

The book cover features a dark, atmospheric forest scene. A woman with long black hair, wearing a long white dress, is seated on the ground, looking down at a red apple in her hands. The forest is filled with tall, thin trees and intricate, dark, swirling patterns that resemble vines or decorative scrollwork. The overall color palette is dominated by dark blues, greens, and blacks, with the white of the dress and the red of the apple providing sharp contrast. The title 'SNOW WHITE, BLOOD RED' is prominently displayed in the upper half of the cover.

# SNOW WHITE, BLOOD RED

*EDITED BY*  
ELLEN DATLOW &  
TERRI WINDLING



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FALL RIVER PRESS

New York

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*For Thomas Canty, my artistic partner, dear friend, and companion through the lands of fairy tales.*

T.W.

\*\*\*

*For Doris Leibowitz Datlow, who read the fairy tales to me and along with me when I was growing up. Thanks, Mom.*

E.D.

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*And in memoriam to Angela Carter, whose peerless adult fairy tales have inspired so many of us, and shall keep true wonder alive.*

E.D. & T.W.

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A true fairytale is, to my mind, very like the sonata. If two or three men sat down to write each what the sonata meant to him, what approximation to definite idea would be the result? A fairytale, sonata, a gathering storm, a limitless night, seizes you and sweeps you away. The law of each is in the mind of its composer; that law makes one man feel this way, another man feel that way. To one the sonata is a world of odour and beauty, to another of soothing only and sweetness. To one the cloudy rendezvous is a wild dance, with terror at its heart; to another a majestic march of heavenly hosts, with Truth in their center pointing their course but as yet restraining her voice. Nature is mood-engendering, thought-provoking; such ought the sonata, the fairytale to be.

GEORGE MCDONALD, in *Fantasists on Fantasies*

Edited by ROBERT H. BOYER and KENNETH J. ZAHORSKI

# INTRODUCTION

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## *White as Snow: Fairy Tales and Fantasy*

TERRI WINDLING

In Italy in one of the earliest recorded versions of the story of “Sleeping Beauty,” the princess awakened not by a kiss but by the suckling of the twin children she has given birth to, impregnated by the prince while she lay in her enchanted sleep. In “The Juniper Tree,” recorded from oral storytelling in Germany, a jealous stepmother cuts off the young hero’s head and serves the boy up in a stew to his dear father who unwittingly tells her, “The food tastes great! Give me some more! I must have more!” In an early French version of “Little Red Riding Hood,” the wolf disguised as Grandmother tells the little girl to undress herself and come lie beside him. Her clothes must be put in the fire because, he says, she will need them no more. The child discards her apron, her bodice, dress, skirt, and hose ...

*O Grandmother, how hairy you are.  
It's to keep me warmer my child.  
O Grandmother, those long nails you have.  
It's to scratch me better my child.  
O Grandmother, those big shoulders you have.  
All the better to carry kindling from the woods, my child.  
O Grandmother, what big ears you have.  
All the better to hear with my child.  
O Grandmother, the big mouth you have.  
All the better to eat you with my child.  
O Grandmother, I need to go outside to relieve myself.  
Do it in the bed, my child ...*

If this is not the version of “Little Red Riding Hood” you learned as a child, it is no surprise, for this is not a nursery tale—as indeed most fairy tales were never initially intended for nursery duties. They have been put there, as J.R.R. Tolkien so evocatively expressed it, like old furniture fallen out of fashion that the grown-ups no longer want. And like furniture banished to the children’s playroom, the tales that have been banished from the mainstream of modern adult literature have suffered misuse as well as neglect.

The banishment is a relatively recent thing, due largely to the swing of fashionable literary taste toward stories of social realism in the nineteenth and early twentieth century and to the growth at the time of the literate middle classes who came to associate these tales, with their roots in oral narrative, with the lower and unlettered segments of society. From this stems the Victorian belief (still prevalent

today) that these tales are somehow the special province of children, for it was children who continued to have access to the stories, told to them by nannies and governesses and cooks, during the years when they fell out of fashion with the adults of the upper classes.

Although fairy stories have been written down since the art of literature began, it was during Victorian times that fairy tales began to be widely collected and published in editions aimed at children in the forms that we know them best today. Thus, when we examine the fairy tales current in modern society, we must keep in mind the source through which they came to us: Victorian white male publishers combed through the thousands of tales gathered in the field by scholars and selected those which they deemed most suitable for their children—or they edited and changed the tales before publication to *make* them suitable. This bowdlerization of fairy tales continued in the twentieth century, reflecting the social prejudices of each successive generation.

And so we arrive, by the 1950s and 1960s, at the Walt Disney-influenced versions of fairy tales that most of us know today, filled with All American square-jawed Prince Charmings, wide-eyed passive princesses, hook-nosed witches, and adorable singing dwarfs. And so Sleeping Beauty awakened with a chaste, respectful kiss. And so Little Red Riding Hood is rescued by a convenient woodman before the wolf can gobble her up. And so tales like “The Juniper Tree” are placed on a high and dusty shelf where they are soon forgotten.

Even the term fairy tale is misleading, as most of the stories from the folk tradition that fall under this category do not contain creatures known as “fairies” at all. Rather, they are tales of wonder or enchantment; they are *marchen* (to use the German term, for which there is no satisfactory English equivalent); they are, as Tolkien poetically pointed out in his essay “On Fairy Stories,” “stories *about* Fairy, that is *Faerie*, the realm or state in which fairies have their being. *Faerie* contains many things besides elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants, or dragons: it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted.” One significant result of the bowdlerization of the old stories is that the term *fairy tale*, like the word *myth*, can be used, in modern parlance, to mean a lie or untruth. A proper fairy tale is anything but an untruth; it goes to the very heart of truth. It goes to the very hearts of men and women and speaks of things it finds there: fear, courage, greed, compassion, loyalty, betrayal, despair, and wonder. It speaks of these things in a symbolic language that slips into our dreams, our unconscious, steeped in rich archetypal images. The deceptively simple language of fairy tales is a poetry distilled from the words of centuries of storytellers, timeworn, polished, honed by each successive generation discovering the tales anew.

In his many works on comparative mythology, Joseph Campbell reminds us that to turn our backs on the old stories, to dismiss them as primitive and irrelevant to our lives, is to turn our backs on a great human treasure and a precious heritage that is rightfully ours. In this century, myths and stories from the folk tradition have been pushed to the sidelines of education, and from the central place they have played in the literary, visual, and dramatic arts in centuries past, through the same cultural shortsightedness that causes fine old buildings to be razed instead of preserved and cherished for the beauty they can add to our lives today, connecting us to the men and women who lived before us.

To stretch the building metaphor a little further: there are two ways a lovely old house can be saved from the developer’s wrecking ball. One is to declare it historic and inviolate, to set it carefully aside from life and preserve its rooms as a museum to the past. The other is to adapt it to modern use, to encourage new generations to live within its walls, look out its diamond windows, climb its crooked staircase, and light new fires in its hearth. In the case of fairy tales, scholarly folklorists serve the first function, collecting the stories, preserving them, often setting them in glass where they must not be

touched or changed. This is a worthy job, for it helps us to see the tales in a historical context. But this is not the job of a storyteller.

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The storyteller (or modern writer of fantasy fiction) is more like the carpenter who adapts the old house for modern use. This is also a worthy job, and a dangerous one—one that must not be taken too lightly lest the storyteller be like the carpenter who would take a medieval thatched-roofed cottage and cover it with aluminum siding. A storyteller must be respectful of the work of the former builders—the twelfth-century hall built on Bronze Age foundations, the second floor added in the sixteenth century, the kitchen wing built in the mid-nineteenth—but perhaps not too respectful, lest she take on the folklorist's job and create a museum to the past where one dare not sit and touch instead of a new home filled with laughter, tears, and the tumult of life.<sup>2</sup>

Over the centuries the symbols and metaphors that give *marchen* their power have been worked and reworked by storytellers of each generation and each culture around the globe. Tolkien envisioned this as a great soup of Story, always simmering, full of bits and pieces of myth, epic, and history, from which the storyteller as Cook serves up his or her particular broth. In addition to oral narrative through which tales pass anonymously from culture to culture, when stories were written down and then widely disseminated (due to the invention of movable type), a new kind of fairy tale was created—the literary tale, attached to a specific author. Sometimes these in turn passed *back* into the oral tradition—and thus few people today recounting the tale of “Cinderella” for their children realize that only parts of the story come from the anonymous folk tradition (from the pan-cultural variants of the “Ash Girl” tales tracing back to ancient China). Some of “Cinderella’s” most familiar elements (the fairy godmother, the midnight warning) were the invention of a single man, a seventeenth-century French civil servant by the name of Charles Perrault. His version of the tale (and others, such as “Donkey-Skin” or “Puss-in-Boots”) so delighted its audience of French aristocrats, and so entranced successive generations of listeners, that it remains the best-known version of the Ash Girl tale in western culture. Another seventeenth-century French writer, Madame Leprince de Beaumont, is the author of the well-known story “Beauty and the Beast.” In the nineteenth century the English writer Goldman wrote the story we know as “Goldilocks and the Three Bears,” and Denmark’s celebrated Hans Christian Andersen created “The Little Mermaid,” “The Ugly Duckling,” “The Nightingale,” “The Snow Queen,” and numerous other tales that have so thoroughly seeped into our culture that the average reader is likely to think these are anonymous tales, too. That is because these writers have taken the ingredients for their stories from Tolkien’s great Soup; and into that soup the stories have returned.

Thus, when we asked the writers in this anthology to take the theme of a classic fairy tale and fashion a new, adult story from it, we were really asking them to work in an old and honorable tradition, adapting these “houses” built of folkloric material to modern use—just as Perrault did, and the Brothers Grimm when they edited and occasionally rewrote the stories they collected in the German countryside. Just as Mallory did when he fashioned Celtic legend into *Le Morte d’Arthur*. Just as Goethe did when he wrote “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice” (never dreaming that one hundred years later we would come to associate his poem with Mickey Mouse and dancing brooms). Or as Antoine Gallard did when he translated the shockingly bawdy Arabian tales of *One Thousand and One Nights*.

It is a relatively newfangled notion to believe a story’s worth (or that of any other art) must lie in its originality, in novelty, in a plot that cannot be anticipated from page to page or an idea that has never been uttered before. This has its place and its appeal, but our modern obsession with novelty has produced some of our most facile (and quickly dated) art. For many, many centuries, the audiences for stories, drama, music, and visual art have better understood the particular fascination of an old

familiar story made fresh and new by an artist's skill—much as a piece of jazz improvisation is appreciated if one has a familiarity with the music on which it is built. Fairy tales and folklore have provided rich, recurring themes throughout the history of English-language literature, cropping up in the plays of Shakespeare, the poems of Spenser, Keats, Tennyson, and Yeats; in Oscar Wilde's fairy stories and Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*; in G.K. Chesterton's and James Thurber's wry and timeless tales; in the works of C.S. Lewis and Sylvia Townsend Warner and Mervyn Peake and Angela Carter—to name but a few of the many highly literate authors whose deft use of fairy tales were never intended for Children's Ears Only ... or indeed, in many cases, for children's ears at all.

In focusing on the history and the value of fairy tale literature for adult readers as we've explored it in this collection, I do not wish to imply a disdain for the efforts of authors whose books are published as children's literature. I believe fantasy should not be limited to the realm of children's fiction, but it should also not be taken away from that ground where it has been nurtured and has thrived throughout the century—in spite of sporadic attacks from those who believe that fairy tales are bad for children. Usually this is an argument against sexism or classism of the tales (which assume all fairy tales resemble the Walt Disney-fied versions). Or the staunch realists, made uncomfortable by the shifting, shadowy landscape of Faerie, warn us against the grave danger of “escapism” which they believe that fantasy encourages in children, teaching them to avoid real life.<sup>3</sup>

It is the blunt truth that a poorly written fantasy story—for either children or adults—may have little more to offer than its escapist or wish-fulfillment elements; but that is a function of the limit of the writer's skill, not the limits of the fantasy form. Simplistically executed works in most fields, from mainstream literature to popular music to television drama, offer little more to their audience than a brief diversion from daily life; fantasy fiction has hardly cornered the market on escapism. In fantasy, as in most fields, the badly written examples can seem more numerous—and occasionally more popular—than the complex works that make writing fantasy fiction an art. But to dismiss the fantastic in modern literature because of some prevalent bad examples of the form is precisely the same as dismissing the whole of English letters because Harold Robbins' books reach the best-seller lists.

A good fairy tale, or fantastic novel, may indeed lead us through a door from daily life into the magic lands of Once Upon a Time, but it should then return us back again with a sharper vision of our own world. Instead of replacing real life, good fantasy whets our taste for it and opens our eyes to its wonders. The fairy tale journey may look like an outward trek across plains and mountains, through castles and forests, but the actual movement is inward, into the lands of the soul.

The dark path of the fairy tale forest lies in the shadows of our imagination, the depths of our unconscious. To travel to the wood, to face its dangers, is to emerge transformed by this experience. Particularly for children whose world does not resemble the simplified world of television sitcoms (*there's* escapism for you), this ability to travel inward, to face fear and transform it, is a skill they will use all their lives. We do children—and ourselves—a grave disservice by censoring the old tales, glossing over the darker passages and ambiguities, smoothing the rough edges. In her essay “Once Upon a Time,” Jane Yolen points to the case of “Cinderella”:

Cinderella, until lately, has never been a passive dreamer waiting for rescue. The fore-runners of the Ash-girl have all been hardy, active heroines who take their lives into their own hands and work at their salvations... . Cinderella speaks to all of us in whatever skin we inhabit: the child mistreated, a princess or highborn lady in disguise bearing her trials with patience, fortitude and determination. Cinderella makes intelligent decisions, for she knows that wishing solves nothing without concomitant action. We have each been that child. (Even boys and men share that dream, as evidenced by many Ash-boy variants.) It is the longing of any youngster sent supperless to bed or given less than a full share at Christmas. And of course

it is the adolescent dream.

To make Cinderella less than she is, an ill-treated but passive princess awaiting her rescue, cheapens our most cherished dreams and makes a mockery of the magic inside us all—the ability to change our own lives, the ability to control our own destinies. [The Walt Disney film] set a new pattern for Cinderella: a helpless, hapless, pitiable, useless heroine who has to be saved time and again by the talking mice and birds because she is “off in a world of dreams.” It is Cinderella who is not recognized by her prince until she is magically back in her ball gown, beribboned and bejeweled. Poor Cinderella. Poor us.

Jane Yolen is one of the writers whose modern fairy tales for children are subtle and complex and provide evocative reading for adults as well. Nicholas Stuart Gray, Richard Kennedy, Patricia McKillip, Robin McKinley, Allison Utley, and other contemporary writers of *marchen* whose works are found on the children’s book shelves have followed in the footsteps of Hans Andersen and Charles Perrault, creating new tales that echo the clear poetry of the old—and some of their tales too may slip back into the great pot of soup to be served by future cooks in some distant generation.

In this century that simmering broth has come to include not only the fairy tales themselves but the pictures that have illustrated them; for ever since the Victorians began widely publishing children’s storybooks, fairy tales have been linked, more than any other kind of fiction, with lavish pictorial imagery. Thus when modern writers work with the symbols of fairy tales, they are drawing upon not only centuries of stories, but one hundred years of visual imagery as well, disseminated through a growing publishing industry. The turn-of-the-century works of the Golden Age Illustrators (the twisty trees and sly fairies of Arthur Rackham, the attenuated Art Deco princesses of Kay Nielsen, the misty lands of Edmund Dulac) have in particular become such an integral part of the experience of reading fairy tales (or having them read to us as children) that these images too have found their way into the soup of Story. The best of this art, like the best of the tales, is not meant for children only, is not overly saccharine or cute, but acknowledges that the power of Faerie, and its beauty, lie in the interplay between the light and shadowy dark.

It is this interplay of light and shadow that we have sought to explore in creating this collection of stories, combining the Snow White of “high” fantasy fiction with the Blood Red of horror fiction. Some of the stories contained herein fall easily into one or another of these camps; others choose instead to tread the mysterious, enchanted path between the two—both bright and dark, wondrous and disturbing, newly fashioned and old as Time.

Ursula Le Guin, in her essay “Dreams Must Explain Themselves,” cautions us not to tread unwarily on this path through Faerie. Fantasy, she tells us,

is not antirational, but pararational; not realistic but surrealistic, a heightening of reality. In Freud’s terminology, it employs primary, not secondary process thinking. It employs archetypes which, as Jung warned us, are dangerous things. Fantasy is nearer to poetry, to mysticism, and to insanity than naturalistic fiction is. It is a wilderness, and those who go there should not feel too safe... . A fantasy is a journey. It is a journey into the subconscious mind, just as psychoanalysis is. Like psychoanalysis, it can be dangerous; and *it will change you*.

Those of us who have carried a love of fairy tales out of the nursery and into our adult lives have felt that power, that danger, that transformative quality of the old stories. The German Romantic poet Johann Schiller once wrote: “Deeper meaning resides in the fairy tales told me in my childhood than in any truth that is taught in life.” My own devotion to fairy tales began with a single book, an oversized Golden Book collection of dark, unbowlerized tales illustrated by a Frenchwoman, Adrienne Segur. This book with its ornate, stilted, lovely pictures had a strange kind of power; over the years I have found a surprising number of others for whom that edition was a touchstone of the

childhoods and who have subsequently chosen, like myself, to write or paint or edit fairy tale works the profession of adulthood. The princes and princesses who lived in those pages, the elegant capricious fairies, the talking animals, the haunted woods, were indeed for me a bright escape from the paler reality of the factory towns and trailer parks I grew up in—but to any child, the world outside the front door, or the familiar town, or beyond the state line, can seem as fantastical and unattainable as any Never-never Land; and a fairy tale quest is a metaphorical road map that can point the way out into the wider world.

Fairy tales were in the air in the 1960s and 1970s, even for those of us growing up in bookless environments and thus largely unaffected by the boost in popularity Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* gave to fantastic fiction, for fantasy permeated the popular folk music of the time—the imagery in lyrics by musicians like Mark Bolan, Donovan, and Cat Stevens, and in old British ballads performed by new folk-rock bands like Fairport Convention, Pentangle, and Steel-eye Span. I suspect that I am not the only reader of fantastic fiction who came to it through this musical back door; and here is another example of the endurance of the old stories, adapting themselves to the radio airwaves and the basic line beat of rock and roll.

Finally, J.R.R. Tolkien reminds us that to leave fantasy in the nursery, or to believe that there is some particular connection between fairy tales and children, is to forget that children are not a separate race, a separate kind of creature from the human family at large. Some children naturally have a taste for magical tales, and plenty of others do not. Some adults never lose that taste; something still stirs deep inside us when we hear those old, evocative words: *Once Upon a Time* . . .

To such adults this book is dedicated, this journey into the Wood.

- 1 As explored in the work of such psychologists as Carl Jung, Marie von Franz, James Hillman, Bruno Bettelheim, and Alice Miller.
- 2 I say “she” when I speak of the storyteller because in the field of fantasy literature women have, in greater numbers than in most other fields, surmounted the obstacles historically put in front of women in the arts to contribute works of enduring value—aided, perhaps, by the notion that fantasy is suitable only for children and thus for women as well. Fairy tales have also been called Mother Goose Tales, Household Tales or Old Wives’ Tales; and Alison Lurie points out in *Once Upon a Time*, that “throughout Europe (except in Ireland), the storytellers from whom the Grimm brothers and their followers collected their material were most often women; in some areas they were all women. For hundreds of years, while written literature was almost exclusively the province of men, these tales were being invented and passed on orally by women.”
- 3 Child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim, in his influential book *The Uses of Enchantment*, suggests that just the opposite may be the case; that many adolescents lost in drug-induced dreams or seeking magic in a religious guru were deprived of their sense of wonder in childhood, pressed prematurely into an adult view of reality.

# INTRODUCTION

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## *Red as Blood: Fairy Tales and Horror*

ELLEN DATLOW

When Terri and I began to solicit stories based on fairy tales for *Snow White, Blood Red*, the first question we were asked by many of the writers we approached was: “What counts as a fairy tale?” In a couple of specific cases, I wasn’t sure and went to Terri as the expert/final arbiter. Fairy tales are stories that come to us through the folk tradition, stories of wonder and enchantment as well as literary tales (like those of Hans Christian Andersen and Oscar Wilde) that have passed back into the folk tradition. They are kin to but separate from mythological stories about gods and the workings of the universe—for fairy tales are about ordinary men and women in extraordinary circumstances. Fairy tales are not fables like the animal tales of Aesop; they are not social satire like *Gulliver’s Travels*; and they are not the nursery rhymes of Mother Goose. We found that the easiest way to say what a fairy tale is, rather than what it is not, is to direct people to the old tales themselves, the ones most familiar in our Western culture: the German tales collected by the Brothers Grimm; the French tales of Charles Perrault, Madame d’Aulnoy, and Madame Leprince de Beaumont; the Italian tales collected by Italo Calvino; the Irish tales collected by William Butler Yeats; the Scottish tales collected by J.P. Campbell and Robert Burns; the nineteenth-century tales of Andersen and Wilde; and the multivolume treasure trove of stories gathered from many cultures known as *The Colored Fairy Books* published by the Victorian editor Andrew Lang and his wife (and still in print from Dover books).

Bruno Bettelheim, the Freudian analyst and author of *The Uses of Enchantment*, has very strict criteria as to which stories are actually fairy tales. In addressing their importance for children, Bettelheim makes much of the story’s power to “direct the child to discovering his identity and calling,” or expects it “to suggest what experiences are needed to develop his character further.” He also claims that to be considered a fairy tale a story must have a happy ending. Thus stories like “The Little Matchgirl” or “The Steadfast Tin Soldier” or my own favorite, “The Happy Prince,” are not actually fairy tales at all. To him, “The Ugly Duckling” doesn’t teach anything worthwhile to children because, after all, children cannot change their genetic heritage. In my opinion, he misses the point of the story, which is that looks might be deceiving and that even an ugly duckling may grow into a swan, that beauty is not always immediately apparent and often lies in the eye of the beholder. We ought not to underrate the subtlety of fairy tales, for their power emerges from the lack of a single, unique “meaning” in each tale. Every listener finds within it something different and personal. Perhaps we must let fairy tales define themselves through the infinite variety of commonalities among them.

In my childhood I was an avid reader of the fantastic, and some of the more sorrowful or violent images in fairy tales are the ones that have stayed with me, haunting me still. In Oscar Wilde’s story



“The Nightingale and the Rose,” the eponymous bird overhears a young man courting. The object of his affection asks for a red rose, even though it’s the middle of the winter. The bird uses its lifeblood to create such a rose for the lovers. The result is the death of the bird and the woman’s eventual rejection of her ardent suitor and his dearly bought flower. My mother read this fairy tale to me one summer day under some trees in front of our Bronx apartment building (where I lived until I was eight years old). I was devastated and I cried and cried, moved by the bird’s futile sacrifice, saddened and horrified by the young woman’s carelessness. I think this little fairy tale brought home to me at a very young age how thoughtlessness can lead to unforeseen consequences.

I also remember reading through a large book of Grimm’s fairy tales by myself. One of the images that stayed with me most strongly was, again, a dark one, from “The Goose Girl,” in which Falada, the faithful horse, is killed by the bad folk and her head nailed to the castle gate, where it tells the king the truth as to who is the real heir to the throne. I felt horror at the murder of this faithful creature, who helped her mistress even in death. Another vivid memory is of Hans Christian Andersen’s “Little Matchgirl” freezing to death selling matches on the street in the middle of the winter. I have no explanation as to why these horrific images remained with me all these years, but certainly my adult love of fiction and interest in the grotesque can be traced to my glee in reading those stories.

Many adults dismiss fairy tales as being too childish, too sweet and innocent, but fairy tales are far from that. The ones that touch us most deeply are often blunt about the darker side of human nature, filled with violence and atrocities: The evil stepmother in “Snow White,” who had asked a huntsman to kill her daughter and bring back her bloody heart for her supper, is forced, at the end, to wear red-hot iron slippers and dance at the wedding until she dies—a lovely wedding gift indeed. The usurping chambermaid who had taken advantage of the princess in “The Goose Girl” is asked by the king to describe what she would do to a usurper of the throne, and once she does is condemned to those punishments, which consist of being “stripped naked and put inside a barrel studded with sharp nails. Then two white horses would be harnessed to the barrel and made to drag her through the streets until she is dead.” “The Six Swans” are all turned back into human boys, except the poor youngest who is left with one swan wing in place of the arm. The sisters of Cinderella are persuaded by their mother to chop off their heels and toes in order to fit their too-large feet into a tiny glass slipper (evoking images of footbinding in ancient China, from when the earliest versions of the story come). And those sweet pigeons that sit on Cinderella’s shoulder at the wedding pluck out the eyes of both stepsisters, blinding them for the rest of their lives in order to punish “their wickedness and malice.”

The fairy tales that were most meaningful to me as a child, Bruno Bettelheim notwithstanding, were the ones that had a darker side. And so it seemed natural to put together an anthology of fairy tales retold for contemporary audiences that included both fantasy and horror.

There are precedents in print and film media, in both the fantasy and horror genres, for the retelling of fairy tales. For example, Peter Straub’s magnificent and moving retelling of “The Juniper Tree,” Ray Garton’s Pied Piper motif in *Crucifax Autumn* and Jonathan Carroll’s retelling of “Rumpelstiltskin” in *Sleeping in Flame*, and, of course, the many tales of Angela Carter and Tanith Lee. Films that immediately come to mind are Cocteau’s *Beauty and the Beast* and Neal Jordan’s *The Company of Wolves*, based on several Angela Carter stories. A friend has also suggested that *Pretending to Be a Woman* (a fantasy movie in which prostitution is treated as just another job) is based on “Cinderella.”

Terri and I have tried to assemble an anthology with many varied voices and tones. Neil Gaiman, the best-selling multi-award winning author of *American Gods*, *The Graveyard Book*, and *Coraline*, has written a contemporary story about lost chances; Esther Friesner, often the writer of light, frothy

books and stories, here presents a very dark interpretation of “Puss-in-Boots”; Jane Yolen and Patricia A. McKillip, most renowned as writers for young adults, provide a dark, adult poem and a high sensual story; Gahan Wilson, best known for his entertaining, macabre cartoons except, perhaps, by readers of his very fine short stories, provides a tale of failed analysis; and Lisa Goldstein, an award-winning writer of speculative fiction, contributes a version of “Hansel and Gretel” that is not actual fantasy at all, but is rather *about* fantasy working deep in the human psyche. Together, all twenty-one writers have produced richly imaginative retellings of existing fairy tales, as individual as the authors themselves, penned for a contemporary, adult audience.

And so we begin our journey to the heart of *marchen* at a time not so long ago, in a land much like our own ... with no guarantee of safe travel, timely rescues, or of ending Happily Ever After. Much like life itself.

*Susan Wade originally wanted to write a story about magic gardens and stealing roses—like “Rapunzel” or “Beauty and the Beast”—but she claims that when she started, things got away from her. She is convinced it came from having been steeped in fairy tales as a child, and says “You tap into that strata of consciousness and all the archetypes start mutating. The result is like that of recombinant DNA; not really the offspring of any one fairy tale, but a splice of several that wound up as something else.” Thus we begin the anthology with “Like a Red, Red Rose.” This story contains several fairy tale motifs—a cottage in the woods, an innocent girl, a witch and a prince. In her unusual weavings of these various motifs, Wade creates a new tale, effective as any of those old.*

## *Like a Red, Red Rose*

SUSAN WADE

At a time not so long ago, in a land much like our own, there was a cottage at the edge of a dark and haunted forest. In that cottage lived a woman and her daughter, and it was said by those in the village and landholdings nearby that the woman was a witch.

Martine and her daughter lived in solitude, tending their animals and their garden, gathering herbs in the forest where none other dared go. The cottage was plain, perhaps a bit larger than most, but the only thing to set it apart was the magnificence of its garden. Luxuriant growths of every succulent fruit and vegetable known to that land (and some unknown) graced the garden: lush figs and grapes and pomegranates and perfect almonds and pears and beans and a myriad of other bounty. Even the stream that fed the garden was lined with watercress and mint. Among the villagers, it was whispered that the witch’s magic was so powerful that, in her garden, a discarded rose would take root and flourish.

And if, of a dark night, people slipped away to visit the cottage by the wood—young girls in search of a love philter by which they might marry, or young men in search of a potion by which they might gain love without benefit of clergy—such things remained unspoken in town.

So it was that little Blanche, for that was the name of the witch’s daughter, lived with her mother, never knowing what it was to play with other children: no May games or ring-a-rosy or catch-as-catch-can. Her games were fashioned for one: rose petals floated on a surface of the small garden stream, or pinecones stacked to form a castle in which tiny flowers bloomed, visited by princely bees. It may have been that Blanche was lonely, but having never known company other than her mother’s she did not notice it.

She was called Blanche (we must assume) because of her milkyfair skin, as pure and fine as a petal, as fragrant as a petal from the great white rose tree which grew at the boundary between the cottage and the wood. Her hair was richly brown, as if carved from the polished wood of that same tree; her eyes as deep and true a green as its leaves. And each day, as soon as she had risen from her narrow bed, her mother would say to her, “It is morning, Blanche. Fetch me a rose from your tree, my child, that I may see how my daughter grows.”

Blanche would scamper to the rose tree to pluck a newly awakened blossom (and her mother must have been a witch indeed, for even in the depths of winter there would always be at least one glowing bloom).

And bringing that blossom to her mother, Blanche would always hear, “Ah, I see my child is like a white rose, pure and sweet as the morning.” And her mother would catch Blanche up in her arms

and Blanche would place the rose in her mother's auburn hair where the flower would remain all the day.

As Blanche grew older, her life continued its solitary course; the only differences were in the nature of her games and the fact that her mother could no longer lift Blanche in her arms. But each morning, she still asked Blanche to bring her a rose from the tree, which she would wear in her hair for that day.

One day, as Blanche and her mother returned from gathering herbs and roots in the woods, Martine collapsed. Blanche raised her mother's head and gave her a sip from the bottle they always carried with them, filled with the spring that fed their garden.

Martine's color became more its usual shade, rosier than Blanche's fair skin ever was. Even so, Blanche thought her mother looked ill and far older than she had that morning. Blanche quickly crushed the amaranth flowers they had collected for one of the potions, a healing salve, and fed them to Martine. The deep purplered of the blossoms stained her fingers and she scrubbed them on the grass.

Her mother's breathing became easier and she laughed a little. Blanche was reassured. "The peasants call it 'Purple-Heart' or 'Love-Lies-Bleeding.'" Her voice still sounded strained. "Shall we go now?"

Blanche decided that it was too soon for them to continue; they would wait until Martine seemed more herself. So she merely looked at the dark stain on her fingers and said, "You never told me that." "I prefer its true name," her mother said. "Amaranth."

Martine sat up then, determined to go home. She needed to reach the cottage, but once there she seemed to revive.

"Mother?" Blanche asked, once Martine had recovered. "What is wrong? Are you ill?"

"It is nothing," said her mother. "Only that I am no longer young."

Blanche found this difficult to credit, seeing her mother's face, its lovely color restored. With her smooth skin and rich auburn curls, Martine seemed unchanged from Blanche's earliest memories of her. "You must tell me if you are unwell," she said. "You must rest."

Martine sighed. "Perhaps it would be better if you went to collect the herbs. You know as well as I what is needed."

And so Blanche became the chief gatherer, while her mother remained at the cottage to prepare and blend her potions, and life flowed much as it always had for the two of them.

Until the son of the largest landholder in the area, arriving early one evening, caught a glimpse of the witch's lovely daughter (for she was quite lovely, as you have no doubt surmised). He had come for a consultation during which he would purchase a certain potion he found useful; the witch kept such sundries in a cupboard near her front gate, as she was reluctant to allow local folk to enter the cottage.

He himself was a comely youth, with a lavish tangle of black curls and eyes like midnight. His name was Allain, and he was well known among the women of the village, a fact which pleased him.

Yet, clever as he was in the arts of love, his expertise deserted him when he first saw Blanche. He abandoned his conversation with an abruptness few would have dared, and demanded of the witch the name of the irresistible creature who had appeared beside the stream.

"She is my daughter," Blanche's mother said, speaking with an awful emphasis which even a smitten lover could not misapprehend. "Do not trouble your heart with her. She will never marry."

And so taken was Allain that he never considered that it was not ordinarily marriage which he sought from his *inamorata*. At least his experience of women did not desert him with Blanche.

mother; at her angry words, he bowed swiftly and said, "It is clear then whence came her beauty." And concluding his business with great charm and greater dispatch, he spoke not again of the vision glimpsed beside the stream: of a girl with hair like polished wood and skin as fair as a pearl.

All his way home, that brief scene was reenacted in his imagination: the lovely apparition, as of a nymph from the forest, with gleaming hair and brilliant eyes that glanced toward him and swiftly away. He recalled she had carried a basket woven of peeled willow branches, overflowing with greenery. It was not difficult to deduce that she had come from gathering herbs in the forest.

And with the deduction, a simple solution to Allain's dilemma was found: he would seek the witch's daughter in the wood, which, whatever its reputation, was far less intimidating than the witch herself. He knew from personal experience how effective Martine's magic could be.

So it came about that on a day soon after (as soon as he had learned the name of the witch's beautiful daughter, in fact), Allain entered the wood. He kept to its nearer boundaries, despite his reputation for daring. But the forest growth was of such density as to be nearly impenetrable, so he was well hid from the witch's view even as he passed by the cottage. And he was well rewarded for entering that dark place, for not much of the day had passed before he came upon Blanche, seated on a fallen pine in a small glade as she investigated a promising growth of bit-moss.

A more striking pose could not have been found had she studied for one: with a beam of sunlight touching her hair to reveal strands of gold hid among rich brown, and her back a graceful curve which led the eye naturally to the even more graceful curve of her waist. And her skin! So pure and milky fair was she that, for an instant, Allain wondered whether her mother had magicked the girl from a lily.

But then she turned, and saw him, and started; as shy as a dove. Any thoughts of her sorcerous nature faded from his mind.

"Blanche," he whispered.

Appearing even more startled, she looked up at him again, and he saw fully the glow of her eyes so brilliant that they put the emerald shade of the forest to shame.

He came nearer, and when she would have gathered up her basket and fled, stayed her with a soft "Ah, no, please!" And when she paused, he said, "I've come such a long way to speak to you, you couldn't be so cruel as to run away."

She turned to him at that, all her wondering curiosity in her eyes, and asked, "You've come to speak to me?"

"Why, yes," he answered. "Did you not know I would, after our souls met in the garden? I could not but come," he added, and possessed himself of her hand.

Blanche turned as if she would escape, and a hint of delicate color came into her cheeks.

The flesh of her hand, just of her hand! was so softly sweet and firm that Allain longed to test with his teeth, trace it with his tongue; to consume that flesh with all the passion of which he was capable. But she was clearly innocent. Allain contented himself with a chaste kiss.

And saw, as his mouth caressed the tender curve of her palm, her lips part and her eyes become darker and lose their focus.

For Allain, these delicate signs of awakened passion were more inflaming than the intricate tricks of a seasoned courtesan.

His heart was lost from that moment.

For Blanche, the brief encounter in the forest filled a need she had never before recognized, never named. A need born of loneliness, perhaps, or simply a longing for companionship both more complete

and less demanding than that of her mother. And with the satiation of that unspoken need, there came an awareness of an entire enchanted dimension beyond companionship.

Blanche turned in her narrow bed to see daylight streaming through the high, small window. Had she slept at all? Or had it been simply a reliving of that waking dream of him? He had touched her, his mouth against her palm. She twisted her face against the bed linens to cool her skin.

She heard her mother stir in the single bedroom of the cottage, then footsteps as she came in to the main room where Blanche's small bed occupied a corner.

"It is morning, Blanche," her mother said, as she did each day. "Fetch me a rose from your tree, my dear, that I may see how my daughter does."

Blanche smiled at the familiar request. She rose and stretched, then pulled her gown over the simple shift that served as her nightwear.

In her bare feet, because it was summer (though, in truth, the garden was always in summer), she ran to pluck a rose from her tree. But when she reached it, she stopped, stunned.

In place of the snowy blossoms that had graced the tree all her life were creamy buds with dusky golden-pink tinging the edge of each petal.

What could it mean? She reached a trembling hand to touch a blossom, then drew back. The roses were lovely, with a scent richer and more enticing than she remembered. And yet, and yet ... they were not *her* roses, not the roses that were Blanche. Yet she knew she could not have mistaken the great rose tree, queen of all the garden there on the verge of the wood.

"Blanche!" her mother called from the cottage. "Do not be dallying in the garden or your porridge will be done without you."

Blanche plucked a bloom then. It came to her hand no differently than the white rose had come the day before. Her mother would explain this to her; her mother's magic may have caused this to happen. Blanche turned and went to the cottage with hurried steps.

But the instant her mother saw the altered rose, her face grew terrible. She snatched the flower away and grasped Blanche's shoulder with a harsh hand. "Where do you see him?"

Shock tore the strength from Blanche's legs, and she nearly fell. Her mother had never spoken to her so, never looked at her so.

Her mother dropped the rose and shook Blanche. "Where?" she cried.

"In the forest," Blanche said.

At that, her mother released her and turned to pace a few steps. Then Martine turned back. "You are no longer pure, no longer the white rose. But it may not yet be too late to prevent the thing I fear most." She came close again to Blanche, her dark gaze holding the girl prisoner. "You know nothing of your own nature, nothing of what the world holds for such as we are. But you are my daughter and I will see that you do not live with the grief I have borne. I will see you to a new life, whatever it costs."

Blanche trembled. The things Martine was saying made no sense, and her intensity was frightening; the more so because it was unaccustomed.

"We must take the love potions and the amaranth salve I use to heal wounds. As large a quantity as we can manage. They will support us until we have the opportunity to establish ourselves elsewhere," her mother went on. "As for clothing and household goods, very little will be necessary. Some food and water is all. Perhaps we can sell the chickens and the goat in the village."

Blanche stared at her mother. "We are to leave? Where will we go?"

Martine said distractedly, "That is to be seen, but, yes, we will leave. Tomorrow."

"But why?" Blanche asked. "I was born here. Why must we leave?"

"It is the only escape, I tell you. I will not let you suffer as I have."

“My only escape from what? If my life is to be changed, I must know why.”

~~Martine hesitated for only an instant. Then she looked down at the creamy rose petals scattered on the floor, each limned in dusky color. “We leave so you will not lose all that you love. Now gather your things. We must be gone by first light.”~~

The next morning saw them on the road leading south to the nearest village. Blanche’s heart was heavy at leaving her home, its garden more lovely than it was at that dawn: a glittering array of nature’s jewels, all scent and color and light. Blanche was curious as well as frightened; her only experience of the world outside her mother’s garden had been to wander in the forest, which seemed more an extension of the garden than a separate place.

The road was of dun earth, dull and gritty. Blanche was footsore before they had traveled far. Keeping the goat and chickens to the road was a worrisome task, and the barrow she helped her mother push was heavy.

It was yet early morning when they reached the village. Blanche looked to her mother for guidance, but Martine was pale and listless and merely stood with her head low.

Blanche glanced around, curious at what the town would hold. A group of men stood by the village well, watching the two women. One of them moved forward at a difficult pace. His few strands of white hair did not conceal the brown marks of age on his skull. When he came within a few steps of them, she noticed that the whites of his eyes had yellowed, a condition for which her mother often prescribed an infusion of vervain. He cleared his throat and spat at Martine’s feet.

“Witch!” he said, his voice cracked. “There is nothing here for you. Go back to your devil’s garden.”

Martine raised her head for the first time when he spoke the word “garden.” She did not answer the old man, but only gazed at him. The other villagers crowded around. Blanche waited, certain her mother would wither this rude man with only a look.

He spat again. “Go back,” he repeated. “None here will have you.” Then he swung around and glared at Blanche. She saw that his yellow eyes were crazed with red lines. They looked as if they might crack open and spill blood in the dust, he stared so hard at her. “Nor her neither,” the old man said, pointing at Blanche, “for all she is so fair. There’s those here old enough to remember what your kind is. Go back.”

Martine spoke then, in a voice so faint it was as if only the wind answered. “We won’t trouble you. We only wish to sell stock before we go on.” She paused, then added as if in afterthought, “I will not even drink from your well.”

The old man cackled. “That you won’t,” he said. “Nor any here take your stock. Raised on the devil’s flesh, they was, and we know it. There’s nothing for you outside that plot sown with devil seed. Go back and reap what you have planted, witch.” The other villagers crossed themselves and made signs against the evil eye.

Martine said quietly to Blanche, “Leave them, then, the animals. You must take the barrow now for I cannot any longer.” Blanche had never known her mother to betray weakness. What was wrong?

Then Martine tossed her head back in her imperious manner. Blanche, seeing the moisture bead on her mother’s brow, wondered what even that small gesture had cost.

“Yes, Mother,” she said.

Martine walked past the villagers, then paused. “Perhaps those with more sense will take the animals and care for them,” she said to Blanche. Her voice was pitched to carry. “Not all the people here disdain the fruits of my garden.”

Several of the townsfolk moved back at Martine's words, glancing aside when Blanche looked at them. Now she recognized a face or two, those who had come to her mother for remedies.

Blanche singled out a kindly faced matron from among them, one whose youngest child had been healed of a fever by Martine's magic. "Will you see the animals are cared for?" Blanche asked her. "They are not accustomed to feeding themselves."

The woman turned away.

Martine stopped a little beyond the town and now looked back to summon Blanche with a gesture. The chickens had scattered to peck at grit beside the well, and the goat was nibbling at a coil of rope that hung nearby. Blanche signaled and lifted the handles of the barrow to follow her mother.

The road seemed very long, stretching before them without any known destination at its end. Blanche was worried about her mother, whose skin now looked waxen and damp. Martine walked stiffly and seemed barely aware of moving.

It was quite still on the road; even the dust barely stirred under their feet. As their distance from the forest increased, the trees lining the road became more widely spaced. The rays of the mid-morning sun stung Blanche's skin. "Mother," she said. "Could we stop for a moment and rest in the shade?" Since they had no particular place to go, there was no reason to hurry their arrival. And it was very hot.

Blanche released the barrow's handles and blew on her blistered palms. Martine continued as if unaware that her daughter had spoken.

"Mother?" Blanche left the barrow and hurried to catch Martine.

She did not stop until Blanche touched her arm, and then the cessation of motion seemed to overwhelm her, so that she swayed on her feet.

Blanche put an arm around her and led her to a small grove of trees which offered some shade. "Sit here and rest," she said. She went back onto the road to get the barrow. After only a moment in the shade, the sun's heat seemed too fierce to be borne.

When Blanche returned, her mother was asleep. Deeply worried, Blanche searched for one of the jugs of spring water Martine had insisted they bring.

She splashed the water into a small cup and knelt to hold it to her mother's lips. With the water and a kiss, Martine's eyes opened and a bit of color returned to her cheeks.

"Are you ill?" Blanche asked. "You seem very tired, Mother."

Martine lifted a trembling hand to take the cup from her daughter. Blanche had to steady it as her mother drank. "If I am, there is nothing to be done for it," Martine said. Her voice shook as much as her hand. "We must go on."

"But it is the heat of the day," Blanche protested, "and you seem so tired. Perhaps we could rest here until it grows cooler."

Martine's eyes closed again. "Very well, just for a short time, then," she mumbled. Then she opened her eyes and looked at Blanche. "Promise me," she said sharply, "that you will not return to the garden. Promise me, Blanche."

"Yes, Mother, I promise," Blanche said. "We will go to make a new life for ourselves, as you said we should. We will go together." Yet, as she spoke, she thought of Allain, of love left behind.

Martine's lip curved in a faint smile and her eyelids dropped. "Perhaps," was all she said before she slept again.

Blanche watched over her mother. As the afternoon wore on, Martine's breathing grew shallower and her skin more colorless. She could barely be roused to drink and did not speak. By late afternoon Blanche was certain her mother was gravely ill.



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