

DUSTY ATTIC

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Twisted Fairytales





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...dio
...dales
...arius vel.
...que habitant
...eu sem integer.
...ras. Mi bibendum
... Ut tortor pretium
...or vitae. Quis viverra
...ius duis at consectetur
...el pretium lectus quam
...ut tellus elementum.



A Letter from Jenna

Hi readers,

Welcome to our fourth issue! We're especially excited about this issue because of the theme: twisted fairytales!

There are some very special pieces in this issue, some with very obvious ties to fairytales we all know and love and some that just hit the vibe just right. We are so grateful for our writers and their continued awesomeness.

We had so much fun reading all the submissions and it made our lives incredibly difficult. How could we choose seven pieces out of all the amazing stories and poems we received? Having a theme really brought out everyone's creative side and we look forward to doing more themed issues in the future.

Speaking of the future, after this issue we will be going on hiatus until 2025. Some big changes are happening and the Dusty Attic team is very much looking forward to being able to work on future issues together... physically! That's right, J.L. is moving! This husband/wife team will finally be in the same country.

Considering this fairly large upheaval, we need to take a short break. The plan is to open submissions again in January for our spring 2025 issue. We will stay active on Patreon and post both free and exclusive content there. Keep an eye out for more updates and announcements.

As always, thank you so much for reading. We couldn't do this without our readers and we really appreciate your continued support.

Jenna
EIC





The Winding of Animals



WRITTEN BY M.J. FRANCIS

He clutched the toy carousel with a sullied hand and wound it, tightening the coil, building potential. A release – and a doleful melody chimed as the tarnished brass key turned, and a miniature lioness chased painted antelope, zebra, and wildebeest.

"Hansel?" his sister called from inside the cottage.

He turned to look and hugged his knees tightly, squatting there among the forest detritus.

She peeped out from the cottage and, somehow, she looked older now. Almost a woman.

"Hansel, I need you."

He shook his head, suppressing tears that had welled inside him for three grievous years.

"You can't be weak, Brother." Gretel marched out and grabbed his wrist, pulling him onto his feet. She dragged him towards the cottage. "You must never be weak."

The stink of charred flesh offended Hansel's nose before he was tugged across the threshold – a stench that reminded him of popping ants under magnified sunlight.

Gretel halted and he noticed her heave, attempting to mask a facial contortion; he retched without the façade.

She looked down at the toy clamped in his fingers. Then she looked him in the eyes, without remorse.

"It's a silly thing, anyway," Gretel said, and she took it from his grip, which loosened too easily.

His eyes wandered, then, to the oven. It still burned ferociously. The screams and squeals reignited in his mind.

"What now?" he asked, timidly.

Gretel led him to a bedroom – the only other room in the cottage. A small wooden bed, with a filthy pillow, was shoved against the corner. Its scruffy sheet was a patchwork of stitched skin and downy hair: blonde, brunette and black. Hansel heaved again at the sight, while Gretel strode over to it and pulled at the heavy bed frame. Beneath, Hansel saw an iron-bound chest.

"I can't lift the bed and pull it out," his sister said.

Hansel went over at once, despite his repulsion and his trepidation, snared by the lure of love.

Gretel dropped the bed with a jump-inducing thud then rummaged through the chest, tossing out tiny, once-loved clothes as if they were rags. At the bottom she found a heavy-looking book.

She carried it out to the kitchen table where the witch had once sat, drooling and snickering as Gretel had scrubbed the stone floor, over and over. She ran her fingers along the leather spine; what type of hide, Hansel dreaded to know.

"What about the hag?" he asked.

"Let the fire work. When it's done, we'll clean it. Scrub and scrub and scrub."



Hansel joined his sister at the table as she fingered through the scruffily inked pages. They were marked with esoteric symbols, bloodied with smeared words he couldn't read. Gretel smiled faintly. Formulating something in that vulpine mind, Hansel recognised.

"Why don't we go? I want our old life." He got no reaction. "I want Daddy and the games we played."

She slammed the pages shut then, making Hansel jump, and looked him dead in the eyes. Burning in them was a flame he'd never seen, or noticed, before.

"There is no way back."

"We won't need crumbs or pebbles to find the way," Hansel said. "Not this time. I know the way. I do."

"That's not what I mean. We can't go back to wicked things."

"Daddy isn't wicked." Hansel let his anger and fear spill out, sobbing. "You can't say Daddy's like that hag. He didn't want to leave us. I heard them argue. It was always her – only her."

Gretel came to his side and put her arms round him, pulling him close. She squeezed him – a maternal comfort he hadn't felt for too long – until his ribs hurt, just a little.

"Father is weak," said Gretel. "Weakness and wickedness are bedfellows. You don't want to be weak, do you?"

"You killed that witch, Sister, while I watched."

"You were locked away. I can't blame you for doing nothing," Gretel said.

"But you didn't hesitate. I—"

She pressed her finger to his lips. "Wicked things deserve to burn."

Hansel wiped away tears on his dirty shirt sleeves. "When we get home, Daddy will be so happy and he'll realise he can't listen to her again."

Gretel huffed, stood up, and grabbed the book. She hugged it to her chest, conjuring an image of their real mother, whose smile had already faded so much from memory.

"We're not going home." Gretel found a certain page and held it out to her brother. "Look. We have the witch's spells. Here – the same that made a sham of this cottage. All you need is me and this book. We will conjure our own life, here in these woods."

Hansel got up. He went to the only window and flung it open. He stuck his head outside, to breathe again. A rabbit skipped among the trees, where the wildflowers and mushrooms grew, while a fox stalked nearby.

"We could ask Daddy to come here instead, away from her."

A metallic screech hurt his ears then. He turned and saw the oven door opened, the heel of a black shoe sticking out.

Gretel stood and watched the flames lick round the brick oven, tasting every morsal within.

Wicked things deserve to burn...

"You're right," Gretel said. "We will go home."

While Gretel left the cottage, Hansel paused by the doorway, spying the carousel on a mantelpiece. He picked it up and followed.

Halting, he looked back at the cottage. Only wood and



thatch now. There used to be a house of gingerbread, sugar glass, and candy-cane doorposts.

There used to be innocence and childish magic, once.

Hansel watched Gretel stride through the thicket with a ferine confidence, as both fox and rabbit scattered from her path.

He dawdled behind and wound the carousel again. Then he broke into a jog to keep up, while the animals stalked the lioness in mechanical procession, and he wondered if there really was a way back.



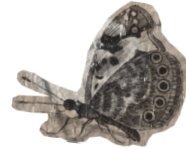
Hansel & Gretel by Arthur Rackham (1867-1939)



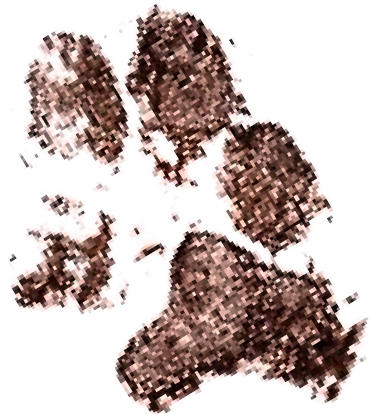
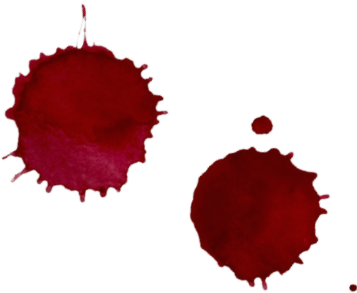
wolfeater

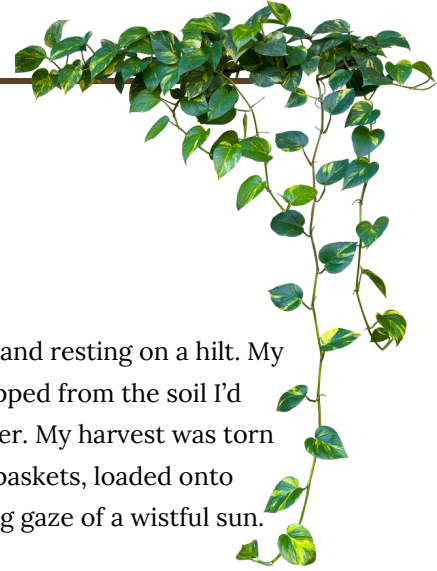
WRITTEN BY EMILY ANNE ELLIOTT

my cloak is red and boldly
flowing in the maytime breeze,
my eyes are wide and innocent
aimed beyond the trees.



picnic basket swinging, overplump and gay,
drawing bees and birds and butterflies
which—are not the prey I crave.





My Dandelion Child

WRITTEN BY L.T. WARD

I wear my hair as a tangled knot of curls, my tongue speaks in riddles, and my constant companion is a sooty cat. None of that makes me a witch, though. No, it is the practiced faith of witchcraft that earns me the label. But on the day when everything in my world was pilfered into theirs, I was not practicing my religion, instead I was merely attending my garden. The king, however, saw my feral hair, heard the rhythmical words I sang to myself, and witnessed my vigilant pet's attendance, concluding without confirming I was a witch. Therefore, I was not a person who had rights in his kingdom.

"I want to eat it," the queen barked at her king over another bout of hyperemesis gravidarum. As she wiped away the sick from her mouth, she demanded, "I want to eat the witch's ivy."

His queen decreed, so the king ordered. Their men absconded my garden's walls. Their gloved hands pulled the vines from the ground, careful not to touch the sap that would make them itch. The queen then ate the ivory berries. She ate the little fruits I had raised to feed the birds in the autumn, making herself even more ill while risking the health of her wee one.

A mother who eats poison ivy and a father who willingly retrieved it for her. The little babe was in grave jeopardy.

"I fear for the princess," I told my familiar after I learned of their idiocy from the very birds who'd lost their meal to the royal belly. Solanaceae purred in agreement.

Two months later, when fireworks boomed into the sky, the soldiers returned. "It is for Her Royal Highness." I looked beyond the three standing at the

foot of my door, each with a hand resting on a hilt. My beautiful plants were being ripped from the soil I'd nurtured all spring and summer. My harvest was torn from the ground, tossed into baskets, loaded onto carts, stolen under the burning gaze of a wistful sun.

"They're mine! Those are mine!"

"They are needed to celebrate Her Royal Highness' birth."

"Do I receive payment for my contribution?"

The lead guard smirked. "The king said to offer you this, witch." He tossed a coin at my face, hitting me right between the eyes.

"This is an insult."

"Yes." The soldiers disturbed the sanctity of my now-empty garden with their laughter.

I pulled my pipe from my skirt pocket and sat in a wooden chair outside of my cottage. I memorized the chewed ground until the moon rose and tucked herself behind a blanket of clouds. "Solanaceae," I said between puffs, "we are owed a better price."

The sooty cat purred as he circled my legs.

It was easy to steal Dandelion. I will not go into details as to how, because the how is unimportant. What is important is that Solanaceae and I were able to stow away from the castle with a corn silk-haired child swaddled in a blanket with a royal crest. What is also important is that Dandelion grew from the sickly babe in a gilded cradle into a vibrant young woman in my tower.



A spell, not a curse, I cast upon the tower. The tips of the honey locust trunk barbs glowed like fireflies for a moment, then quieted. A protection spell. No one could pass if their intention was a threat to the safety of anyone within the arboreal fence. This spell could hold until Dandelion's eighteenth birthday when her adulthood would dissipate my magic.

With a motherly love, I tended to that child. She was sunshine in my arms. Solanaceae and I were determined to protect her at all costs. Her parents were the royals. They had every privilege available, but not a lick of sense between them. A few weeks into our child-saving, I wondered if I was overstepping. Then Solanaceae gave his report. My familiar crossed beyond the wall of magic to learn of the kingdom.

Monsters. Monsters ruled.

Solanaceae reported the resulting deaths of an army and a navy sent to war against an unknown enemy. In ordering their military to find their child at all costs and to punish the person who stole her from them, people died. The kingdoms on our borders raised arms to defend against false allegations, refusing to extradite a woman they did not harbor. Weapons were drawn; lives were lost. Still, the king and queen demanded more. *No one could take what was theirs.*

As I held the downy babe sleeping in my arms, I knew her innocence would be violated if she went back to her birth parents.

Eighteen years passed by as fast as the life of a spring floral bloom. Solanaceae foraged for intel outside our little nest, relaying what he'd learned with whispered thoughts, keeping Dandelion safe from the horrors of the world beyond our sanctuary.

She blossomed, our downy babe. From a suckling infant, she grew into a toddling darling who refused to leave our flourishing garden, so during those heated

months of cultivation, we slept among the fallowed land, our bedding the soft soil with vines and sprouts stretching over us. An agrestal child, Dandelion's corn silk became untamed and long. By five, her locks were at her knees. By seven, the ends trailed on the ground.

"Wouldn't it be best if I trimmed your hair? Just a little. Then it wouldn't be so heavy upon your head. You won't trip when you run the fields or climb the trees."

"No, auntie. I never want to cut my hair." So I plaited it weekly, often needing to loop the braided ropes to avoid her dragging the hair on the ground.

Solanaceae also became her familiar as much as he was mine. Each evening, after he'd toured our borders, he returned to us where I would teach Dandelion the histories of my faith, the words and the tools, too. He climbed her braid as a ladder, then perched himself on her shoulder to listen in on our lessons.

I forgot how tax attaches itself to any price. Taking Dandelion to safety meant abandoning my home. Cottage and garden, where I had bloomed, were gone to me now. However, the shine in Dandelion's eyes were diamonds to my expended coins. My decision was never wrong for me.

Her eighteenth birthday, over a berry covered cake, I retold her the story of how she came to be mine. She had heard this many times before, the first when she was four-years-old and the sunlight shone as gold upon her hair, hair so opposite the rich sable shades of mine.

Each time, I ended with, "If you would like to go home, the choice is yours." Each time, she said, "I am home."

Today, I changed the ending. "The spell is now broken."



Dandelion nodded. We sat and ate her celebratory dessert in silence. Then she said, "I want to see them. My parents."

Fear seized my heart, but I readily helped her prepare. By the afternoon, she left me with Solanaceae as her lead to find the castle. She promised to return, but I wasn't certain she would as I watched the folded braid disappear into the distance.

It took until the next day for Dandelion and Solanaceae to arrive at the castle gate. The guards eyed her over, sneering at the wilderness of her appearance, refusing her entrance. She presented them with the aged blanket with the royal crest. One took the keepsake from her, disappearing into the castle.

"Their Royal Highnesses wish to see the visitor," he said when he returned. The guards escorted her with blades pointing at her back to the state room. They sat in ornate thrones in ornate ensembles, watching with suspicion as their supposed missing child entered, Solanaceae padding beside her. She nervously and softly sang to herself.

The king gazed upon Dandelion. The young woman stared back with his eyes. Yet her hair was a tangled knot of curls, her tongue spoke in riddles, and her companion was a sooty cat. He turned to his wife for counsel. The queen onced-over Dandelion whose face was a mirror to her own, then shook her head. The king bellowed, "You cannot be the missing princess. You are a witch trying to steal her claim to the throne. Guards, seize her!"

Solanaceae scaled Dandelion's braid, perching himself on her shoulder as the accused princess said, "We live by the choices we make and the both of you are fools."

She muttered the incantations she'd learned in her loving home. Just as the guards nearly reached them,

the castle began to shake. Violently. Flowered plants pushed their way through the stone floor mortar. An interior meadow sprung up all around until the royal cast was waist-deep in grasses and flowers.

"Stop that!" shouted the king.

"Seize her!" shouted the queen.

The guards stepped forward, but stopped as a buzzing hum rose at their belts. Petals peeled away to reveal thousands of bees who flew forth, spearing the would-be attackers with their own tiny swords. The soldiers swatted and screamed. Some swung their blades fruitlessly through the air, the bees buzzing laughter in response.

In the chaos, my daughter and friend escaped. They made their way home. When they arrived, Dandelion stood beside me and uttered the very words I had eighteen years prior. The tips of the honey locust trunk barbs glowed like fireflies for a moment, then quieted.

I smiled. I nodded. Dandelion smiled. She nodded. We walked past our garden to the base of our tower. I pulled my pipe from my skirt pocket, then sat in a wooden chair. At the opposite side of the door, my daughter did the same.





Memoirs of the Bog

WRITTEN BY ANA REISENS

When they write, they hold roses between their feet. They eat lilies from long-winded dishes and forget their mother's names. They write poems for the bleeding, for the bled, for those who have known the cold and all who have loved with bones. When they write, they speak to the moss, the bog, the turtles stacked upon the logs, the crested kingfisher that has just brought back the dawn. They write with reeds and grow cranberries beneath bones.





Songs of the Sea

WRITTEN BY ANNICKA BORGES



Niamh always knew her mother was different. She would spend hours on the beach in front of their cottage, staring into the waves as though she were contemplating diving in head first. Niamh would hear snippets of songs and conversations on the wind, always in her mother's voice, but not in any language she recognized. While the sturdy, ruddy-cheeked mothers of the village were busy gossiping and playing matchmaker with each other's children, Muireann was standing tall and slender with her toes in the surf, wind whipping her dark hair around her like a flock of crows. Niamh knew that her mother was not from the village, that her father had found her on his travels and brought her back. As a child she would beg her mother for stories of her home. Muireann would tell Niamh about her fierce namesake, the daughter of the sea king. She would sing Niamh lullabies that sounded like waves lapping on the hull of a boat. Her dark eyes would shine as she spoke of the seals dancing among the waves and sunning themselves on the rocks.

Niamh had never known her father- he'd been lost at sea before she was born- but she had been told he was a kind and gentle man with a big heart and a bigger laugh. When her mother spoke of him it was with a mixture of fondness and sadness. It was obvious to Niamh that her mother loved her father, but there seemed to be something else there too. When Muireann would talk about arriving in the village as a young bride there was almost an edge of bitterness to it. Niamh knew her mother loved her. She never had a reason to doubt this steadfast truth in her life, but there was an obvious longing there too.

The day Niamh found the box was like any other. She had spent the morning preparing the garden for spring planting. It had been a wet winter and the small plot of earth outside the cottage door was muddier than

usual. As Niamh stopped to rest she spotted something unusual protruding from a newly hoed furrow. She knelt in the dirt and worked at the object with her fingers. Freed from its soil prison, Niamh discovered she held a smallish wooden box. It was plain, with no carvings or design, closed tightly with a strong lock. Curious, she took the box into the cottage to explore once she had finished her chores.

That evening when Niamh returned to the cottage she found her mother sitting near the fire with the box in her lap. She was gently stroking the lid with a faraway look in her eyes. Niamh gently touched her arm and Muireann started.

"Where did you find it?" asked Muireann, almost angrily. Taken aback, Niamh told her it had been buried in the garden. Muireann looked at her in astonishment, then began to laugh. "After all this time!" she said, "that dear man put it in the earth where he knew I wouldn't look." Niamh's confusion must have shown on her face because her mother gentled and held out her hand. "Come, daughter, it's time you hear our story."

Muireann removed a key on a chain from inside her dress and inserted it into the lock. With a sharp twist the dirt-encrusted lock opened and she lifted the lid. Niamh crept closer and peered into the box, unsure how to process what she was seeing. She reached out a tentative hand and gently, so gently, ran one finger down the length of the shimmering silver fabric. No, *not fabric*, she thought, *skin*.

Muireann smiled at her daughter as realization dawned. "Mama," said Niamh, disbelieving, "are you... are you selkie?"



"Yes, my girl. Many years ago on a shore far from here your da spied me slipping my skin to test my human legs and dance in the moonlight. Any who know the story of selkie-kind know that to possess one's seal skin means they possess the human within. But your da, he was a kind and gentle soul. He returned night after night to watch me dance on that rocky shore, never once trying to possess me for his own.

After many nights of this I spotted him and ran away. I stumbled and injured myself. Your da helped me bind my wounds, still making no move to own me though I could tell he was entranced. We became close as he returned nightly to tend to my dressings. When the time came for him to return home I could not let him go. I had grown to love him. I gifted him my seal skin and became his bride.

When I found myself with child I asked him to lock up my skin and hide it away, lest the call of my first home become too much to withstand. That beautiful man did as I asked, but gave me the key. He told me that though he held my skin, I held his heart and he would never keep me against my will. We had such a brief time together as he never returned home from his last voyage. The sea had made me his, then took him from me."

Niamh stared at her mother, awestruck. This went so far beyond what she ever could have imagined. She had grown up with tales of the sea and the mysterious creatures that called it home. "Mama," Niamh asked, fearing the answer, "will you return to the sea now?"

"No, my girl. My place is here with you. I could never leave you. My love for you will always be stronger than the call of the sea." Niamh rested her head against her mother, comforted by her fierce and gentle words.

But as time passed the two women began to sense a restlessness in each other. More and more often Niamh found her mother staring into the sea, holding

the box in her arms, and Muireann began to notice Niamh's dark beauty attracting the attention of many village men. Muireann longed to return to the sea, but would not don her true form until Niamh was settled and happy with a love of her own. Under her mother's watchful eye Niamh explored the attention coming her way. It soon became clear that her daughter was in love and had found the man she would marry. Eoin was a strong, quiet man who loved Niamh in a quiet, steady way, but with a ferocity Muireann recognized. She knew that Eoin and Niamh would love and protect each other. With each passing day the song of the sea and her first skin called to her with more urgency.

Niamh and Eoin were married the following spring on the beach outside the cottage. Muireann cried bittersweet tears knowing that her time with Niamh was drawing to a close. She had missed her true form but was not eager to leave this simple life with Niamh and Eoin. As the happy couple settled into their new roles as husband and wife- Eoin working his fishing boat and Niamh caring for the cottage and garden- Muireann began preparations to return to the selkies.

Unsurprisingly the joy in the cottage grew greater with news of a baby due the following spring. Once again, Muireann put off her return to the sea to help sweet Niamh prepare for the new arrival. As summer faded into fall Eoin's boat fell upon hard times. His normal fishing grounds were no longer producing enough to support the family. A decision was made that he would embark upon a longer journey with some of the other men from the village to seek more giving waters. It was late in September when a message arrived. There had been a terrible storm, none of the fishermen would be returning home. Once again, the sea had taken.

Niamh ran from the house and fell to her knees at the water's edge, trailing rage and grief in her wake. She pounded at the rocks and surf, cursing the sea that had given her her mother but taken her love. Long

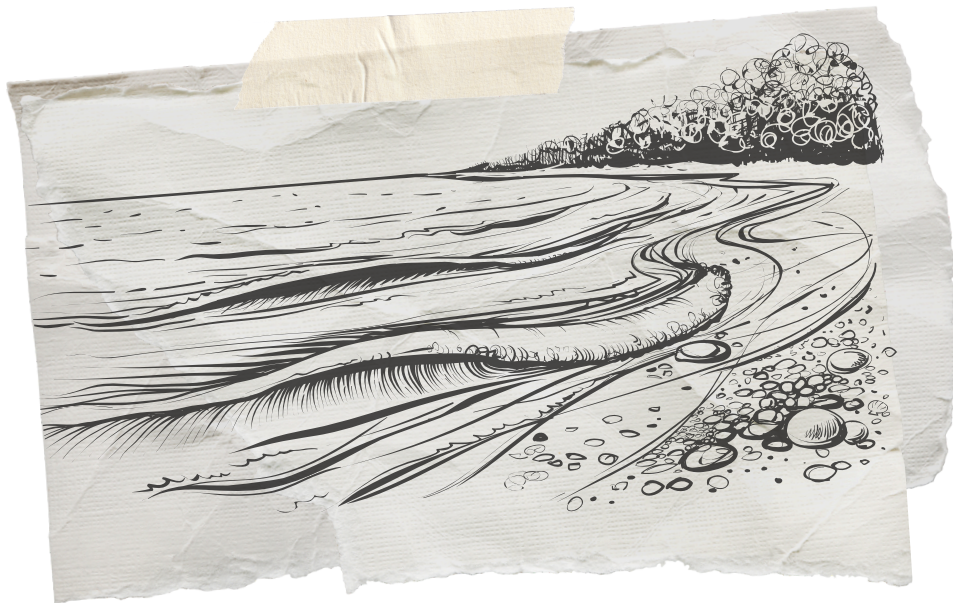


into the night she cried at the water's edge, her throat raw and her tears mingling with the salt of the sea. As the night wore on Niamh began to notice movement in the moonlit waves. She was shocked to realize that it was seals. The sleek, silvery creatures were keeping watch with their fathomless dark eyes. Muireann knelt next to her and softly whispered, "I know what I must do."

She walked resolutely to the cottage and returned with the box. Muireann hugged Niamh tight to her chest, feeling the gentle swell of her belly between them. They gazed at each other, a look of understanding dawning. "Mama, no!" Niamh cried, "you've waited so long!" Muireann held her daughter's face in her hands and looked deep into her eyes. "It was always meant to be you, Niamh. I won't have you repeat the life I led here. Go, my girl, be free." With

one last shuddering breath Muireann slipped her first skin around Niamh's shoulders. The seals looked on from a distance as Niamh's new form took shape and she dove into the sea. Muireann gave a gentle, solemn nod to her first family as tears slid down her face.

Without her skin Muireann's magic began to fade and her age was showing. There were now starlight silver streaks in her jet-black hair, and wrinkles appeared around her eyes. Her quiet life in the cottage continued, but the days were lonely without Niamh. She knew she had made the right choice, but a broken heart is difficult to heal. She began to spend more and more time staring out over the water, singing of love and loss. There were always dark eyes watching from among the waves, listening to Muireann's lilting voice. Their favorite songs were the lullabies that sounded like waves lapping against the hull of a boat.

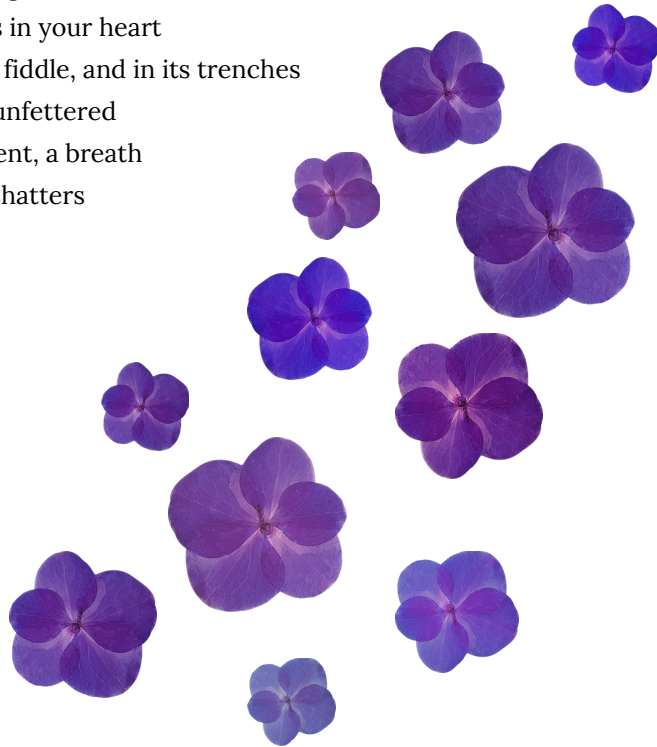




Husk

WRITTEN BY TILLY MOSS

Buried in the umbra of the woods
Bleak shadows weave darkness
Tread carefully here, they said
Let not your ears hark their melody
Let not your eyes befall the meadow
Ensnared at mischievous behest
You fall asleep amongst the violets
Beguiled by enchanting chaos
Where menacing hands wield wretched dreams
To tear fissures in your heart
Hungry fingers fiddle, and in its trenches
It lies; golden, unfettered
One final moment, a breath
And your soul shatters





Godmother

WRITTEN BY HANA GAMMON

Her stepsisters never had been kind to her, but they had taught her everything she needed to know about dealing with these creatures. Be polite without saying please or thank you. Bring nothing made of iron into the mire. And whatever happens, never give them your name. They won't give it back.

Cinder patted her draughthorse's broad neck. Shaggy hooves and worn boots squelched together through the black mud. The reigns shook in her hand. They must have been wandering for hours now, losing themselves, waiting to be found. Tracing their own steps. Her eyes flicked through the reeds, through the streaks of shadow between them. One false step and she could sink into the peat, never to see the sun again. She held the bundle under her cloak tight.

At the hard glint of grey winking from the bog, she turned her eyes to the mud. They did not like to be looked in the eye. That is what her stepsisters had told her. Although now, she thought to herself, how could they have known? Had they ever asked them? No, it must have been her kind to have made up that rule. To have broken eye contact first. Either way, she did not look up as the edge of a silvery cloak barely brushed the surface of the water. No footprints were left on the peat moss.

What came to meet her here, at the edge of her world, was not a woman. It was not a man. It was not a wizened old crone, nor a wild-eyed youth. Not quite human. Not quite animal. All things and nothing all at once. And it held out to her its fine, deep-lined hand. She did not accept it just yet. She spoke into the grey.

"I have come to ask. And I have come to give. I must transform."

Cinder hated how her voice shook, like the wind rippling the cold water. She barely restrained herself from tacking on a whispered please.

The corners of a thin, bow-lipped mouth twisted into a smile.

"That I can do," came the voice, deep and almost soothing, like the cool growl of the wind. "You will transform." It paused. "It is for a man, no?"

"You need not worry about my reasons. I only ask for transformation." Cinder picked her words carefully. Soft enough to be polite, sturdy enough to be unambiguous. No thanks. No pleas. No room for questions.

"Very well," granted the fae. "So you have asked. And I will answer."

It swept closer, rippling the water. Hands outstretched.

"And you will give."

Cinder pulled back her cloak and unfolded the bundle beneath. Sharp, dark eyes, eyes she could not meet, watched her fingers peel back the swathes of fraying rags. Once all was cast aside, Cinder held nothing but a pair of exquisite crystal slippers, barely glinting in the cold sunlight.

"They're my mother's," she explained. "They *were* my mother's. I'll wear them once, but they're yours in payment after all is done."

Her mother would forgive her, she had told herself that morning. She would understand. She had known



just as well as anyone how fond the fae were of shiny things. Cinder's breath caught as she felt the pale shadow drift closer. The flawless crystal would've caught the reflection of those long spectre hands if only they had a reflection to cast.

"Both of them?"

The fae's voice cut through the fog. Far away, Cinder's horse whinnied and dashed the water with his hooves. But Cinder would not let herself hear him. She kept her eyes cast down and nodded.

"Both of them," she confirmed. What kind of a question was that? She touched her heart, then held out her shaking palm. The fae took her hand in its own, as coldly soft as the mist, as the mud. One false step away.

"It's a deal."



Cinderella by Arthur Rackham (1867-1939)



About the writers

Annicka Borges

Annicka is a mom, wife, and nurse who also dabbles in writing. She has memories of writing poetry and short fiction as far back as kindergarten. She finds much of her inspiration in the mountains surrounding the city where she lives. When Annicka isn't working, momming, or writing she is trying her hardest to make "grannycore" a way of life by yarn crafting (yes, she could knit you a hat), cooking, reading, talking to her plants, and drinking tea while hanging out with her two cats--Isla and Big Lou.

Emily Anne Elliott

Emily Anne Elliott is a writer and more frequently a reader. Her work is forthcoming in the upcoming issue of *litmora* literary magazine.

M.J. Francis

M.J. Francis' work has appeared in such magazines as *Etherea*, *Daily Science Fiction*, and *Electric Spec*.

Hana Gammon

Hana Gammon is a young South African writer whose work is inspired by the Gothic and uncanny. Her short story, "The Undertaker's Apprentice", won the Africa region of the 2023 Commonwealth Short Story Prize. Hana is currently studying English Honours at the University of Stellenbosch.

Tilly Moss

Tilly is a 31 year old aspiring writer and artist dwelling in the UK, working on her first dark fantasy novel. As a huge consumer of various fantasy and horror media, she spends a lot of her time reading, gaming and creating, but she also loves to indulge in nature through travelling and gardening.

Ana Reisens

Ana Reisens is a poetry farmer. Born and raised in the American midwest, she now tends to her crop in the sun-bathed soil of Spain. You can find her poetry sprouting in *The Threepenny Review*, *Sixfold*, and *The Bombay Literary Review*, among other places.

L.T. Ward

L.T. is a neurodivergent writer who mostly writes speculative fiction and horror shorts and novels while spending her days creating shenanigans in a university library, raising her children, and satisfying her never-ending thirst for knowledge through reading, meeting people, and first-hand life experiences. She has short story publications with *34 Orchard*, *Haunted Press*, *CommuterLit*, *Lost Boys Press*, *Dancing Lemur Press*, *Black Hare Press*, and several others.



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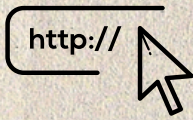
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