. The villagers in West Wood whispered about the Tree of the Cursed Maiden and the moans of grief it made.

By the end of five years, the forest was almost felled. The East Wood was gone and nearly all of the West Wood. The woodcutter had worked his way from one village to the other, and now there was only one tree left to fell. As soon as this tree was felled, the woodcutter would be freed from his relentless labors.

The woodcutter lifted the ax that was fused to his hand. But before he could strike the first blow, the tree said, "Stop!"

Shaken by the voice coming from a trunk of bark, the woodcutter said, "Tree, I cannot stop. I have been cursed by a wise woman to fell this forest from one side to the other. Once I cut you down, the curse shall be lifted and I can go and claim my bride."

"Who is your bride?" moaned the tree.

"A milkmaid fair from West Wood town. She works with her hands from sunup to sundown. She is the prettiest maiden this forest has seen, and once I am free, I'll ask her to have me."

The tree groaned with great grief. "Listen to me, woodcutter. I have been cursed by a wise woman too. Once I was a milkmaid fair who worked with her hands from sunup to sundown. But because of my hard heart, the wise woman turned me to wood, and a tree I will be until my heart softens with the milk of kindness."

The woodcutter let out a cry of dismay. "My milkmaid fair! How can this be?" He tried to wrest the ax from his own grip, but the curse was not lifted and the ax would not budge. "How could I think to cause you pain? I would rather cut off my hand than lay an ax to your roots."

The ax began to shimmer and tug, pulling him closer to the tree. In the last five years, it had never lain so long unused.

"But if you do not cut me down," said the maiden, "your curse will never be lifted. Come, dear heart, lay an ax to my roots and we will both be free of the curse one way or the other."

"Never, dear heart," said the woodcutter. Ignoring the pull of the ax, he turned the blade outward and wrapped his arms around the tree in a lover's embrace.

As the woodcutter spoke, a great storm began to rise. The rain beat down upon the woodcutter, but he would not release his hold on the tree. Pellets of hail beat down upon the woodcutter, but he would not release his hold on the tree. Sheets of snow fell down upon the woodcutter, but he would not release his hold on the tree.

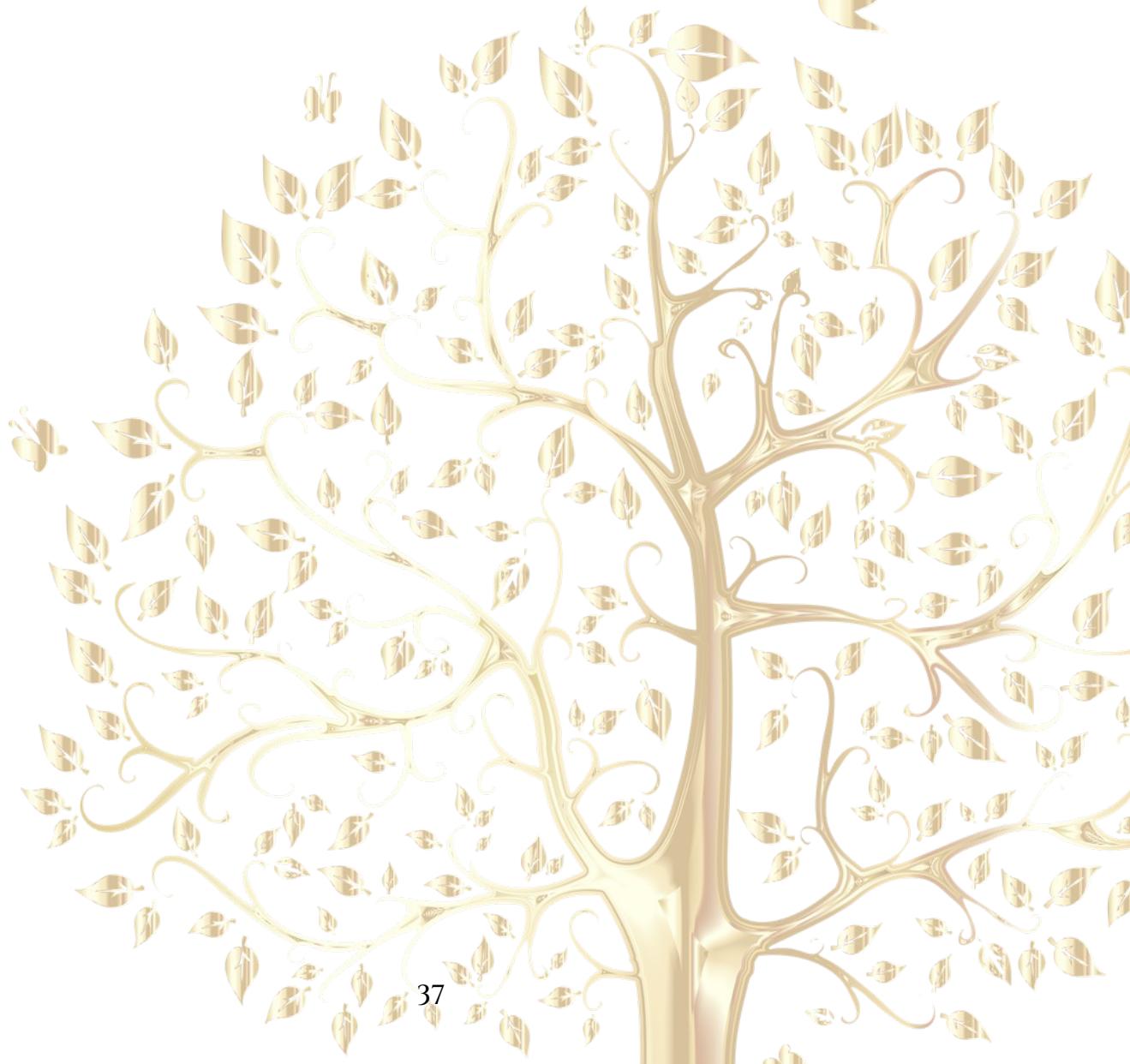
Finally, a great wind rose and uprooted the tree and brought it crashing down upon the woodcutter. The woodcutter held tightly until his eyes closed with the pain, and the last thing he remembered was a trickle of sap running from the fallen tree onto his face, from where the enchanted ax head had pierced the heart of the tree.

When the woodcutter awoke the next day, the rain had gone, the hail had disappeared, and the snow had melted. He looked around himself and saw a meadow full of flowers. And sitting not ten paces away was the beautiful milkmaid, with a garland of flowers in her hair.

“Are you well, dear heart?” she said, rising to meet him.

“I am well,” he said, rising to his own feet. He marveled at how light his hand felt without the weight of the ax bearing it down. “The enchantment is broken!”

“Only this remains,” said the milkmaid. Embracing him, she took his hand and pressed it to her heart where the scar of an ax blade bore the proof that her once-haughty heart could love.





FROM THE FORESTS OF THE EAST

by ALYSON FAYE

A

“There be dragons a-coming,”
the old man prophesied -
“To save yourselves, one and all,
there has to be the gift of a bride.”

He’d always spoken in riddles
for his eight decades plus.
Visions, birthed in dream trances,
“My curse,” he said, “from the gods.”

The villagers taunted their prophet,
tossed dirt and stones and cud,
before they scorched his soles
with blazing, flaming coals.

“Old fool,” they muttered
over frothing flagons of ale.
Each man knew the very last dragon
had been hunted, gutted and impaled

three hundred years a-fore,
in the fir forests to the east,
or so spake the tales of travelers,
who spun stories about the beast.

Night dropped its mantle,
yet drab dawn ne’er broke,
before the sullen skies above
were swamped with smoke.



Three days and nights passed thus
in hazy gloom and ashen dust.
The villagers prayed, and wailed,
whilst fear ate away at their entrails.

On the fourth day, young Issac
pointed toward the eastern sky -
“I hear wings!” he cried.
Then he signed the evil eye.

Looking skywards the villagers gazed,
horrified. Black feathery wings,
a span breadth of one mile wide,
split the sooty smog like twin scythes.

This was no scaly, fiery dragon,
but instead a monstrous roc,
rare as frankincense and jade,
more deadly than Nightshade.

The bird consumed the heavens,
smearing the cirrus clouds
with ribbons of inky shadows,
creating myriad sky-shrouds.

“Here be the old man’s dragon,”
the village elders proclaimed,
with their hands brimful bloodied,
their prophet, buried and betrayed.

The roc plunged downwards -
children screamed, families fled
along the cobbled, cursed streets,
as men’s hearts overflowed with dread.

The roc’s savage, predatory beak
split wide, forked tongue flared out,
its amber eyes stared, soul-less,
at its human prey below.

Cruel claws, long as pitchforks,
ensnared three men in one clutch,
swept them skywards, then freed them,
to watch them smashed to pulp.

A screech of triumph echoed,
roofs were ripped away, walls fell and
carts with horses up snatched,
each beast, whinnying, terror-struck.

The villagers hastened forth
bearing a host of burning torches,
to roast the ravenous roc’s soft belly;
grill its gristle, scorch its sinews.

A girl lay fallen, near trampled underfoot.
Lisabetta, broken, but still breathing,
heard the broad wings’ beat,
smelled the bird’s fetid breath.

“Take me,” she whispered,
“let me be your consort of the skies.
I will ride upon your back.
Please, just let my village lie.”

The feathered aureous head bent,
and down he swooped,
seizing her, with dove-like care,
alien amber eye gazing into hers.

They soared towards the forests of the east,
from whence the raptor had flown,
from a world of fantasy and fable,
but in truth, one of fear and flesh and bone.

The bride’s tears fell like raindrops,
upon the villagers and their homes,
dowsing flames, cooling brows,
transfiguring into lustrous pearls.



Or so the legend goes . . .



BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE

WITCHES IN LOVE

by SARA CLETO & BRITTANY WARMAN



There's a trope in fiction and media that we absolutely hate. In older media, especially from the mid-1800s to the mid-1900s, it was pretty much a standard in witch stories. Can you guess what it is?

It's the idea that love and witchcraft do not mix. Put another way, it's that to fit into a romantic relationship, you can't be a witch—you have to give up your magic.

Think about the end of the film *Bell, Book, and Candle* (1958). Gillian, a contemporary witch who owns an art store, loses her powers (and her cat!) when she falls in love. This is presented as a good thing, a worthy sacrifice to make in order to secure a relationship. Think about how in the beloved TV show *Bewitched* (1964-1972), Samantha is always trying (and usually failing) to renounce her powers and live a proper human life with her husband, who has made her promise to give up magic and become a proper suburban housewife. The very idea of witches casting "love spells" implies that no one could love a witch without the influence of magic... or, if they dare to, the [relations](#)

the relationship won't work out well for them. Remember, for example, the Greek mythological story of Jason and the witch Medea. He runs off with someone else, she murders their sons and his new wife. Cheating on witches is generally not recommended.

We despise this trope for a couple of reasons. First, magic is fun in so many of these stories. Why should a woman have to give it up to enter a relationship, especially when male partners are not expected to



make a similar sacrifice? But more importantly, why should powerful women have to make themselves smaller to deserve romance? Why should they have to give up part of themselves? No. We reject this with every fiber of our beings.

As Edna St. Vincent Millay writes in her poem “Witch-Wife” (1956), speaking as a man married to a witch, a witch “was not made for any man, / And she never will be all mine.”

Sometimes an older story will give the smallest bit of pushback on this. There’s a wonderful literary fairy tale, for example, called “The Little Witch of the Plain” by Evelyn Sharp (1897). In this story, the “little witch” Blarnie loses her witch powers when she kisses a king, but the tale ends with the note that “the people came just as much as before, to ask her for advice; and when she told them to cross their fire-irons on the floor to cure their rheumatism, they always found that it did cure them; and when she told the mothers to kiss their children seven times to cure them of dis-obedience, that was always successful too. So Blarnie is still the beautiful Little Witch of the Plain.” But such stories were pretty thin on the ground until relatively recently.

Now, however, there are more stories and more opportunities for witches in love. Sometimes this involves creating new narratives—tales like *A Discovery of Witches* by Deborah Harkness (2011), *Beautiful Creatures* by Kami Garcia and Margaret Stohl (2009), *Serpent and Dove* by Shelby Mahurin (2019), and *Garden Spells* by Sarah Addison Allen (2007) are fantastic depictions of witches falling in love! Even Hallmark—notorious for their over-the-top romantic comedies—has gotten in on the action with the film *The Good Witch* (2008), which was so popular that it inspired several sequels and even a whole TV series (2015-2021)! Alix E. Harrow’s *The Once and Future Witches* (2020) is a recent and highly critically regarded tour-de-four about the love between three sisters, who use witchcraft to change the world, and the plot also contains complex, ultimately happy romances for two of the sisters. Though there are still plenty of tragic stories, more and more writers and creators are imagining romantic possibilities for witches that don’t hinge on a renunciation of magic—which we read as the loss of self.

Sometimes, giving witches a bit of romance simply involves looking at old stories in new ways. For example, one of our favorite witch love stories is now “Frau Trude,” an obscure tale from the Grimms’ collection, but we never would have recognized it as such without the wisdom of fabulous folklorist Kay Turner. On the surface, it looks like an especially vicious cautionary tale. A “strong-willed and forward” girl ignores her parents’ warnings and defies them to seek out the witch, Frau Trude, who lives in the forest. When she arrives at the witch’s house, Frau Trude says “I have





been waiting for you and wanting you for a long time. Light the way for me now!" She turns the girl into a block of wood and throws it onto the fire.

The straightforward way to read this story is that a disobedient girl gets what she deserves for stepping out of line and seeking trouble. Not exactly romantic. But Kay Turner blew our minds when she argued in her amazing article "Playing with Fire: Transgression as Truth in Grimms' 'Frau Trude'" in *Transgressive Tales: Queering the Grimms* (2012) that romance can be a key to unlocking an alternative reading of the story.

Turner argues that "[n]either the girl's desire to go to Frau Trude nor Frau Trude's desire to possess the girl is ultimately interrupted; rather, the plot inexorably draws the two together, promoting their encounter's inevitable climax. Mutual attraction is the tale's turnkey, raising the power of desire against all others. Much of the narrative establishes this mutuality, first from the girl's, then from Frau Trude's point of view." Essentially, Turner believes that the girl seeks out the witch not because she is inherently disobedient but because she is drawn to her romantically and that, in turn, the witch

reciprocates those feelings when she admits she has been "waiting for [her] and wanting [her] for a long time."

In this reading, the parents' forbidding her to go to the woods takes on a very different meaning. When Frau Trude transforms the girl into a block of wood, we can read it as an act of violence or destruction, but we could also read it as a metaphor for sexual awakening. If this sounds like a stretch it's worth thinking about the sheer number of metaphors we've all heard that link heat and fire to love and attraction. The final line of the story reads: "When [the girl/block of wood] was thoroughly aglow [Frau Trude] sat down next to it, and warmed herself by it, saying: 'It gives such a bright light!'"

Perhaps witches can glow with the bright light of love as well.



Flash Fiction Contest
RUNNER UP

TRIPLE GODDESS PRAYER

by CECILIA BETSILL

Come child, and drink
from the Cauldron of Cerridwen.
And when you rise
Take the storm winds with you.

Come child and drink.
Suck on the breast of the Siren
and let the manna drown you.
Sinking, staining water pink.

Come child, and lay your head
on the lap
of the Great Morrigan.
Raven wings wide and
Counting the dead.

(Gaze across that battlefield,
littered and crisscrossed
with corpses of bastards
ready to pay)

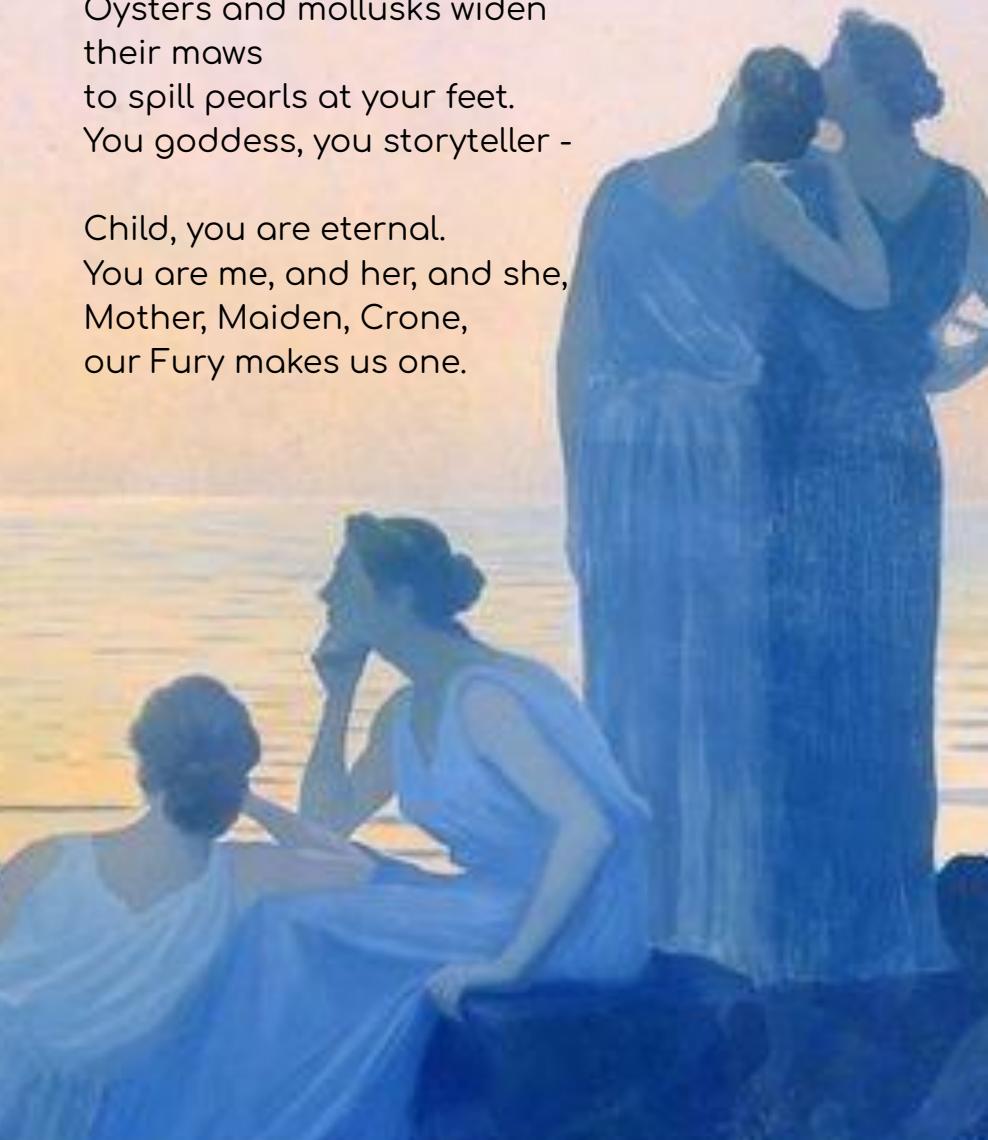
Come child, and jump
on the back of the Valkyries.
And when you soar sing the
Rune song of Mother & Crone.

Come child and stand at the
Crossroads of Hecate.
Peer into the fates and the
future and
Tell your coven what you see.

Ah, you maiden, you girl child,
let your rage flow.
Rage for the ones before you
who burned and who hung.

Be reborn in the castrated foam
of your father.
Oysters and mollusks widen
their maws
to spill pearls at your feet.
You goddess, you storyteller -

Child, you are eternal.
You are me, and her, and she,
Mother, Maiden, Crone,
our Fury makes us one.



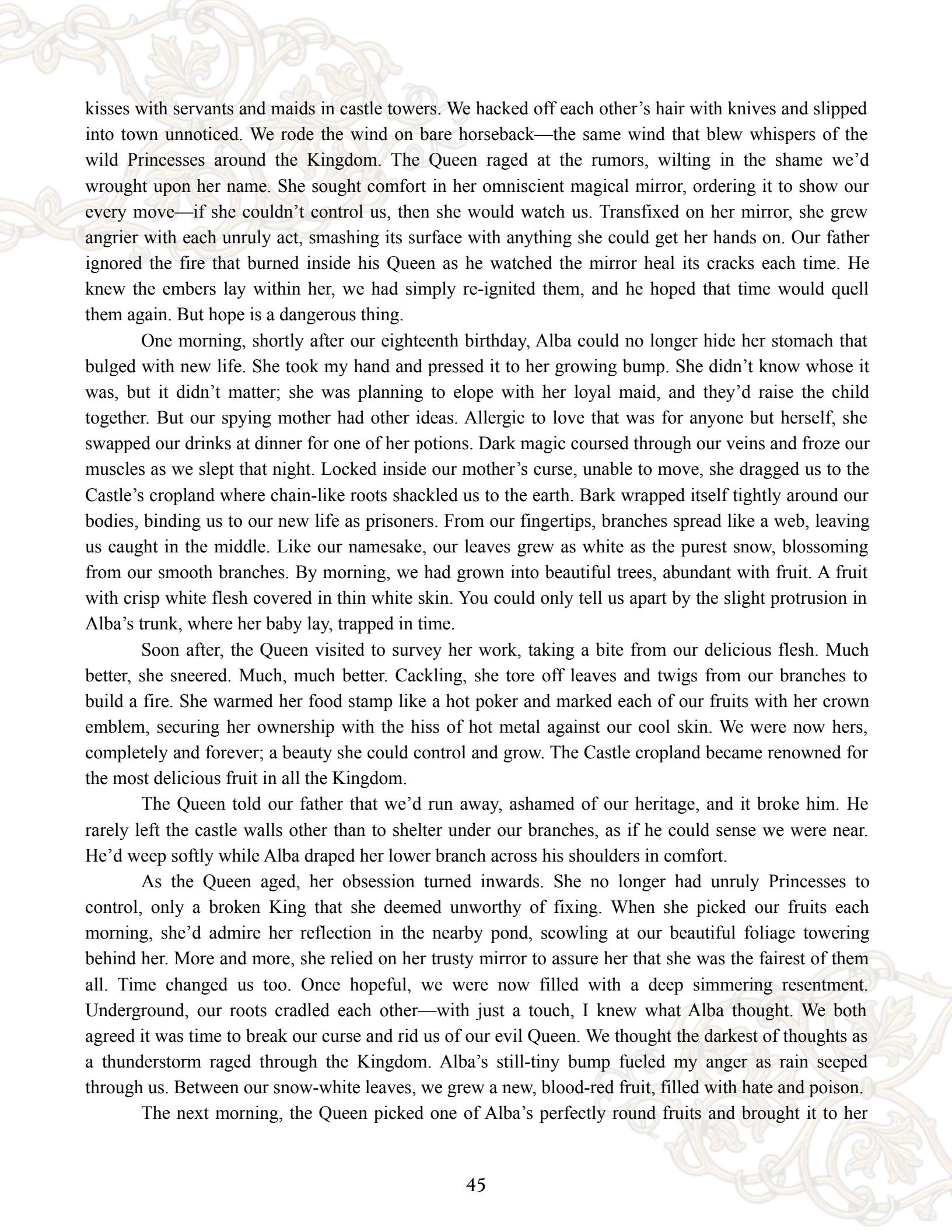


NIX AND ALBA

by LEILA MURTON POOLE

*M*y name is Nix and I bleed white. Sticky sweetness bursts from my flesh as I'm torn apart. My twin sister, Alba, tastes bitter. Still delicious, we've heard, but sharper; you wince before you smile. We're grown by our Queen and keeper, who stamps us with her mark—a crown branded on our skins. A reminder that we belong to her, no matter whose mouth we end up in. After all, we were once her daughters.

The Queen liked us when we were small enough to be controlled with dainty dresses and plaited hair. But the older we grew, the less we fit into her perfect Princess-shaped molds. We stole



kisses with servants and maids in castle towers. We hacked off each other's hair with knives and slipped into town unnoticed. We rode the wind on bare horseback—the same wind that blew whispers of the wild Princesses around the Kingdom. The Queen raged at the rumors, wilting in the shame we'd wrought upon her name. She sought comfort in her omniscient magical mirror, ordering it to show our every move—if she couldn't control us, then she would watch us. Transfixed on her mirror, she grew angrier with each unruly act, smashing its surface with anything she could get her hands on. Our father ignored the fire that burned inside his Queen as he watched the mirror heal its cracks each time. He knew the embers lay within her, we had simply re-ignited them, and he hoped that time would quell them again. But hope is a dangerous thing.

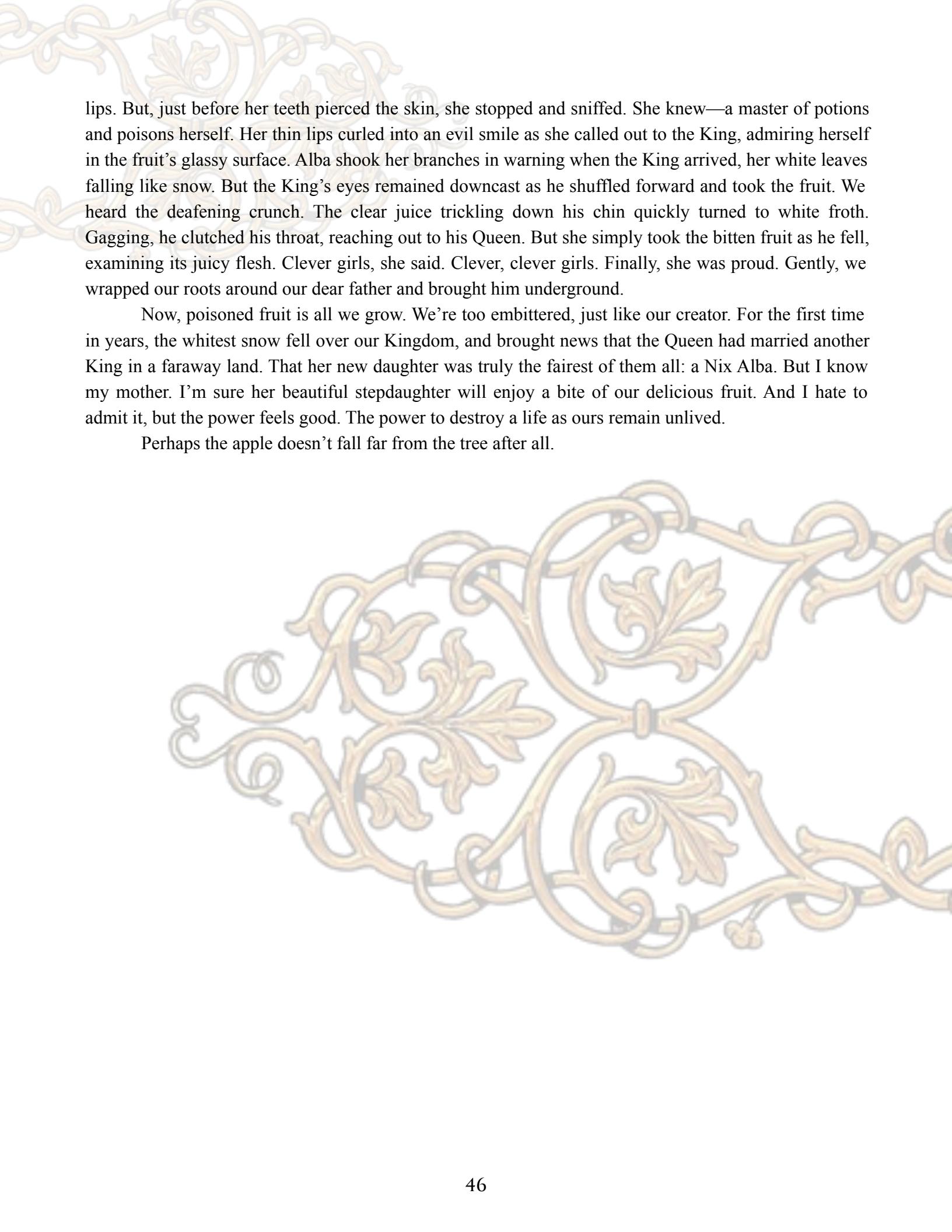
One morning, shortly after our eighteenth birthday, Alba could no longer hide her stomach that bulged with new life. She took my hand and pressed it to her growing bump. She didn't know whose it was, but it didn't matter; she was planning to elope with her loyal maid, and they'd raise the child together. But our spying mother had other ideas. Allergic to love that was for anyone but herself, she swapped our drinks at dinner for one of her potions. Dark magic coursed through our veins and froze our muscles as we slept that night. Locked inside our mother's curse, unable to move, she dragged us to the Castle's cropland where chain-like roots shackled us to the earth. Bark wrapped itself tightly around our bodies, binding us to our new life as prisoners. From our fingertips, branches spread like a web, leaving us caught in the middle. Like our namesake, our leaves grew as white as the purest snow, blossoming from our smooth branches. By morning, we had grown into beautiful trees, abundant with fruit. A fruit with crisp white flesh covered in thin white skin. You could only tell us apart by the slight protrusion in Alba's trunk, where her baby lay, trapped in time.

Soon after, the Queen visited to survey her work, taking a bite from our delicious flesh. Much better, she sneered. Much, much better. Cackling, she tore off leaves and twigs from our branches to build a fire. She warmed her food stamp like a hot poker and marked each of our fruits with her crown emblem, securing her ownership with the hiss of hot metal against our cool skin. We were now hers, completely and forever; a beauty she could control and grow. The Castle cropland became renowned for the most delicious fruit in all the Kingdom.

The Queen told our father that we'd run away, ashamed of our heritage, and it broke him. He rarely left the castle walls other than to shelter under our branches, as if he could sense we were near. He'd weep softly while Alba draped her lower branch across his shoulders in comfort.

As the Queen aged, her obsession turned inwards. She no longer had unruly Princesses to control, only a broken King that she deemed unworthy of fixing. When she picked our fruits each morning, she'd admire her reflection in the nearby pond, scowling at our beautiful foliage towering behind her. More and more, she relied on her trusty mirror to assure her that she was the fairest of them all. Time changed us too. Once hopeful, we were now filled with a deep simmering resentment. Underground, our roots cradled each other—with just a touch, I knew what Alba thought. We both agreed it was time to break our curse and rid us of our evil Queen. We thought the darkest of thoughts as a thunderstorm raged through the Kingdom. Alba's still-tiny bump fueled my anger as rain seeped through us. Between our snow-white leaves, we grew a new, blood-red fruit, filled with hate and poison.

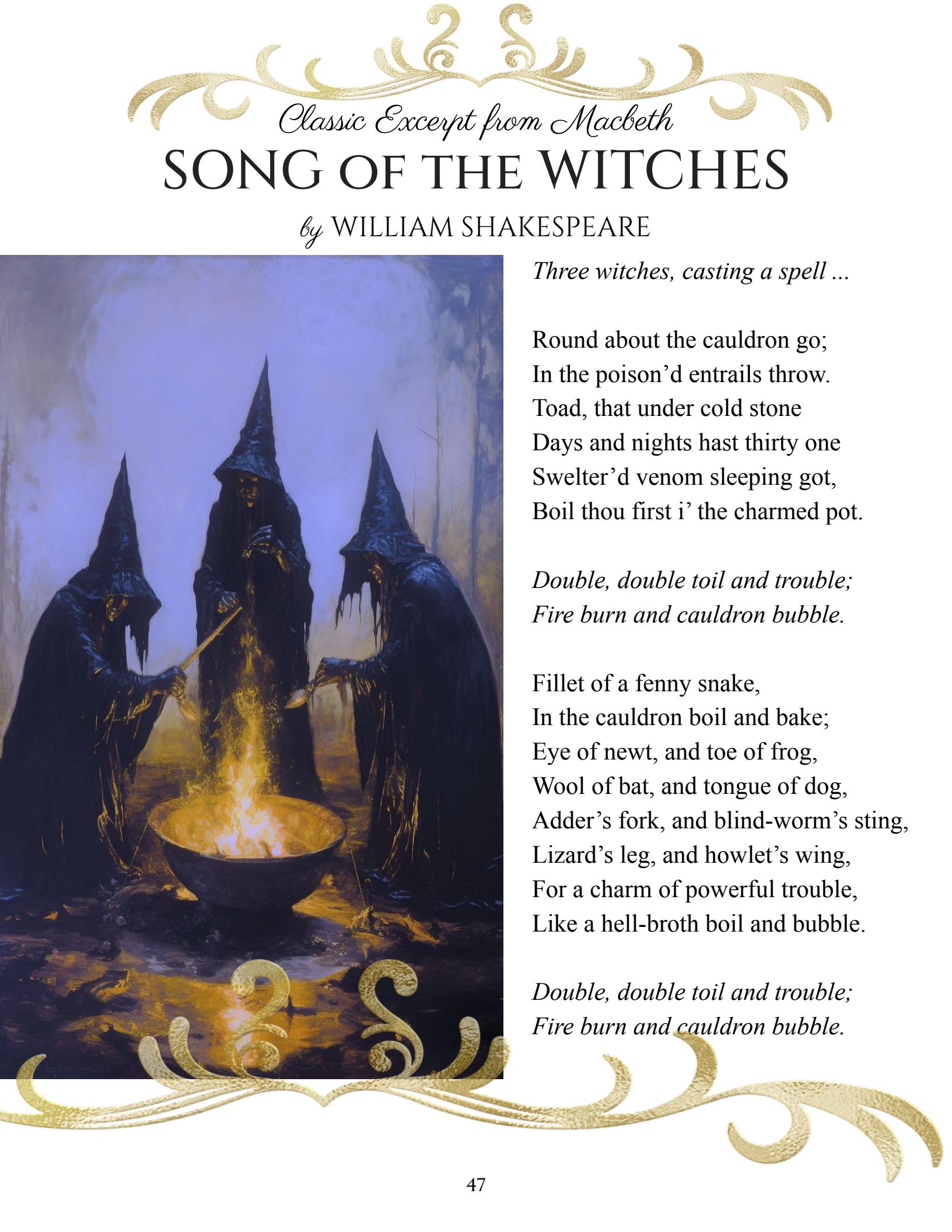
The next morning, the Queen picked one of Alba's perfectly round fruits and brought it to her



lips. But, just before her teeth pierced the skin, she stopped and sniffed. She knew—a master of potions and poisons herself. Her thin lips curled into an evil smile as she called out to the King, admiring herself in the fruit's glassy surface. Alba shook her branches in warning when the King arrived, her white leaves falling like snow. But the King's eyes remained downcast as he shuffled forward and took the fruit. We heard the deafening crunch. The clear juice trickling down his chin quickly turned to white froth. Gagging, he clutched his throat, reaching out to his Queen. But she simply took the bitten fruit as he fell, examining its juicy flesh. Clever girls, she said. Clever, clever girls. Finally, she was proud. Gently, we wrapped our roots around our dear father and brought him underground.

Now, poisoned fruit is all we grow. We're too embittered, just like our creator. For the first time in years, the whitest snow fell over our Kingdom, and brought news that the Queen had married another King in a faraway land. That her new daughter was truly the fairest of them all: a Nix Alba. But I know my mother. I'm sure her beautiful stepdaughter will enjoy a bite of our delicious fruit. And I hate to admit it, but the power feels good. The power to destroy a life as ours remain un-lived.

Perhaps the apple doesn't fall far from the tree after all.



Classic Excerpt from Macbeth

SONG OF THE WITCHES

by WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE



Three witches, casting a spell ...

Round about the cauldron go;
In the poison'd entrails throw.
Toad, that under cold stone
Days and nights hast thirty one
Swelter'd venom sleeping got,
Boil thou first i' the charmed pot.

*Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn and cauldron bubble.*

Fillet of a fenny snake,
In the cauldron boil and bake;
Eye of newt, and toe of frog,
Wool of bat, and tongue of dog,
Adder's fork, and blind-worm's sting,
Lizard's leg, and howlet's wing,
For a charm of powerful trouble,
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble.

*Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn and cauldron bubble.*



WHAT HAPPENED TO THE HUNTSMAN

by SARAH CANNAVO



This is what they don't tell you
in the fairy tales.

The huntsman had served the king
for years, just as his father had served
the king's before him: catching poachers,
hunting criminals, killing the occasional wolf.

He served the king faithfully, not because
he was supposed to but because he was
an easy king to be faithful to: firm, but fair and just.
The huntsman, who'd heard tell of many other kings
in many other lands who weren't, was proud
to swear his service to such a man.

He served the princess, too, from the day
the queen gave her own life to give life
to the girl, the answer to her pricked-finger prayer:
skin as white as snow,
lips as red as blood,
hair as black as ebony.

And he loved her, because nobody
who knew the princess
could help but love her.

Well.

Almost nobody.



He tried to serve the second queen
as faithfully as he had the first,
as he served the king and the snow-white princess.

But while she demanded loyalty, there was
something about her that made it more
difficult to give, something that glinted in her eyes
like broken glass, bright but jagged, ready
to draw blood. He took to the woods more often,
to keep it from landing on him.

For a while, it worked.
Then the king died.

She wore widowhood well—a bit too well,
many thought, but none dared even whisper aloud,
for fear of what she might do if she heard.
But she had her eyes on another enemy.

This part you know, how she summoned the huntsman
and demanded the princess's heart.
How he lured the girl into the woods (and how easily
she went with him, the man she'd known
all her short sweet life) and drew his knife,
but couldn't bring himself to pierce the innocent breast.

Not this child.
Not for her.

So: the release.
So: the boar's heart.

He watched the queen eat the heart
he presented to her.
She ordered him to.
As she devoured it, gristle in her teeth
and blood dripping down her chin, she laughed,
and silently, within herself, so did he.

You won't have her, witch. Not by my hand.



The day came, though, that he'd
always known would. Summoned again
by the second queen, her jagged eyes blazing
with wild fury as she demanded to know why
the princess still lived.

He *did* laugh aloud then, knowing what was coming
but also that all of her plans had been ruined
by his act of mercy, cunning undone by compassion.
There was still hope in the world, even if not for him.

He saw her eyes flash, and her rage
reflected in the blade she drew from her belt.

This is what they don't tell you
in the fairy tales.

The huntsman died for what he'd done.
But he died smiling.







THE CABIN IN THE WOOD

by AJ CUNDER

On the night of my fiftieth birthday, cluttered candles on the cake still warm and smoky, I questioned Mother about her lineage. A shade passed over her, as it always did when I asked, and she withdrew to the shadows, hollow. “Best you don’t know,” was the only morsel she offered. “Not yet anyway.”

She never did get the chance to tell me.

The following night, my parents died in a car accident. According to the police, my father suffered a stroke, hopped the median into oncoming traffic. I afforded myself a moment of grief, a tear or two escaping, then tucked it away before it could do any more damage. What-ifs and if-onlys already hardened my heart. I had no room for more. I distracted myself with the paperwork of funeral arrangements, probate, interring my parents peacefully in the ground. I wondered if my child would call or text after I left a voicemail with the news.

Instead, a few days after the burial, a lawyer rang. He gave the name of his firm, Aarne, Thompson, and Uther, est. 1857, and an address in Germany. Said there was important business regarding my mother’s estate.

“I’m sorry, Mr... which one are you?”

“I am Mr. Aarne,” the tinny voice came through.

“Mr...”

“And I am Mr. Thompson,” a voice interrupted.

“Also Mr. Uther,” a third said.

I swished a mouthful of bitter black coffee, my third cup that morning, from a chipped mug that irritated my lip. It was a Christmas gift years ago, the words Best Mom Ever cracked and fading after countless cycles through the dishwasher.

Through my apartment window, the Hudson Valley sparkled as the sun streaked golden across the hills. Since my parents’ death, a strange unease had settled upon me, like losing an important to-do list and forgetting what was on it. That and a latent hunger that refused to abate, no matter how many egg sandwiches I made.

“It is important business,” Mr. Aarne said again. Or maybe it was Mr. Uther. I couldn’t quite place the accent. German, but the inflections sounded... ancient. “Your presence is required. I do not mean to sound crude, but there is a matter of inheritance, and no insignificant sum.”

I would need time off work. A reason to escape the production ledgers and account audits combing through Hershey factories. My supervisor would understand. I was grieving.

I held my hand over the mug, vapors curling through fingers.

“Give me two days.”



I arrived in Achern, Germany a quarter past midnight, local time, after an hour-long drive from Stuttgart with a cabby who didn't speak English. Stumbling through jet-lag, I overpaid the inn-keep who insisted I hadn't, went to bed in my clothes because I'd forgotten my pajamas, and endured an owl hooting outside my window for the better part of the night. When dawn finally slipped through the shades, I splashed water on my face, drank stale coffee as part of the complimentary breakfast, and laced up my walking shoes.

The streets seemed to skip through time as I followed my phone's blue-outlined path, ticking back a decade each block until cobblestones lined narrow avenues, hand-painted signs swung from shops, and brass knockers graced doors of peeling and faded green. Even the air tasted fresher, as though untouched by the smog of industry. The quaint buildings reminded me of gingerbread houses.

The offices of Aarne, Thompson, and Uther boasted a sign that said the same, the names arched over a raven mid-flight, with the number 327A. I raised a hand to knock, but the door opened before I could. An elderly man greeted me, his pate pale and shaven, handlebar mustache quivering violently, extending nearly six inches to either side. "Welcome, welcome, Frau Grace. I am Mr. Aarne."

"And I, Mr. Thompson." A man of identical composure descended a creaking staircase into the foyer that smelled of old tallow candles and the must of yellowed paper.

"Where is Mr. Uther?" I asked, beginning to wonder what sort of fairy tale I had stepped into.

"Presently, he will join us," Mr. Aarne assured, checking a silver pocket watch. "Meanwhile, may I offer coffee?"

It smelled of cinnamon and nutmeg.

"Blood of the forest, we call it here," Mr. Thompson said.

"Sustainably sourced, of course," Mr. Aarne added as we moved to a conference room with walls of bookshelves filled with leather bindings cracking. I spied some tales I remembered from college courses, before I switched to a business major, *One Thousand and One Nights* beside authors like Hans Christian Andersen and the Brothers Grimm.

"Your flight, how was it?" Mr. Aarne asked.

"Fine. Look, I don't mean to be rude." I set the mug down—reluctantly, fighting addiction and novelty that would have me drink it all in one gulp. "But I've come a long way. I barely slept last night. I'm here for answers about my family's past, if you have any. If not, I'll be on my way."

Mr. Aarne gave a slight bow. "As you wish. Please, sit. Ah, Mr. Uther."

A third man ascended from the building's basement, completing the trio. "Apologies for the delay. It took a moment to wrestle this from the bookkeeper." He brandished a folded parchment paper with a red wax seal.

"My mother's will?" I ventured, hesitant to inquire who—or what—the bookkeeper might be.

"Indeed," Mr. Aarne assured. The three men sat around me, leaning in as though preparing to share a sacred secret. Mr. Uther cracked the seal with his fingernail.

Feathery script flowed across the parchment, the ink faded. Whether I needed glasses or the handwriting was too dated, I couldn't discern more than a handful of words, some of which seemed to be in German, others in an even stranger language—Anglo-Saxon, perhaps, pictographic characters like the Futhorc.

The reminder of my parents' death twisted in my chest like a heart attack. I'd never see my

mother again, never hear her laugh that sounded more like a hiccup, taste her cookies that never would flatten. Never see my father with eyebrows like caterpillars that wiggled when he yawned, feel his hugs that held me tighter than any security blanket. But I kept it all down, pushed into the hollow of my stomach, and bottled my tears. I had brokered enough boardroom deals, and was practiced in the art of keeping my face a blank slate.

Mr. Aarne affixed a monocle to his eye, squinting as he peered at the page. “I, Geraldine Leckermaul, being of sound mind and body, do hereby bequeath to my daughter the property henceforth known as the cabin in the wood.”

“When did my mother sign this?” I asked. He had read her maiden name.

“At the passing of her mother,” Mr. Uther answered. “The year 2002, if recollection serves.”

I had never met my grandmother. I remembered a time that year—I was only ten—when Mother disappeared for a few days. My father never said much about it. Thinking back, mother might have mentioned Germany.

“Why does it say daughter? What if she had a son?”

“There is a circumstance, in your mother’s family,” Mr. Thompson said, “where each generation has one—and only one—child, each of them a daughter. Yourself, do you have children?”

I swallowed. “Yes.”

“A daughter?”

I almost shook my head; but then I nodded, the path of least resistance, still struggling... unsure myself of what to believe. “We don’t speak though, since...” Since she told me one day she was actually a he and I said, I will not tolerate that nonsense under my roof.

I remember the look that washed over her...him, a hurt so deep it seemed almost bodily. I nearly reached out, a sudden desire to hug my child like I once did to ease the pain of a bruised knee, but the businesswoman in me rejected such a concession. My mother said it was just a phase, insisted I had a daughter, her brow furrowed with worry lines, just a matter of psychology, she’d said; Jenny will come round eventually. My child cut his hair and moved to California with my husband who divorced me. I watched the moving truck gather their belongings from the window of my office. I didn’t even say goodbye.

A year or two after, I tried calling. Neither called me back. Lately, in the lonely, dark hours of the night with only a bottle of wine to keep me company, I’d crawl through posts of mutual friends on Facebook, following snippets of my child’s life through a computer screen.

“Where is this cabin?” I tucked thoughts of my son beside grief for my parents.

Mr. Thompson answered, “In the Black Forest, under the shadow of Feldberg Mountain.”

Mr. Aarne held out a quill, its vane like midnight. “Sign the paper, and it is yours.”

My hand reached up instinctively before I pulled back. “What if I don’t want it?”

They chuckled.

“It is written in the will, the cabin must have a Leckermaul,” Mr. Aarne said with a wry smile. “As well you might suggest splitting your soul from your body.”

“Or burning your hand in a fire,” Mr. Thompson added sotto voce.

“Or cutting your head off from your neck!” Mr. Uther slapped his knee.

The quill fit naturally in my fingers. I didn’t even remember accepting it. “Where’s the ink?” I

asked, my throat suddenly dry.

“Just write. The ink will flow.”

Nib touched parchment and drew my hand across, tracing my signature in red that bled and stained the page. My fingers paled, a bout of lightheadedness sweeping over me. Before Mr. Aarne folded the parchment, my signature seemed to fade, my child’s old name replacing mine under the signature line, my name replacing my mother’s above.

Mr. Aarne gestured to the door. “A car outside waits for you.”

“Where am I going?”

The three men all grinned. “The cabin, of course.”



The driver parked in a dirt lot overshadowed by ancient trees. Like the cabby from Stuttgart, he said little during the ride, which suited me just as well. Tinted windows and leather seats lulled me into a fitful half-sleep, questions churning, speculation sifting dreams, my stomach refusing to quiet. Easing out of the car, I stretched my legs and arched my stiffened spine. I examined the paper map Mr. Aarne had provided. Crags scarred the page, a track traced in black from the road up the mountainside.

Follow the Woodcutter’s Trail. Half a kilometer.

“Are you going to wait here?” I asked the driver.

He nodded, eyes inscrutable behind silvered glasses.

The sun descended from its zenith as I pushed through bramble and branch. I paused for a moment to examine a piece of dead wood that had been tied to a tree, the hollow shell slapping against the trunk as the wind disturbed it, sounding almost like an ax chopping, or a metronome keeping time. A snow-white bird cocked its head, gave a shrill tweet, and flew up toward the mountaintop. I rested against a boulder, catching my breath beside a sheer drop before continuing, following the songbird’s twitter.

Soon enough, the path emerged in a clearing with a cabin at its center. Dark logs formed walls, a substance oozing between them like syrup. Suddenly I wanted pancakes. Glass windows sparkled like ice, a dusting of snow on the rooftop like frosting, a shaft of sunlight striking the chimney wreathed in licorice vines. I shivered without my jacket in an alpine draft, heavy shadows wreathing the cabin. I thought of my mother’s family living here in the past, building a home from the forest. A certain sense of wonder drew me to the door, a pitted handle of iron. The smell of something baking filled the air, something sweet like cupcakes. My hunger deepened, clouding my mind.

The door gave way, soundless, not even a squeak or squeal from the hinges. Ambient light illuminated the interior well enough, though a row of candles lined a nearby table, wicks half-burnt, waiting to be lit. I saw no evidence of a present tenant, aside, perhaps, from a woodland creature or two—no scraps of food, no personal belongings, no clothes—but the building itself seemed perfectly kept, as though some spell of preservation prevented the rafters from sagging or dust from gathering.

The space expanded beyond what the outside suggested, shifting at the edges of my vision, as though it breathed. A wood-burning oven nestled in a corner of the kitchen like some crouched beast, large as a bear, twisted, soot-stained chimney punching through the roof. Arrested for a moment, I couldn’t tear my gaze from the oven’s dark door, as if all the answers I sought were hidden there in its ashes.

I shrank back. Better you don't know yet, my mother's voice echoed in my mind. In a room adjacent, a bird cage swung gently from the ceiling, door askew, big enough to fit a child.

I drifted past words carved into a wall, a rhyme or chant etched in jagged letters:
Nibble, nibble, little mouse. Who is nibbling at my house?

It repeated several times before trailing off, the letters dancing and shifting. Beside the rhymes, another series of etchings scarred the wall, spreading down like a family tree, filled with H's and G's. In each generation, one pair was crossed out, save for the bottom row where two pairs of H's and G's remained.

I searched for a bureau or credenza, something with drawers where secrets and answers might hide. I tried to find something of my mother here, some sense of her presence, but felt only hunger, an ever increasing hunger as my head buzzed—a hunger like I'd never felt before, not even on long work days when I skipped breakfast and lunch, missed dinner with my family. My stomach grumbled, and it seemed for a moment like the cabin did too.

A sharp knock at the front door cracked the quiet. I thought perhaps I had imagined it, until it came again, and I went to greet my visitors.

At the entrance, a boy and a girl, no more than seventeen, stared back at me, faces streaked with dirt, ragged clothes spun like cotton candy. "Sorry to bother you," the boy said, eyes down, "but my sister and I have been wandering the woods since yesterday. Can you point the way back to the road, please?"

"The trail is just there. But..." I bit my lip. My son always said I should be more welcoming. "Why don't you rest here for a while? I don't plan on staying much longer myself. I have a car waiting by the road."

The children looked to one another and nodded. "Okay," they said together.

The succeeding events unfolded almost too quickly for me to follow. The boy flicked out a wicked blade, serrated edge stained. The girl grabbed a cast-iron pan and smashed me over the head, stars dancing like fireflies. Pulling a length of rope from somewhere, she bound my hands as I stumbled. They pushed me toward the kitchen, toward the oven, the opening suddenly cavernous, and shoved me in. My forehead smashed against the metal frame, a stream of blood stinging my eye, and I was inside, behind the grate, head twisted, knees tucked in, feet curled at a painful angle. They slammed the door and barred it with a rod of iron. Speechless, I stared at the animals I had mistaken for children.

"What... Why?" I finally stammered, heart thrumming like a cornered hare.

"Don't play games with us. You know why." The girl wiggled a stick through the grate, prodding me.

Drunk on adrenaline, I could barely form an answer. "Please let me go."

The girl turned to her brother—if he really was her brother. "This was easier than papa said. She didn't even fight."

"It's just a trick," the boy muttered. "You know how wily her kind are. Lull us into a false sense of security, then once she's out, Bam! In the oven we go."

"Still..." The girl tugged her lip.

I struggled to move, to push open the grate, a cry bubbling inside. But no, I reminded myself it would do no good.

“I have no interest in putting you in any oven.” My voice wavered, pulse pounding and percussive.

“Sure,” the boy said. “Tell that to our great-great-great-grandpapa. Nibble, nibble, little mouse, who is nibbling at my house? Sound familiar?”

“No,” I said flatly, heart sinking as the girl carried in firewood.

The boy narrowed his eyes. “Never heard of your family history?”

“Tell it to me.”

“You’re just buying time. Gretchen, put the wood under the stove.”

The strangest thoughts wormed through my mind. The reports at work my replacement would have to finish. The grilled cheese sandwich I had planned to make as soon as I returned from this God-forsaken trip. The apology I’d never make to my son. The chance that, in whatever life followed, I might see my parents again.

Gretchen stood, frowning.

“Well?” the boy said. “Light the fire.”

“I’ve forgotten the matches at home.”

The boy scowled and rattled the oven grate, tested the bar across it. With some jostling, it started to move. “I’ll stay. You go.”

Gretchen nodded, but at the door she called, “Handel, I can’t seem to open it.” I heard banging and a curse. “She’s bewitched the lock!”

Whether the children were high or truly believed in magic, I seized the opportunity. “That’s right. You can’t leave.” I wondered if it was just a rusty mechanism—but then again, it had opened so easily for me.

“Seems we’re at an impasse, then,” Handel said, sucking his teeth.

My back started to spasm. Part of me almost preferred death over hours of torture in that cramped space. “Let me out and I’ll start the fire for you. I can do it without matches.” Memories of my mother came back to me, the days she took me into the woods and taught me how to start a fire with stick and kindling.

The boy squinted even more, reptilian slits distrustful. His straw-colored hair reminded me of spaghetti.

“You can even keep my hands tied. Please, just don’t leave me in here. It’s torturous. Inhumane.”

The children shared a reluctant glance. Then Gretchen opened the oven and dragged me to the floor. I coughed out a mouthful of ashes, wriggled my hands, easing them back and forth, back and forth as the knot loosened.

“Have at it, then.” Handel tossed me a stick and some wood shavings.

“You’ll need to sharpen the end of it.”

Knuckles white, he gripped his knife. To Gretchen, he said, “I don’t like this. You remember what happened to papa’s cousins last time. The witch shot them both with sleeping darts and into the oven they went.” He spat. “And she probably taught this one all her nasty tricks.”

Whether it was hunger or delirium, an image popped into my head of an old sporting goods

receipt I had found years ago, the yellowed paper buried in my parents' kitchen junk drawer. There had been only one item on the slip: a dart gun. When I asked about it, my mother laughed and said I must be misreading it. They've never owned a dart gun. When I looked for the receipt to see if I'd been mistaken, it was gone.

I spied a fire iron nearby. If only I could free my hands. Just a bit more, and the rope would give way.

Gretchen twisted a strand of hair around her finger—a plump finger, I noticed, like a breakfast sausage.

The rope slipped off and I lunged for the poker, wielding it awkwardly like some dangerous snake as the children jumped and swore. I'd never held a weapon in my life. I swung it, pushing the children back. They circled like wolves in the dark.

Hunger crawled like roaches in my stomach. Sweat trickled down my neck. Soot and ash clumped my hair. "What now?" I asked.

"We fight," the boy said. "And either you end up in the oven." He looked to Gretchen. "Or we do."

I couldn't help but choke out a laugh. "Really? That's it?"

"What more can there be?"

He reminded me for a moment of my child, the intensity of his conviction. "What did you mean when you said the witch must have taught me her tricks?"

"Did your mother never train you? Never tell you of this cabin and the price it demands each generation?"

I swallowed. "No."

"Ever since our ancestors killed the first witch," Gretchen muttered. "Before she burned, she cursed this place. Bound our family to it, and hers. She had a niece, and when the girl came of age, she inherited this place, drawn to it as were Gretel's own children—a son, and a daughter. They ended up in the oven, and the cabin was sated for a time. Until the witch had a daughter of her own who would come to inherit the cabin and face the children of Hansel's daughter. And so it goes, your family killing ours every time." She found my eyes in the dying light. "You feel it in your bones. The need to be here. To feed the oven. To avenge your family, as we come to avenge ours. And so it will be, endlessly, with your daughter, and hers afterwards, so on until the end of time."

"You're wrong," I said. "With me, this ends."

The boy shifted from one foot to the other, eyes darting to the fire iron, to the oven, to my hands.

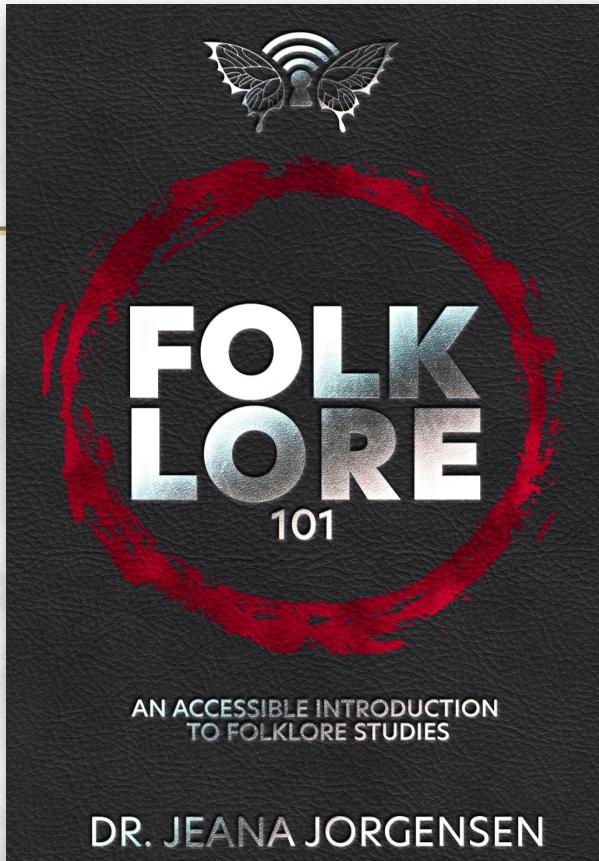
"I have no daughter. I'm the last witch of the Leckermaul line." My stomach twisted, hunger like a volcano erupting. Where was my son now? Did he think of me? Did he replay in his mind the last time we spoke, as I do in mine?

The fire iron fell to the floor with a clang. I knelt by the oven, gathered some kindling, rolled a stick between my hands until the dry shavings caught.

"What are you doing?" Gretchen crowed.

Embers took root, glowing red like the eyes of a devil. They blossomed and spread, orange tongues lapping hungrily. "Shall I get in?" I asked. Self-sacrificing, my son would call it. If only he could have seen.

When's the last time you got to pick a folklorist's brain?



If you've always wanted to take a folklore class, or you're a writer or artist using folklore in your work, or you're just generally interested in the topic, this is the book for you!

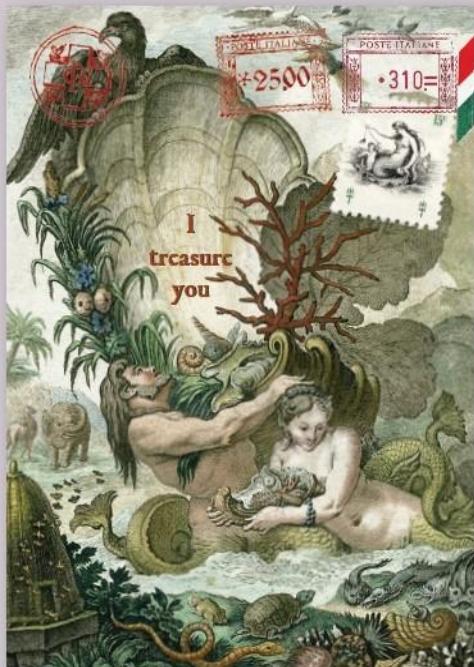
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—Dr. Sara Cleto, co-founder of The Carterhaugh School of Folklore and the Fantastic

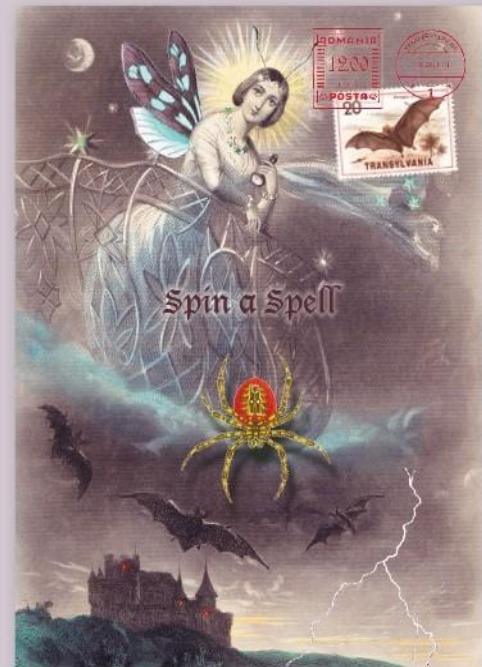
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The boy held the knife up, but without the strength he had before. His arm lowered. “Why are you doing this?”

I shrugged. “I’m old. Untrained in my mother’s ways. If we fight, I’ll only postpone the inevitable, and likely get hurt along the way. This is quicker. Easier. You can go back to your family with the trophy of my bones. Victors in the final battle.”

“Handel?” Gretchen said softly.

The oven grumbled, dust falling from the rafters as the fire grew.

In a flash, Handel reached into the stove and threw the burning logs into the cabin. They rolled, sparks and embers flying. As the flames caught timber and beam, I screamed, as though it seared my very flesh. Handel and Gretchen dragged me outside where I shivered, the fire spreading, glass cracking, cabin melting, oven rattling and howling like a demon. Its chimney vented black smoke, red embers flashing in the dark. I felt as though I were still trapped inside, flames eating me alive.

Handel and Gretchen sat with me until the final beams of the cabin crumbled, leaving only the oven still standing, a blackened relic rising from the ash. I struggled to my feet, stumbling a step or two. “What now?” I asked.

“What about the oven?” Gretchen wondered.

“Wind and rain will eat the iron. It’ll rust and turn to dust like everything else.”

We found the trail, tracking white pebbles that glistened like silver coins in the moonlight. The black car was still parked in the lot. “Do you need a ride?” I asked.

“We’ll find our way.” A white duckling waddled by.

Never adept at goodbyes, I offered a quick wave and nod, then slipped in the car.

“Your business is concluded?” the driver asked. He didn’t seem to have moved.

“Yes. Take me to the airport.”

I tried to catch a final look at the children, but Handel and Gretchen had already vanished.

At Stuttgart, I waited five hours for a flight to Los Angeles. Counter clerks and flight attendants eyed me with unease, wrinkling their nose at the grime-streaked woman soiling their floors. The passenger who sat beside me asked to move and took the only spot available—a middle seat in the rear, next to the restroom.

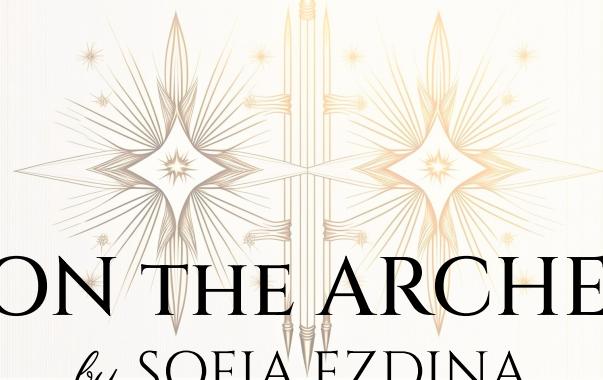
Seventeen hours later (with a layover in London), I stood on my son’s doorstep. My hair fell disheveled, my clothes stunk of smoke, I hadn’t brushed my teeth in days. I stood there for a time, hand raised to knock then lowered countless times. When I finally did, I almost fled. But I waited. The door opened. A young man looked at me, eyes widening at first, then narrowing as he frowned. “What are you doing here? What happened to you?”

My breath caught. I tried to find the words that tumbled in my heart, to find Handel’s courage, Gretchen’s resolve. “I have forgiveness to ask of you.”

He studied me for a moment, face split in two by the sharp cut of the overhang’s shadow, then stepped aside.

A raven watched on a nearby rooftop, a parchment paper in its beak. As I crossed the threshold, it flew away, dropping the paper that dissolved like dust as it fluttered, vanishing before it touched the ground.





PYGMALION THE ARCHEOLOGIST

by SOFIA EZDINA

Shovel in hand, she found her
on a field, at the excavation site
among hollowed seashells,
a record of time congealed for
three thousand years among dirt and sand.

“Don’t move,” Pygmalion whispered.
With her eyes, she tried to photograph the context,
the stratigraphy,
or the thought of Galatea’s
thousands-year-old-dirt-dark shoulder
and how Pygmalion pinches dust
from it with her fingers,
embarrassingly flesh and velvet,
or Galatea’s stone-throat shouts of laughter,
or Galatea’s name swallowed with
Pygmalion’s human tongue.
Galatea’s passion. Galatea’s patience.
Galatea rots.
Pygmalion photographed
Galatea’s mummified lips on her lip.

Perhaps, she was too obstinate
like Demosthenes, who raised Athens to war
for the third time.
Her calloused hand used to dig, to unbury,
reached through the millennia’s threshold
to pull Galatea from the marble. No longer a myth;
a history. An epic poem no one will ever read.

The past, was it ever her business?
Pygmalion fossilized upon the Galatea’s touch.



Interview by
KATE WOLFORD
IVORY TOWER STUDIOS
WITH LAREN STOVER & PAUL HIMMELEIN

Dear Readers: This is the last in a series of Etsy shop owner profiles. Enjoy learning more about the unique card shop, Ivory Tower Studios.



What made you want to start this shop?

We have always loved snail mail and started out making cards with collages for our friends many years ago. One year we wrote a Halloween goblin poem and illustrated it with an image from *The Giant Golden Book of Elves and Fairies*. Our friend Tom Robbins (author of *Jitterbug Perfume*) loved it so much he called to say, “Paul should run around to stores and sell them.” That wasn’t quite how we envisioned things—and the idea of launching a card company lay dormant like buried treasure. Then the Covid lockdowns came and staying in touch became so important. Things were far from perfect, and we had only two card designs but we thought why not put them up on Etsy and see what happens.

Where did the love of art come from for both of you?

We both went to college for art and are always creating art. There’s never been a time when we weren’t designing, painting, filming, photographing, writing something. Laren used to show her paintings and photographs at a Soho gallery and I designed furniture and painted Ancient Greek-style red-figure-vase motifs on them for stores in New York and Palm Beach before we started writing books. Creating art, whether literary or visual, is the best thing in the world.



Why cards? What makes them so special for you?

Cards and letter writing have always been a passion, you could say an obsession. At home, ours is a world of pen and ink, fine stationery and sealing wax, candles and pots (and pots) of tea. We’re always writing letters and cards (often illustrating and embellishing them) to friends whether they live on the other side of the world or just across town. A card or letter connects and resonates with the recipient in ways a text message never can. Texts were meant for deleting, cards are meant to be saved.



Are there specific sources of inspiration that help you achieve the look of your cards?

We want our cards to be something you might find in a cabinet of curiosities. We are steeped in nostalgia and the antique. Our aesthetic is influenced by 18th-century and Victorian-era imagery which we reimagine into lush, whimsical designs that dance between the exotic and arcane. We want each design to be a miniature world—rich, beautiful, unexpected and entirely new. Our cards are never snarky, but that doesn't mean they aren't playful.



What else would you want our readers to know about Ivory Tower Studios?

We just won a Louie Award (this is basically the Oscars of the greeting-card industry) for our Year of the Rabbit Lunar New Year card. We're excited about our upcoming year of the dragon card!

We'd like to say a little about the cards themselves. Some are traditional folding cards, but we also design single-panel cards with envelopes. Many of our cards are on the larger side (5" x 7") and are printed on thick, premium stock and are meant as keepsakes as they're colorful works of art on their own.

We're also getting ready to launch our website: ivory-tower-studios.com but until then you can find us at etsy.com/shop/IvoryTowerStationery.



THE MERMAID MUSEUM

THE OCEAN'S NOTORIOUS FEMME FATALE IS THE MUSE

by LAREN STOVER



*B*Y 18 she had two mermaid tattoos. Alyssa Maloof, a photographer and founder of The Mermaid Museum says, “I didn’t have a collection, or think about them all the time, but a mermaid tattoo is a pretty serious sign that I was getting the siren’s call through the ether.”

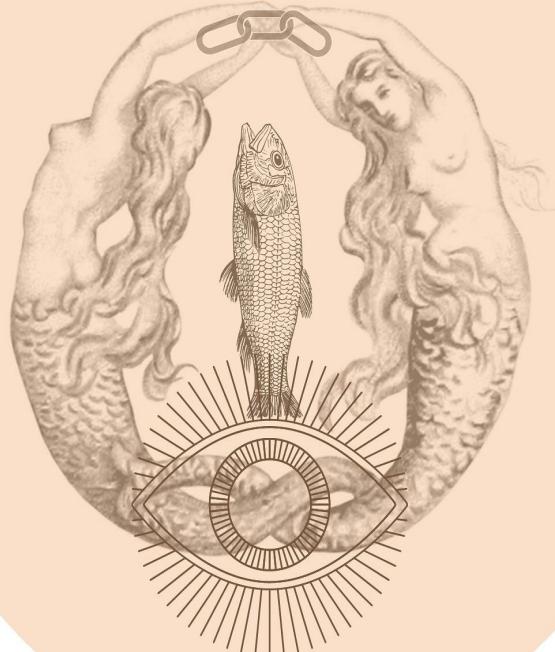
Alyssa’s photo studio, the airy second floor of a former Odd Fellows building in Berlin, Maryland, was largely dormant in 2020. So when visions of mermaids began to swim in her head, she came up with the idea to install a mermaid museum in the space. What clinched the deal was not a vision of a beguiling sea maiden with sea-green eyes and seaweed-laced hair. What glamourised her was not even a selkie.

“As I was musing about making the museum, I was early to a wedding I was shooting in Philadelphia so I walked into Anastacia’s, my favorite antiques shop back when I was an art student. It was always a dream to be able to buy a big thing from there.

“Do you have anything mermaid oriented?” I asked the owner and he said, ‘Oh, yeah, we have a little dish.’ Then he pointed to a glass case veiled in dust and said warily, ‘We also have *that*.’”

THE MERMAID MUSEUM

Oddities. Artifacts. Ocean.



The Mermaid Museum, nine miles from the sea where wild ponies roam the beaches and dunes of Assateague, is a dreamy loft with tall windows and a high ceiling. When you enter, you are instantly transported by otherworldly music wafting through the exhibits that illustrate fantasy and folklore alongside nautical lore and science, and by science, the evidence uncovered here is truly the most whimsical kind of scientific evidence.

The museum is a crash course in mermaid history and lore, but seductively interactive—as soon as you enter you encounter a trunk spilling over with mermaid and sailor costumes so you can dress up and lounge in a giant clam shell for a selfie, or show off your mermaid tail in an antique tub, and you’re also invited to draw mermaids on a wall.

Mermaids lure you from all over the room: an immense hand-carved red-headed sea siren welcomes you (or do we mean warns you?) as you enter, a brass fountain of two alluring mermaids balancing a giant shell on their heads beckons with gentle sprays of water, and you may be mesmerized by a silent 1904 film *La Sirène* by George Méliès projected onto an entire wall as a magician scoops fish from his top hat, manifests a mermaid and then transforms her into a maiden with legs.

Tiny peepholes, eye level for a child, offer magical scenarios and surprises: tiny jellyfish or a glass globe with a mermaid hologram or the answer to the question: Who is the world’s most famous mermaid?

Ariel...of course.

The walls and cases and bell jars tell stories, all researched, compiled and written in a tidal wave of inspiration by Alyssa over six months. She dropped off her young son with her mother, rented a hotel room in nearby Ocean City and sat on the beach writing with copious notes and books to the rhythm of the sea.

That turned out to be a “preserved” mythic creature. Resting on a bed of sand with a fan-coral backdrop and a few scattered shells was a genuine Fiji mermaid. The upper half, a delicate mummified scaly bony body with a grimacing skull and bulging glass eyes and outstretched arms clutching a starfish—the bottom half, a taxidermy fish tail.

“And that was the moment I asked myself, am I really going to spend \$4,000 on a dried-up mermaid?”

Alyssa did have a ship’s figurehead of a mermaid, but this was a true curiosity, a rare treasure with a rare-treasure price.

She drove back to Berlin haunted by the P.T. Barnum-era relic for a week. (P.T. Barnum unveiled a similar “FeeJee” mermaid in New York in 1842, allegedly fashioned by a Japanese fisherman by melding a monkey and fish.) She was ultimately hooked by the creature, an acquisition that made her commit to the museum. “I drove back up, put her in the back of my car, and I said, Please don’t curse me.”

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Tiny peepholes, eye level for a child, offer magical scenarios and surprises: tiny jellyfish or a glass globe with a mermaid hologram or the answer to the question: Who is the world’s most famous mermaid?

Ariel...of course.

The walls and cases and bell jars tell stories, all researched, compiled and written in a tidal wave of inspiration by Alyssa over six months. She dropped off her young son with her mother, rented a hotel room in nearby Ocean City and sat on the beach writing with copious notes and books to the rhythm of the sea.

Inspired by the Jurassic Museum of Technology, in Culver City, California, a mixture of artistic, scientific, ethnographic, and historic items which have been said to evoke a cabinet of curiosities which predates the modern natural history museum (as per Wikipedia), The Mermaid Museum is diverse and playfully historic in its storytelling and range of artifacts.

The overall effect is one of almost-credible fantasy laced with artistry and whimsy supported by well documented eyewitness accounts from sailors and sea captains from all over the world: Christopher Columbus in 1493 reported that he saw three mermaids frolicking in the water writing that “they were not as beautiful as they are painted, although to some extent they have a human appearance in the face...”

And there are also accounts from a famed English sea explorer, a Welsh farmer, a Danish reverend, dam workers in Zimbabwe, Japanese soldiers, fishermen in Cape Breton, Canada, and even an alleged sighting in Fresno, California, where a lost woman with webbed feet claimed to be a mermaid and to have come from a nearby lake.

We learn from a wall plaque that Pliny the Elder wrote about nereids in the first century, describing them as women with scaly bodies like fish, a mythical precursor to mermaids. A fifth-century bestiary (a study of animals and their natures) called *Physiologus*, described mermaids as having the upper half of a woman and the lower of a fish, split at about the navel. In the 13th century, a Franciscan monk Bartholomeus Anglicus, wrote *De proprietatibus rerum* (On the Properties of Things) and described the mermaid as a femme fatale stealing sailors from their ships.

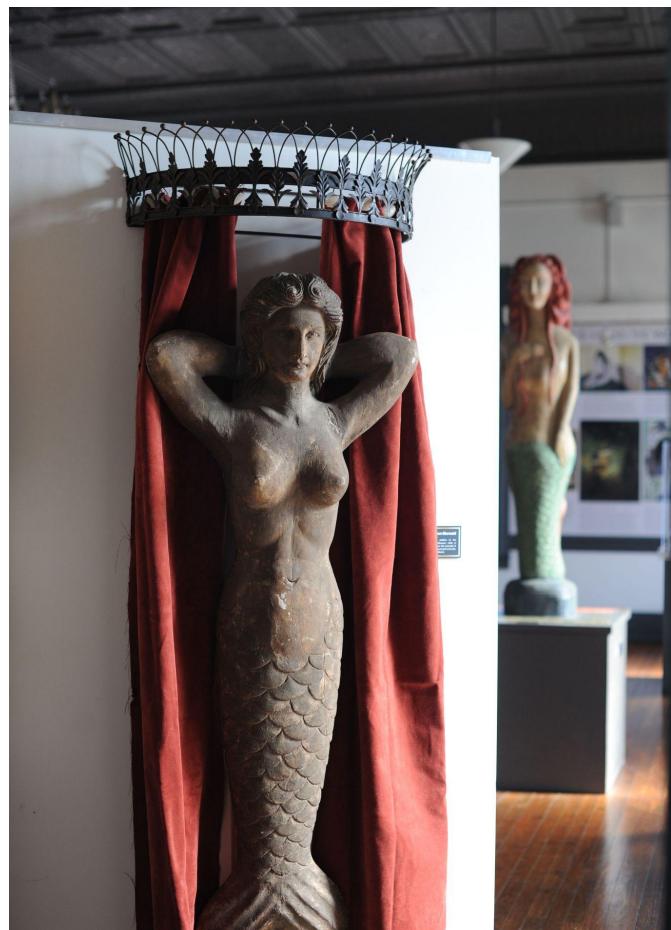
Mermaids and water spirits, in fact, are famous for drowning men. The Rusakla, a Russian mermaid or the soul of a young woman who has drowned, would lure young men into the water where she'd entangle her victims' feet with her long red hair or tickle them to death as she laughed.

Depending on who is describing her, the appearance of the notorious femme fatale shifts—her hair goes from black to light brown to blonde to red to green, but she is always elusive.

They rarely fare well, however, when captured. In 1560, the aide to the Viceroy of Goa performed autopsies on seven mermaids caught by fishermen in Ceylon. A Dutch artist named Samuel Fallours (who worked on Amboin Island) claimed to have acquired one and kept her in a container of water and painted her. She squeaked like a mouse, he said, and died of starvation as she refused to eat.

In a display of a bisque figurine and photo of mermaid bones, we read that “Mermaids in Japan are more commonly known as Ningyo. The skeletal remains of a mermaid can actually be found on display at Ryuguji temple in the city of Fukuoka, the specimen allegedly dates back to the 13th century and was found when it washed ashore in Hakata Bay on the Japanese Island of Kyushu. Long ago visitors to Ryūgū-Ukimido were given water to sip in which the ‘mermaid bones’ had been soaked, allegedly to protect them from disease.”

Walking through the museum we find an amusing





fashion fact, that mermaids almost always went topless until 1946 when Parisian designer Jacques Heim showed the first bikini called the Atome.

There are mermaid cameos, Vintage Weeki Wachee memorabilia, a very realistic “preserved” mermaid embryo nestled in sea sponges. In a cultured pearl display, we learn that “mermaids kept oysters as pets and within the oysters they grow pearls.” And who knew that the mermaid’s favorite gem is opal, and was especially popular among mermaids in Medieval times?

There’s the Virgin Mermaid fishing lure that promises to lure both men and fish.

Did sailors mistake seals and manatees for mermaids?

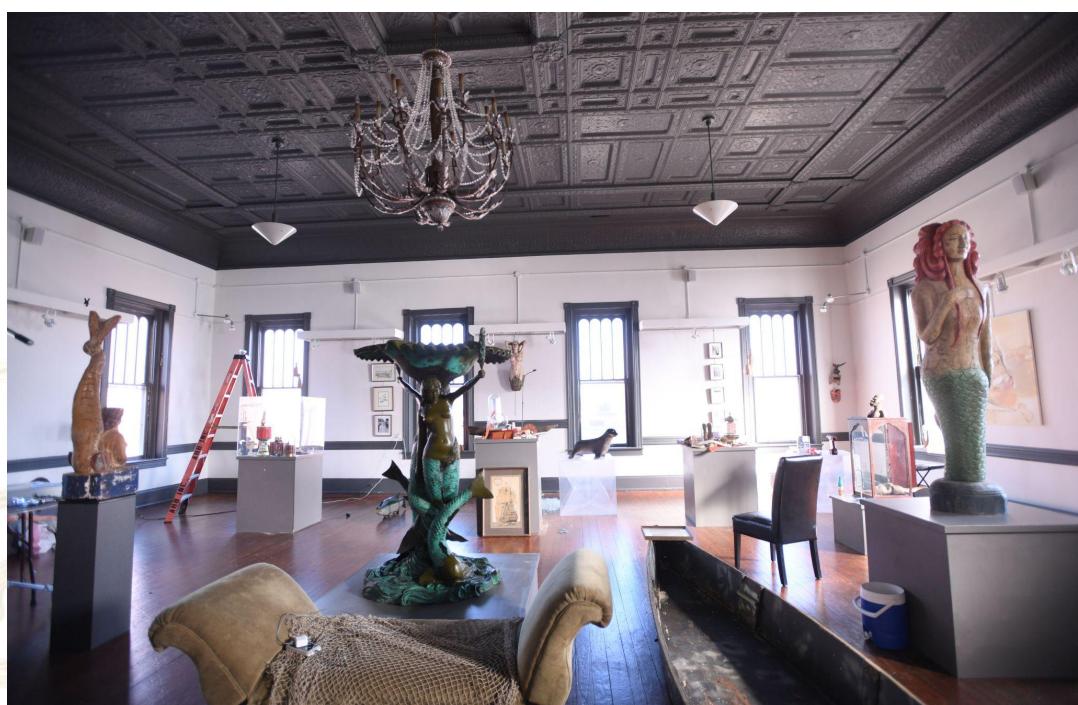
Alyssa muses, “Sea weary? Drink?”

What is the eternal allure of the mermaid? Alyssa goes deeper than the glamour of the sea’s notorious femme fatale:

“I think the mystery of the ocean—the juxtaposition between life and destruction is a metaphor for the mermaid...the ocean is freeing when you’re actually swimming and you feel so alive, how you can float and feel free. But it’s also scary because the ocean can easily take your life, and there’s so much that we can’t see under there that the idea of the mermaid strikes something in our subconscious about the depths of our wanderings.”

What is Alyssa’s most prized possession in the museum?

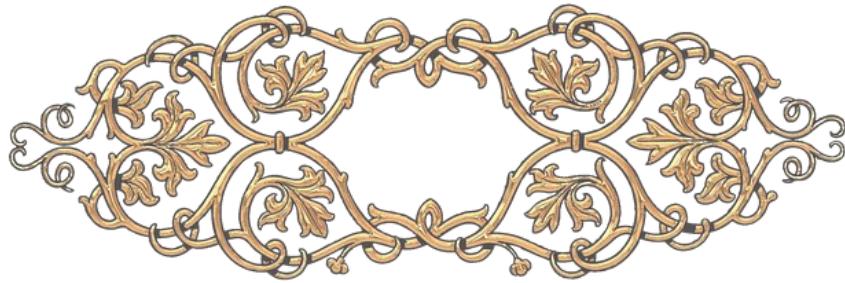
“A Cheeto in the shape of a mermaid,” says Alyssa. “I found it on eBay for \$1.00 with \$3.99 shipping.”





THE GHOSTS OF MILDEN HALL

by KELLY JARVIS



*“And if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death”*
Elizabeth Barrett Browning

*L*ast night I dreamt I went to Wexley again.

It seems each time I pass through the iron gates which guard the entrance to campus, I am transported back in time. Wexley College, a small liberal arts school founded in the late 1800's, feels ancient, its Gothic architecture adding a thousand years of fabricated history to its coastal New England location. Urban legend says that the school's first president, eager to establish his new institution as a long-standing pillar of academic achievement, used to climb to the top of the clock tower under the cover of night, dousing the granite blocks with acid until they looked as worn and pockmarked as the walls of a medieval castle.

In my dream, I feel the crisp autumn air purl around me. I hear the winds as they whisper through barren branches of maple and elm. I turn toward the flickering gas lights of the flagstone bridge, cross the fledgling Dayton Brook, and head up the hill toward Milden Hall Library, our library, secret and silent in the light of the setting sun.

The library looks just as it did when I was an undergraduate, a monstrosity wrapped in scaffolding. Beneath the platforms and tarps which wend their way around the building is a Gothic masterpiece modeled after European universities, its grand arches and stained-glass windows a metaphor for the steadfast beauty of the educated mind.

Of course, the engineers had forgotten to account for the weight of the books in their structural design, and once the shelves of the seven-story building were stacked, the foundation began to moan and shift beneath its hefty burden. Within twenty years of its opening, the library's stones and bricks had begun to crack, crumbling onto the paths below.

For scores of years, the campus community, too caught up in philosophical debates to worry about the physical world collapsing around them, simply carried on. Statistics students lightheartedly calculated the odds of being hit by one of the infamous falling bricks, and lecturers in the English Department waxed poetic about the weight of knowledge and the Faustian dangers of intellectual pursuits.

Then a student was killed by a brick that tumbled through the autumn air like an assassin.

Her name was Rebecca. It was long past midnight on an October evening when she had learned that her boyfriend was cheating on her with a plain-faced freshman. She tore through the deserted campus, intent on confronting the deceiver about his betrayal.

The last thing she heard was the scrape and plummet of the brick.

She was found the next morning, an intense look of anger still etched onto her frozen face. Blood

had spattered around her head like a halo of scarlet foliage, and sea mists had settled upon her lifeless body like a silver frost, giving her corpse an eerie glow.

Workers began wrapping the library with tarps. Tunnels were constructed to shield students from falling debris as they entered and exited the building. Scaffolding was erected to divert walkers to a safe distance.

Milden Hall would wear these unsightly wounds through decades of failed renovation attempts before the college trustees would finally commission a new library. It would be a modern design, crafted of glass and steel, a metaphor for Wexley's commitment to the technological advances of the future.

Rebecca, forever angry, would remain a part of Wexley lore. Students still speak of an old oak grove by the new library that will suddenly, without wind or warning, drop dozens of acorns down upon the heads of unsuspecting couples who gather there to relax, as Rebecca and her boyfriend once did, in the welcoming shade. They say it is Rebecca's ghost, taking her revenge against thwarted love, shaking the gnarled branches like a madwoman in the trees.

Rebecca is not the only ghost you will find at Wexley College.

In Winthrop Hall, a dormitory crafted from an old sea captain's mansion, you may meet The Pink Lady. She moans with grief, staining her rose-colored gown with tears as she waits for her drowned husband to return. Her wailing will not harm you, but if you hear the laughter of her phantom children, run away before their cold hands reach out to push you down the stairs.

In the Holcomb Auditorium, which houses the Department of Language and Literature, you may feel the hot breath of old Professor Radcliffe on the back of your neck. He died there in the middle of his lecture on Shakespearean sonnets. You can still see his chalk marks bleeding through the washed slate on the classroom wall, forever scanning the beats and stresses of forgotten iambic pentameters.

And, if you walk through the courtyard, enter the Witch Woods, and head toward the hills where the Dayton Brook that cuts through campus begins, you may encounter the restless soul whose murdered remains were found floating beneath melting ice four months after her roommate reported her missing.

Stories like these have been told on campus for generations, whispered around bonfires and shared among sorority sisters. Unable to silence the tales, Wexley College has leaned into its haunted reputation, arranging campus ghost tours, hosting spooky hayrides, and hiring psychics to speak on campus each fall. Even the cafeteria ladies join in the fun, wrapping their heads with scarves and pretending to read student fortunes in discarded tea leaves and crystal balls made of tinfoil.

I fell in love with the ghosts of Wexley College. During my lonely school years their thumps and whispers kept me company, letting me know I was not alone. Ghosts have tales to tell, reasons for leaving small pieces of their souls behind on this earthly plane. Each haunting is a memory, a mystery, a love story for the living.

A college doesn't need ghost stories to be haunted. Academia itself is a haunted place, romancing students with promises of the past. Where else will you walk by church graveyards on your way to class, the cold stone slabs a balm against the turbulent heat of passionate youth? Where else will you gather in buildings named after deceased donors, learning to scaffold your arguments on ideas first articulated by scholars who stopped breathing long before you were born? Where else will you see

specters rise from the creased pages of timeworn books, their raspy voices still begging for adulation?

I pledged my fealty to the haunted kingdom of academia during the fall semester of my senior year. I had been invited to join Phi Beta Kappa, the country's most prestigious honor society, and I was told to meet with the chapter advisor, Professor Beckford, the oldest living member of our faculty. He was to present me with my ceremonial key, a gold embossed pendant featuring a clasped hand, fingers pointing upward toward a cluster of three gilded stars, a symbol of the divine knowledge that floats just beyond our human grasp.

His office was on the top floor of Tower Hall, a tall stone building with endless spiraling stairs. He sat at his desk behind a half-opened oak door, and when I knocked, he invited me in for tea, shuffling to the corner of the room and returning with a tin of homemade cookies. I imagined his wife, an elderly woman with soft white hair, sending him off to work that morning with a kiss upon his cheek.

We talked for a while, Professor Beckford's rheumy eyes lighting up each time the conversation steered toward his own academic interests. He pulled out a large leather ledger from his bottom drawer and dropped it open on his desk. Dust swirled in the ray of afternoon sun that filtered through the arched window.

The ledger contained the signature of every Phi Beta Kappa member in the school's history, its yellowed pages tattooed with storied names from the past. Professor Beckford handed me a quill. My fingers trembled as I watched its sacred ink form the letters of my name.

I began my PhD Program at Wexley the next year, and, because my professors did not consider the Gothic genre a subject of serious study, I focused my research on patterns of love and marriage in 18th and 19th century British domestic fiction. Elizabeth Bennet and Jane Eyre became my closest companions, and visions of Thornfield and Thrushcross Grange loomed across the moors of my imagination, warning me of romantic dangers to come.



I met him several years later, in autumn, the most intimate of seasons. The trees were just beginning to compose their eulogy of color for summer's lost light, and the air was sweet with decay. The gusty winds of September wrapped themselves around me, teasing shades of gold and crimson from my mask of green. Poets sing of true love unfurling like the petals of spring flowers, but for me, true love would quicken with the first frosty breath of fall.

He was new to the department, brought in to replace Professor Whitney who had passed away in August. A distinguished fellow of the Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning Society, he had been hired to teach courses in the Victorian Era and the history of literary criticism. Now nearing the end of my PhD program, I had been assigned as the teaching assistant for his undergraduate survey class in 19th century poetry.

He welcomed me into his office which was piled high with boxes and stacks of books. He brushed a pile of papers off a chair for me and sat on the corner of his cluttered desk. He was still wearing his regalia from the morning's Convocation ceremony, but his black robe was open in front, revealing his unbuttoned collar and loosened tie.

He spoke with an air of confidence and authority as he ran through his expectations for the semester. He had ordered a new anthology, preferring it to the outdated one Professor Whitney had planned to use, and he wanted me to read through the outlined selections so I could assess the first round

of exams. He flipped through the pages of the collection as he spoke, pausing to caress his favorite poems with his ink-stained hands. A band of pale skin circled his third finger, the ghostly mark of a missing wedding band.

He was twenty years my senior. His hair, still thick and so black it carried a sheen of blue, was threaded with silver at the temples. I imagined him at ease in the lecture hall, summarizing Wordsworth's poetic manifesto and explaining the impact of industrialism on Victorian verse. He would make coeds swoon when he read Keats aloud, and even the football players in his class, who were attending Wexley on athletic scholarship, would be moved by his theatrical recitations of Tennyson and Browning.

“Miss Burdett?”

The sound of my name pulled me from my fantasy. My pen fell from my grasp. He watched it roll slowly across the wooden floorboards and then turned his gaze back to me, an amused smile dancing in the corners of his eyes. He waited with the practiced pause of a professor while I searched my mind for the question he must have asked, but all I could find there were the haunting rhymes of Porphyria's Lover confessing his passionate deeds.

“I asked if you would like to finish our meeting over coffee.”

My heart fluttered like a caged bird in my chest. It was an eternity before I found my voice.

“I would love a cup of coffee, Dr. Fairfax.”

“Theodore,” he said, smirking as he offered me his outstretched hand. I could see the darkened curve of a tattoo on his forearm. He leaned forward so that his eyes were level with mine. “And I should call you?” he asked.

“Charlotte.”



The smell of coffee brewing still reminds me of how happy I was, how happy we were, in those early, passionate days.

I had never considered myself pretty. All my life, I had been the smart one, the plain one, the hard-working one, but each time Dr. Fairfax brushed the hair from my eyes and called me his “little brown bird”, I felt beautiful. I noticed the way he looked at me in the soft autumnal light of our classroom, his gaze traveling across the tawny wool knit of my sweater. I blushed when I saw my new shade of burgundy lipstick staining the collar of his shirt.

Wexley College had a strict policy against student-teacher relationships, so even though I was long past the age when my own mother had married and started her family, Theodore and I had to keep our romance a secret. The tension of brushing up against him at faculty meetings and pretending not to feel the throb of his body fueled my late nights visits to his office. The thrill of being caught by the building security guards was so intoxicating that we sometimes dared ourselves to meet in empty conference rooms and lecture halls or clung to one another in darkened stairwells and vacant hallways, our labored breathing echoing off the cold marble floors beneath our feet.

By the end of our first October together, I knew he was the man I wanted to marry.

Theodore was intoxicating, but he was also demanding, expecting me to grade his student papers and contribute to his scholarly research on the love letters between Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. He liked the idea of me silently assisting him with his work regarding the most famous

literary couple of the Victorian era, and once, after we had finished a bottle of Italian red wine, he teased that he had rescued me from a life of solitude just as Robert had recused Elizabeth from the illness she suffered while confined to her tyrannical father's home.

I had been a model student through nearly six years of a rigorous PhD program before I had met Theodore, but now my advisor grew worried that my commitment to my work was waning. I prioritized Theodore's research over my own, and I had already missed deadlines and begged for extensions. My advisor questioned my ability to complete my dissertation edits and prepare for my oral defense. When he suggested I delay my graduation for another year, I panicked. Graduating would allow Theodore and I to reveal our relationship. Remaining a student would stand between me and the marriage I desired. I had spent years of my life writing about the romance between Jane and Rochester and the tortured passions of Catherine and Heathcliff. Now, I wanted my own chance at a happily ever after.



Theodore taught graduate seminars two nights each week and was often kept busy after class with paperwork and student questions, so I resolved to devote these evenings to my studies. I would huddle at a little desk in the stacks of the third floor of the Milden Hall Library. A green shaded lamp cast a circle of light onto my pile of papers. The library closed at midnight, but my spot was so out of the way that no one would notice me when the building shut down. The overhead lights would blink off and the locks on the great doors would turn, but I knew I could slip in and out of the building through a side door with a broken alarm.

I loved working this way, the dark silence punctuated only by the wind wuthering through the protective tarps. I could fall into the pages of my novels, transporting myself to the balls and promenades of the Regency and Victorian eras, pretending my tartan skirt was an elegant gown pooling around me in ruffles of silk.

I was halfway through my edits one night when I was frightened by the sound of footsteps echoing on the marble tile. I held my breath. The heavy door that led to the stacks from the third story balcony creaked open. My pen hovered in midair. I felt a presence come up behind me, and I let out a sigh of relief when I turned to see Theodore, his tweed jacket slung over his shoulder.

I had never told him where I went to study. He must have seen the green glow of a light in the window of the darkened library and followed it to me.

He bowed to me like a gentleman caller, then suddenly pulled me from my chair and pushed my body against a shelf of books.

He brushed my hair back from my face and kissed me. Through his white shirt, I could see the swirls of ink that formed his tattoos. The lines of his favorite poems were written in script across his forearms, and on his back, his hip, were symbols I did not recognize. My favorite tattoo was the one on his chest, a long-tailed swallow with ebony feathers, frozen in mid flight. I moved my hand to where it rested beneath the folds of his shirt and felt the steady pound of his heartbeat.

He stared intently at me. His dark eyes looked hungry.

“How do I love thee?” he asked, reciting the lines of my favorite sonnet. His voice was thick with longing and his fingers pulled the hair at the nape of my neck. The stubble of his beard scratched my face as he whispered in my ear. “Let me count the ways.”

His fingers brushed against the chain looped around my neck and followed it past my collar bone

to my throat. My Phi Beta Kappa key, its three golden stars twinkling in the flickering light, dangled at the end of the chain, just above my breasts.

“One.”

He smiled as he pulled at the necklace, twisting it until I felt the cold metal tight against my windpipe. He covered my mouth with his and I momentarily struggled to breathe, drowning in the velvet softness of his lips and the stale taste of coffee behind the bitter tobacco and whiskey clinging to his tongue. When he pulled away, I gasped for air, inhaling the musty scent of books and polished mahogany. He slid his hand from my neck and pulled open the buttons of my blouse, the pop of the threads echoing against the silence of the deserted library. He slowly placed a pair of kisses upon my neck and chest.

“Two.”

His hands still held the chill of the cold November air from his walk across campus, and I shivered as he moved them down my waist. He scattered my paperwork like falling leaves and lifted me onto the desk.

“Three.”

Milden Hall settled and moaned. Frosty winds whipped through its scaffolding, and the plastic tarps that surrounded the broken edifice flapped and writhed in ecstasy.

I heard acorns falling in the oak grove below. I imagined it was Rebecca’s ghost, jealous and angry that I had found true love, shaking the branches of the trees.



Somehow, I made it through my final semester and graduated in May. Theodore was there, cloaked in his regalia, marching behind the chancellor who carried the ceremonial mace and staff. I felt his eyes on me as I stood with the other graduates.

When the President asked the candidates to rise for the conferral of our degrees, I was spellbound. The weight of my achievement transformed me as if by magic. The ancient ceremony legitimized my scholarship, legitimized my relationship with Theodore, and knighted me into the kingdom of academia, giving me the home that I had been searching for my entire life.

The next morning, Theodore and I, finally equals, lay curled together in my apartment. I traced the lines of his tattoos as I began talking of our summer plans, trips to the shore, picnics at the winery, and long afternoons spent reading poetry beneath the shade of campus trees.

A shadow passed over his face.

“I leave tomorrow for my summer fellowship at Oxford,” he said. “I told you about it.”

He hadn’t.

I felt hurt by his oversight, but he was every bit the absent-minded professor, and I knew I would forgive him. I could follow him across the Atlantic and cook him candlelit dinners in our Edwardian flat. I pictured our food growing cold while we kissed. I looked at him expectantly, waiting for him to ask me to join him.

He didn’t.

“You have your work to keep you busy,” he said, as I turned away from him to hide my tears. His voice was dismissive and cold.

I did have work. I had accepted a non-tenured part-time position at Wexley. I would teach two

classes with little pay and low job security. I had been excited about the opportunity, envisioning Theodore and I working together, passionate scholars in love. Suddenly, the job felt empty. The work felt cold. My heart felt heavy with the thought of a summer spent on opposite sides of the ocean. I realized how foolish I had been to write the unpromised pieces of our story--love, marriage, children--with my own imagination.

He sighed and pulled me against his chest. My hot tears spilled onto his skin, and I reached up to wipe them away, brushing against his swallow tattoo.

“Do you know why sailors inked swallows onto their chests?” he asked, his voice softer, a distraction. He would never talk about his tattoos, even though I often asked about their meaning. They were his secrets, a part of his past, and he had never granted me the key to reading them.

“The Greeks considered the swallow sacred because it carried the souls of the dead to the afterlife. They believed Aphrodite, the goddess of love, could transform into a swallow and take flight, her beauty trailing from the streaming feathers of the bird’s tale.”

He spoke with the same intoxicating tone he used for his lectures. I clung to every word.

“British sailors inked the bird onto their chests each time they traveled five thousand nautical miles. It was a sign of their bravery, and, since swallows are not seabirds, the sight of one brought comfort because it meant the ship must be close to shore.”

He looked at me, stroking my shoulder. I imagined myself as Aphrodite in transformation, the twisted bedsheet between us my gown, my tousled hair flowing over us like the feathers of a swallow’s tale.

“But, for the sailors of the Victorian Era,” he paused here, lingering on the word Victorian, a word that had in so many ways defined his life, our life, “the tattoo of a long-tailed swallow was a promise. A swallow always returns to its nesting place, no matter how far and long it has traveled, and the tattoo meant the sailor would always return to his beloved.”

I could see his heartbeat grow faster beneath the inked feathers. His tattoo trembled as if about to take flight.

“You are my beloved, Charlotte. I will always come back to you.”

I climbed on top of him, kissing his lips, kissing the inky feathers of his tattoo, trying to memorize the feel of his hands on my body, preparing myself for an endless summer with only the campus ghosts to keep me company.



Theodore did return to me in the glorious days of early autumn, and it seemed as if his presence made the trees glow with golden light.

I had thought we would make our relationship official now that I was a member of the faculty, but Theodore wanted to keep our personal life private as he had not yet built his tenure at Wexley. I think he liked keeping me his little secret, and although I was disappointed, he took pains to comfort me, sending me romantic love letters and poems through the University mail. It was thrilling to open them and read them in the crowded part-time office where I did my work, nameless adjuncts drifting in and out of the room like ghosts. I wondered if my part-time colleagues ever noticed my blush, my smile, as I read the papers he had stained with his words of passion and love.

My formal studies had ended, but my research continued, branching away from domestic fiction

and into the folklore, legends, and fairy tales that lurked in the background of 19th century literature. My advisor had always directed me away from these influences, thinking them beneath the scope of scholarly investigation, but now that I was an unseen adjunct, I was free to explore Bluebeard's wife and Beauty's beast. I was particularly curious about Anderson's mermaid and Wilde's warbling songbirds, suffering and grieving from the depths of unrequited love.

Over the next few years, Theodore and I fell into a routine as predictable as the rhythms of academic semesters, as repetitive as the telling of ghost stories on stormy nights. Each summer when he traveled, I waited for him, widowed and alone, walking along the shore in solitude like The Pink Lady of Winthrop Hall. Each autumn when he returned, my life burst back into scandalous color, his presence as exciting and familiar as the smooth blank pages of notebooks purchased for the start of a new school year.

He was assigned new graduate assistants each year, often intelligent young scholars with bright futures. In the seventh year of our relationship, his assistant was a beautiful young girl writing her dissertation on Christina Rossetti. She and Theodore spent long hours together preparing for class and conducting research, as we had once done. My heart wrenched with jealousy each time she brushed against him at a faculty meeting, her flaxen hair falling around her velvet blazer in long strands as though she were a white, plump bird.

One night when Theodore was working late, I decided to bring a bottle of red wine to his office, hoping to reignite the flame between us which seemed to have cooled with the season's dropping temperatures. The building was dark, and a rim of light illuminated his door. I placed my hand on the knob and stopped, listening to the sounds of muffled laughter.

I hesitated.

Then, with excessive haste, I opened the door.

She sat at his desk, reading an old volume of poems, and he hung over her, his hands on top of her shoulders. Her cashmere sweater was draped over the desk and the top buttons of her blouse were undone. He was laughing at something witty she had said when he turned to find me frozen on the threshold.

I saw the guilt in his bloodshot eyes.

I stormed out of the building without saying a word.

He found me in the Milden Hall Library. I had entered through the broken door wanting the peace and solitude of the empty building, but he had followed me, trying to explain away what I had seen.

He begged me to listen to him. I pushed him away from me, crying that he had never loved me, screaming that I would never forgive him.

That night, Milden Hall was once again the sole witness to our passion, but this kind of passion ended only in tears.

I did not return to my classes that semester, resigning my teaching position. Theodore never contacted me again.

In desperation, I sent him a letter through the campus mail that he had once used to send me

clandestine messages of everlasting love.

It was never answered.

I went to his office once. It was a Tuesday evening. I knew he held late hours there after teaching his graduate seminar, but the room was empty. His books had been taken down from the shelves and packed in boxes which were littered across the desk and chairs. Theodore was always being courted by prestigious universities, and he must have accepted an offer to leave Wexley, to leave me.

I knew then that we were over.

Although I was no longer a member of the faculty, I continued to study at the Milden Hall Library. I took comfort in the opulent Gothic beauty lurking beneath the crumbling bricks and flapping tarps. I sought solace in the raspy voices of forgotten ghosts rising from each of its ancient tomes.

I remember very little except the inordinate grief and loneliness of those many years I lived without Theodore. Every so often, when I pulled a collection of Victorian poetry from the shelf, I would discover pressed flowers we had gathered on our walks through Witch Woods. Theodore used to leave them in our favorite books for me to find like lost treasures, and each one shattered my broken heart into smaller pieces.



One night, as I spent the sleepless hours at my little desk in the stacks of the third floor, I noticed a flickering light beneath the locked door which led to the open area of the library. Curious, I clicked open the lock and stumbled through the shadows until I found the light source, a group of undergraduate girls holding hands around a candle. The flame twisted in the winds wuthering through the building cracks.

The girls looked impossibly young, and the dim light painted their faces with the pallor of death. I was about to reprimand them for lighting a candle in a closed library when I heard his voice like the echo of a memory.

“Charlotte.”

I turned to see Theodore, standing by the marble railing that looked over the center vestibule to the first floor below. It must have been decades since I had seen him, but he looked the same, tall and handsome in his linen shirt and tweed vest, the marks of my lipstick on his collar. The first few buttons of his shirt were open, and I could see the feathers of his swallow tattoo, dark beneath the white fabric.

Theodore reached out to me, and I heard the girls behind me gasp. Not wanting to turn back and see their ghostly faces, I took a step toward Theodore.

When we touched, the lights in the building flicked on and then off, illuminating the Gothic arches and flooding the stained-glass windows with color before plunging everything back into darkness. Far away, I heard the girls scream.

Suddenly, memories began to swirl around me like ghosts. I watched as Theodore chased me into the library that fateful night after I had seen him flirting with his graduate assistant in his office. We were soaked with rain from our trek across campus, wet, yellow leaves clinging to our clothes. He grabbed my arm to stop me and make me listen. I pushed him away. In our struggle, we slipped and fell backward over the marble railing.

Our broken bodies landed in a twisted embrace on the floor two stories below, our clasped hands pointing upwards, as if reaching out to catch a cluster of golden stars.

I turned away from the horrible memory and looked into the eyes of the only man I had ever loved.

“You are my beloved, Charlotte. I will always come back to you.”

His body began to fade before me, his bone and sinew evaporating like ether, blending into the dusty library air. I let him pull me into his embrace.

We flamed like the final glow of the setting autumn sun. Then everything disappeared.



Wexley College finally built its new library on the ashes of Milden Hall. The crumbling structure that engineers and scholars had failed to repair was burned to the ground by a group of young girls who had gathered for a séance to help the ghost of a dead professor cross the veil on All Hallows Eve. The books ignited like tinder, sending light, red as blood, into the swells of night, and the winds, which blew in from the sea, fanned the furious flames.

The trustees demanded that the modern steel building which replaced Milden Hall would be fitted with the newest capabilities in fire safety, but technology advanced so quickly that even the new library was outdated before its inaugural opening. The modern monstrosity, now named Templeton Hall, looks down over the antiquated campus like a woman on her deathbed surveying the memories of her past.

Like all college campuses, Wexley remains haunted, forever defined by a past that writes itself upon the present. Scholars cite ancient thinkers, athletes compete against records set by former generations, and students sit in lecture halls beneath portraits of former presidents who have long since left this earthly plane.

Each year from Homecoming through Halloween, Wexley hosts its famous haunted tours. The guides, dressed in Victorian costumes, tell the stories of Rebecca and The Pink Lady's children. They speak of the ghostly green light that shines from a third story window in the new library and point out the burning smell of an unseen candle that still lingers in the musty air. They drop their voices in practiced fear as they dare patrons to recite the opening lines of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Sonnet Number 43. It is said that if you recite the poem in the dusty library stacks, you will hear a whispered voice counting slowly in your ear—one, two, three.

Last night I dreamt I went to Wexley again, for even ghosts can dream. I passed through the iron gates, crossed the flagstone bridge, and headed up the hill toward Milden Hall Library, still standing in my memory like the ruins of a medieval castle.

All ghosts have tales to tell, their stories echoing through eternity like the opening lines of a treasured novel. My tale, still shrouded in mystery, now must draw to its close.

In death, I forgave him. My Theodore and I, our secrets finally laid bare, found our happiness in the ever after, though like all shades, we are doomed to lurk in the shadows, permanently separated from the quiet needs of the living which rise and fall with the patterned precision of semesters. We have become a part of the past, the creaking floorboards, the faded ink, the sudden shivers in the night that let you know you are never alone.

If you look for us, you will find a piece of our souls forever housed on the ghostly shelves where Milden Hall Library, our library, once stood. Here, in the hallowed halls of this phantom edifice, we return to each other like long-tailed swallows who have crossed the turbulent seas of life and death, to find our way back home.



CONTRIBUTORS



AND VERY LITTLE STONE - 6

Margaret Fisher Squire's poems have appeared in *brass bell: a haiku journal*, *The Ryder Magazine*, and the Five Women Poets' chapbook, *Birds of a Feather*. Some can be heard in the archives of WFIU's program ["The Poets Weave."](#)

Image: Amanda Bergloff



THE RUG MERCHANT'S TALE - 8

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: Sophie Gengembre Anderson



TO SURVIVE A FAIRY TALE - 12

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: Arthur Rackham



MEDICINE OR POISON - 15

Ella Arrow believes in magic, especially the kind we make for ourselves. Her book, *The Flight of the Starling, A Fairy Tale*, is available on Amazon and in bookshops. She writes stories and makes art in her home near Madison, Wisconsin. Join her quest for a magical life on www.ella-arrow.com.

Image: Jessie M. King



EVER AFTER - 17

Tish Black is a writer, content creator, and film programmer. She creates fairy tale & folklore content as Tales with Tish, including video essays exploring fairy tale films. Her first book of short stories inspired by fairy tales will be published in late 2023. Find her online at TishBlack.com.

Image: The Public Domain Review



CONTRIBUTORS



LITTLE RED TO THE WOODCUTTER - 19

Dr. Sara Cleto is an award-winning teacher, writer, and folklorist. She co-founded The Carterhaugh School of Folklore and the Fantastic, where she teaches creative souls how to re-enchant their lives using fairy tales. Her poetry and prose can be found in *Uncanny*, *Corvid Queen*, *Star*Line*, and more.

Image: Jean Jacques Enner



FAIRY TALE CLASSICS FROM THE BROTHERS GRIMM: JORINDA AND JORINGEL- 20

Image: Heinrich Vogeler



THE NIGHT QUEEN'S LULLABY - 23

Amanda Bergloff writes weird stories and poetry that have been published in various anthologies, including *Stories from the World of Tomorrow*, *Trembling with Fear*, *After the Happily Ever After* and *Uncommon Pet Tales*. She has a passion for collecting vintage books, toys, and comics in her spare time. Twitter: [@AmandaBergloff](https://twitter.com/AmandaBergloff)

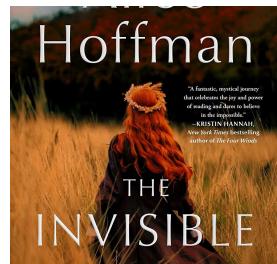
Images: The Public Domain Review



ENCHANTED CREATORS: THE LITERARY MAGIC OF ALICE HOFFMAN -24 THE GHOSTS OF MILDEN HALL - 70

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.

Images: Courtesy of Alice Hoffman, Pixabay



PERSEPHONE'S POMEGRANATE - 28

A food writer who focuses on the intersection of cuisine and culture, **Jayne Cohen** is the author of two cookbooks and numerous articles in the NY Times, Boston Globe, LA Times, Gourmet and Bon Appetit, among other publications.

Image: Evelyn de Morgan



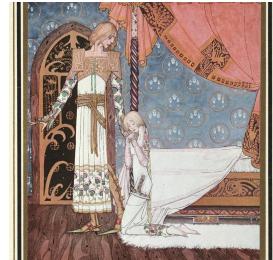
CONTRIBUTORS



EAST OF THE SUN, WEST OF THE MOON - 33

Hannah Grace Greer is a disabled writer and poet originally from Pennsylvania. She is currently studying creative writing from the University of Iowa. Her work has been published in New Reader Magazine, Still Point Arts Quarterly, Eye to the Telescope, and elsewhere. You can find her [@hannahggpoetry](https://twitter.com/@hannahggpoetry) on Twitter and Instagram

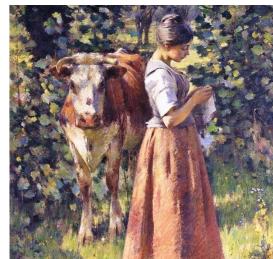
Image: Kay Nielsen



THE WOODCUTTER AND THE MILKMAID- 34

Rosanne E. Lortz is a teacher, an author, and a mom to four boys. She usually writes Regency Romance but can also be found creating YA fantasy.

Image: Theodore Robinson



FROM THE FORESTS OF THE EAST - 38

Allyson Faye lives in the UK, with her family and rescue animals, including her Labrador, Roxy. She is a tutor, editor, mum, dog-walker, and avid film buff. Her poetry has been published widely; e.g. *Sylvia, Spillwords, Siren's Call, Under Her Skin* (from Black Spot Books), *Air*; (Tyche Books) and Unsettling Press.

Image: Rene Bull



ARTICLE: WITCHES IN LOVE - 40

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](https://www.carterhaugh.com), 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: Photos Wikimedia Commons, Painting by Edward Frederick Brewtnall



TRIPLE GODDESS PRAYER - 43

Cecilia Betsill is an NYC-based Swede writing LGBTQ+ fantasy and witchy poetry. She is currently working on publishing her debut novel entitled *Siren's Song*. You can find Cecilia helping run a literary open mic in Brooklyn and occasionally illustrating the accompanying monthly zine.

Image: Alphonse Osbert



CONTRIBUTORS



NIX AND ALBA- 68

Leila Murton Poole is a writer and filmmaker who loves secrets and stories. She used to only write secret stories but started to share them after developing an addiction to writing competitions. Find out more of her secrets at <https://www.leilamurtonpoole.com>

Image: Amanda Bergloff



CLASSIC POETRY: SONG OF THE WITCHES - 47

From *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare

Image: The Public Domain Review



WHAT HAPPENED TO THE HUNTSMAN - 48

Sarah Cannavo's work has appeared in *Dreams and Nightmares*, *Haven Spec*, *Star*Line*, *parABnormal*, and *The Vampiricon*, among others. Her poetry was nominated for the 2020 and 2021 Rhysling Awards and the 2022 Dwarf Stars Awards. Her story "Unreality" and novella *Wolf of the Pines* are available now on Amazon.

Image: Picryl



CABIN IN THE WOOD - 51

AJ Cunder graduated from Seton Hall University with a Master's in Creative Writing. His work has been published in a variety of print and online journals such as *Mysterion Online*, *The Modern Deity's Guide to Surviving Humanity*, and *Fractured Lit*, among others. He currently serves as Editor in Chief of *Et Sequitur Magazine*, Assistant Editor with *Cosmic Roots & Eldritch Shores*, and on the editorial staff of *Metaphorosis Magazine*. Follow him on Twitter [@AJ_Cunder](#), or online at www.WrestlingTheDragon.com.

Image: Pixabay



PYGMALION THE ARCHEOLOGIST - 61

Sofia Ezdina is an emerging writer and an immigrant queer woman, who befriends stray animals and whispers eerie things. Her works appeared in *Jalada Africa*, *Enchanted Conversation*, and Air and Nothingness Press. One of her poems was also named a runner-up for Barjeel Poetry Prize.

Image: Edward Burne-Jones



CONTRIBUTORS



INTERVIEW: IVORY TOWER STUDIOS- 62

By Editor-in-Chief, **Kate Wolford**.

All photos courtesy of Ivory Tower Studios



ARTICLE: THE MERMAID MUSEUM - 65

Laren Stover is a melancholy connoisseur known to frolic with fairies and is co-founder of Ivory Tower Studios. She is a journalist and playwright and the author of three books—*Pluto*, *Animal Lover*, *Bohemian Manifesto*, and *The Bombshell Manual of Style* and is a fellow of Yaddo and Hawthornden Castle.

Her libretto for composer Lowell Liebermann's *Appalachian Liebesleider* premiered at Carnegie Hall. Find her on Instagram [@Faerie_style](#)

All photos courtesy of The Mermaid Museum



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](#)

Image: Amanda Bergloff



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



Arkhip Ivanovich Kuindzhi



Amanda Bergloff Designs



The Night Queen
now bids you farewell.
Some of the encounters
you've had in this place
may follow you into your dreams,
while others will remain,
waiting for your return...
for the realm of Eternal Night
is always here
and will always
welcome you back.

