

AWAY WITH THE FAIRIES

A COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES

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“Fear isn’t so difficult to understand. After all, weren’t we all frightened as children? Nothing has changed since Little Red Riding Hood faced the big bad wolf. What frightens us today is exactly the same sort of thing that frightened us yesterday. It’s just a different wolf.”

– Alfred Hitchcock



Days of Eden

In the days of Eden, fairies lived among all the tiny winged creatures of the world. They blended in with hummingbirds, butterflies, and dragonflies alike. These things began to change once the first human blood was spilled. The rotting flesh of brothers beneath their sacred meadows lead to dull blooms and putrid scent.

The fairies saw the sins of man and began to resemble them in spirit; growing hateful, malicious, and vengeful.

Pincers and horns sprouted from their tiny faces and venom spit from their mouths. Their hands and feet worked into stingers, their wings hardened from feathers to shards of stone. The fae found new homes as wasps, locusts, and poisonous beetles. Their small minds corrupted by the world now ruled by another beyond their

strength. Some might interject and claim that the aforementioned dragon and butterflies are still among the living archaic pests. Perhaps there still are fairies who have chosen to live passively, blind to the rage of their ancestors. But know this, any who have earned the fury of a queen wasp, has earned the anger of a thousand silent bystanders.





Brewer of Poisonous Cures

Down under a cliff in the woods lives a little old lady. Her hair is white like starlight and she is clothed with fringed floral shawls.

If you are invited into her cottage, you might be blessed with a cup of tea made from the poisonous flowers in her garden.

The witch means you no harm! No! She's quite amiable and only offers you the tea if you really need it. She will listen to your qualms, your regrets, your soulless rambles. She will poke and prod on and on about your life, ask meaningful questions and reach out a hand to comfort you when you begin to weep. She'll smile, force out a lie or two, and maybe drag out a confession. That morning she will sing to the bees that dangle from the orchard and use their honey to top the bread she bakes for her

guests. The stinging venom milked with gnarled hands will be tucked away in case you need it in your tea. The hag, she means you no harm, she will only offer you the poisonous tea if you need it. As you sit in the quaint comfortable home, see the long purple flowers outside her musty window, those are the most potent! "Their petals are cupped and speckled as if you could drink right from them! The witch muses, "Oh but that's not how we treat our guests. The finest ceramic for you! Go on! Still hot from the kettle! Brewed fresh from the garden and mixed with honey for a hint of sweetness!" Her beaming smile will pass judgment upon you. You might be blessed with a cup of tea made from the poisonous flowers in her garden, if you deserve it.



Changelings

In the forest lies a clearing where the tall grass sweeps the sky and opens around an overgrown willow tree. The branches and of the tree fall like thick feathery curtains, creating a small enclosure around it's weary trunk. Here, when the days are the longest in the year and the sky stays soft and bright for too long, fairies like to play. Children always find them first, awed and comforted by the strange aura they bestow. Laughing and dancing, both fae and child prance into the meadow with the spectral willow tree. The youth stay and breathe in the fading warm air, deciding to return home the following day.

Holding hands, the children line up along the inside of the willow tree's protective womb, closing their eyes to listen to the unearthly music of the fairies.

Little crowns of leaves, acorns, and summer flowers weaved together with ancient hands drift forward to adorn the youths' temples. They raise their arms, giggling with fingers outstretched to accept their royal raiment. Soon the dying light passes through the leaves and casts twisted shadows onto the rosy faces. The fairies hush and quietly sweep past the drowsy children.

Upon moonrise, the fae kiss the eyelids of the innocent and whisper echoing dreams into their heads as they drift into oblivion. The fairies inhale their soft breath, and with it come the forsaken child's memories, voice, and their shimmering souls. They pull their prize right out of the children's fluttering hearts, and wear them like jewelry. The last of the spell tugs on their skin until it tears away painlessly. In the morning, the changelings will walk back to town, wearing faces like masks, their stolen voices embellishing their throats, their memories as a crown.





Plague of the Sphinx

The wind kicked up a veil of golden dust over the vast desert. The desolation of a small kingdom lay buried in the glittering sand, leaving towers and turrets drowning in the dense sea. Over the dilapidated gate, stands a statue of a woman-faced lioness with clipped wings roaring her pain and ferocity into the deaf sky. But now, after eternity, the bitter scent of living blood passes over the walls and reaches the statue. The sphinx's eyes turn sharp, and she peers out of slitted lids, devilish and hungry. Her large pronged teeth extrude from her lips as they curl into a carnivorous smile. Breaking through the stone, she flexes her missing wings as she stretches down the arches of her gate to meet the new intruder.

The sphinx spoke like running water, jarring the listener from the disjunction from her fierce face and her voice. "You", she crooned. "You must speak to me before passing through my gate."

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The traveler blanched, he had not noticed the statue had twisted to life upon his arrival.

"I have been cursed to stay in these ruins of a long lost civilization. I pray to you, break my spell and unleash me unto the world. Do not refuse me or I will strike you where you stand and add yours to the graves beneath my feet."
The cursed woman spoke her own spell upon the traveler, cunning as the Devil himself.

The traveler responded, stumbling over himself in a pathetic bow. "I beg not to bear your punishment, I will help willingly as a humble servant."

"So you shall, fresh blood is what will break my curse, but I must first enlist your conversation."

The traveler crumpled into his bow, paralyzed. “A riddle I must ask of you, fail and you shall be my sacrifice, succeed and I will remain bound in misery.” The traveler stayed silent in terror as the sphinx continued, “Here is your trial, friend.”

“When I choke out my neighbors and steal their land for my own, I cause famine and strife for a nation. When I am wanted, I do not exist. When I wander on my own, I am not wanted. I travel by wind, water, and beast, yet none can trace my footsteps. Who am I?”

The woman-faced-beast waited patiently in a crouch for her savior’s answer. Strange slitted eyes locked onto the crumpled form below her. The traveler shook violently, unable to procure a coherent thought. His mind echoed that of the dreaded answer, a garden swallowed up by thorny weeds. Weeds crowding out sunlight and fresh air as he struggled to maintain sanity. When he failed to speak the correct answer, the sphinx pounced.

A triumphant roar flew from the throat of the sphinx as she flapped her clipped wings, unbound from the ruins. The spell was broken. Her fanged grin curled around her slanted eyes as she rose to the new horizon. Once again she was a famine upon the lands, and a plague among kingdoms.



he Moon Spirit

The moon spirit is out tonight, keep the doors locked with three silver keys. Remember, you will hear him around twilight. You will hear him long before you see him, and pray that all you do is hear. His jolly and triumphant song will echo off the very sky and bounce back to the earth after rattling the stars. He will sing as if he were a whole choir, an unearthly chord slides between his teeth as a single note. His lyrics

beyond poetry, unable to be written by any hand or imitated by any mortal throat. Heed this warning, you must ignore his aria. Clamp your hands over your head to block out the song, for it may be all you hear for the rest of eternity. Shun his gaze as he comes over the eastern hills. Look not into that beaming face. Fear, for he may not come alone. Who knows what kind of stellar furies might lurk around him.

Be wary of his eyes that bleed smoke and madness. Do not be caught. Do not be converted into another star.

he Angel & the Serpent

Angels, in some form or another, have been known to lay in wait on the clouds. They have many names, some use the derogatory term “harpies” or “spirits” to another. To those who revere the ethereal creatures, they are deemed “angels”.

Nonetheless, angels lounged up above on a thick fog as if it were an elegant daybed. Together they laughed, tossed around the sunlight, and plucked at the wind weaving it into new gowns to wear. As the light drained from the sky and no longer bounced from their radiant skin the laughing turned to disappointment. Moaning, they rose and drifted away to chase the light and settle back into their dreamy play.

Only one angel remained in the twilight, her back against the purple bed of vapor. She gazed upwards to admire her handiwork, the sunset she and her sisters had painted over the waking

stars. In her languid state the angel cared not where the wind took her, and soon the angel drifted out over the sea.

There, a mermaid lounged on the rocks who’s heads crowned just above the water. The mermaid watched the night rise and the sky light up with blazing streaks as the angels splashed more color on the other side of the horizon. Her eye caught at the sight of the maiden of the air roosting on her cloud, and astonishing admiration flooded through her. The mermaid was struck with the powerful beauty the angel bestowed. The star child’s hair floated in the wind, while the mermaid’s fell heavy and viscous to her shoulders with the ever present weight of the sea. The skin of the angel glowed warm despite the fading sun, while the mermaid’s own was cold and clammy. The angel noticed her stare and felt pride rise inside of her throat, her lips twisting into a smug smile.

Genuinely dazzled, the mermaid smiled back. Unnerved by such an honest face, the harpy's smile caught, the mermaid's fine eyes smiling just as much as her lips.

It gave the angel pause, yet this new sight both intrigued and stroked her ego. The angel greeted the fish hesitantly, not usually inclined to make herself known among corporeal beings. The maiden of the sea twisted and splashed to get closer, not entirely graceless but not effortless like the goddess. She slithered forward like a serpent. "Disgusting creatures, and so unhallowed," the angel thought to herself. Nonetheless, out of curiosity, the angel allowed herself to hover above the waves and drift towards the sinful creature.

The mermaid told stories about the deep underwater grottos and monstrous creatures that glowed with a strange light unlike the sun. She spoke of the flowering stone that grew and ate as if it had a soul. Despite herself, the angel marveled at her descriptions. Her hubris conceived that the stories stood to be shamed by those of her own.

So in turn, the angel told stories of the colors seen from unfiltered light above the clouds, and of those on land who catch the wind in cloth and whistles on a long string. Sights the serpent would never be able to comprehend. To bring her fanciful tales to a climax, she flaunted her ability to pull down stars for children to wish upon.

Listening to the wishes always gave the harpy much malicious pleasure. "How frivolous and selfish are the wants of the world," she mused to herself.

The mermaid could not stay forever, apologetically she left the angel alone again. When the angel returned to her celestial realm she felt rather blasé with the mundane tasks before her. During the day, she mournfully sulked under the moon for cover while it rained, the closest the angel would ever come to being fully submerged underwater. How lonely she found herself among her sisters and the beauty of the sky, the angel ached for more interesting company. As a result the maiden of the air spent her time floating on the mist that was anchored to the ocean.



The two maidens met often to relate more fantastical tales that could never be relieved by the other. Stories about rain storms over the mountains, or of the glowing underwater volcanoes in the deepest parts of the trenches. One day, the mermaid had a special surprise for her angelic friend, and from behind her back she revealed a fallen star.

"Isn't it wonderful?" she said holding it up to her friend, "See how it glows and sparkles? Underwater, it is as if I carry the whole night sky with me! What a treasure it is! It must be from you, for I recall your tale of pulling down the stars for children to wish upon. This one must have fallen astray, as it landed right in the middle of the ocean. No one could have made a wish upon it but me! Oh how lucky I am to have a fragment of the sky, a piece of you, to be with me always!"

The angel's face became hard and shadowed,



she did not share in the celebration. It made her sick with envy and humiliation.

“How dare this serpent touch a divine piece of the cosmos with her slimy hands,” the harpy screeched in thought. “How dare she intend to keep something that could never belong to her. What could she ever give in return? The wonders of the ocean would not fit into a vessel for me to keep as a token of our friendship. Why should one be rewarded but not the other?”

The angels’ rage showed conspicuously on her face. She demanded to have the star returned to her. Confused, the mermaid asked for an explanation.

“I am not required to make my holy intentions known to someone like you, imp! You will return what is rightfully mine before I righteously make the sky fall upon you. As a result, you will never return to the surface to marvel at heaven’s wonders again.”

The mermaid held her treasure close to her chest, retreating from her traitorous angel. She searched for some sort of compassion in her old friend’s eyes.

The angel remained unbridled. “Slimy ugly thing, you have no right to even converse with someone of my status! What disguised devil are you to defy me?” Fire and brimstone raged in the angel’s face.

Finally the heartbroken mermaid stormed back.

“Heartless, soulless being! Ever since your conception you have been blessed with ignorance. You know nothing of a pain, fear, or even hunger that plagues us of flesh. You call me a devil for these burdens, but you have never

known me. You know nothing of my longing to escape this world into a new one. How I wish to join you and become a child of the stars. Why defy me what little comfort I can gain?” The mermaid’s face glistened with anguish as she pleaded for her angel to hear her prayer.

“Why should your wish be granted when I will never have mine? How have I known nirvana and yet I beg to be a creature of earth with you. I must know suffering if I know there is no heaven that will satisfy me. You tempt me devil, serpent! With no comfort for me there will be no comfort for you. My love is a jealous one.”

And with this, the sky was brought down upon the maiden of the sea. She cried out and struggled, but found no air to breathe above the waters. The mermaid was smothered below the depths, never again to see her heaven. The broken hearted serpent writhed in sorrow, never allowed to bestow her gift. The second surprise to her friend, a glorious conch shell, the wonders of the ocean fit into a simple vessel. The wretch suffocated under the waves, never to have her true wish granted, when she first saw the falling star.

he Spider Ball

Every year, on the last day of autumn there is a magnificent festival. The cycle of spiders does not last as long as others, as such, the spiders prepare for the ball constantly and practice their needlework every morning. The designs of their lustrous fabric becoming more elaborate with every fallen sun.

Once the misty morning burns away under the coming noon, the spider ball will begin. The spiders will gather, donning their finest handmade clothes. Their gowns all original and as delicate as snowflakes. They decorate their garments with the shimmering gems that fall from the sky, so fragile that only their needled hands can manipulate. The halls of the dance will be decked with curtains weaved of the finest lace over a floor of polished pond water. After the masses have settled the ball will commence, and every attendant will begin a display of acrobatics and dance. The performers will twirl like the tufted seeds of a dandelion, as if the very air holds them aloft on a string. Light will reflect off of the dew drops to cast rainbows onto their decorated bodies. The spiders will dance more graceful than any ballet ever composed by man to an aria sung by the wind.

Oh, to see the world through their lenses, to witness the majesty of the event through their kaleidoscope eyes.

The climax of the event is much less about the decorum. Spiders are not only skilled artists but masterful hunters, and a feast is held after the siren dance of the spiders. The bustle of the ball will slow with a solemn bow to signify the end, revealing thousands of hypnotized prey snared in their webs. The weaved tapestries along the halls viscous to the foolish insect. The curtains and canopy drip with an invisible adhesive. Oh the bloody scene that always follows! Several of the weaker spiders amongst them shall fall victim themselves! How easy it becomes to forget their civilized society when faced with hunger and the brutal winter that will mean ruin for them all. As the feast puts an end to the day, night will lay her cold hand on them. The lace adorning the hall will sharpen to a bristled wire. The curtains will stiffen and shatter under new weight. The polished floor will glaze over to fractured starry glass. One by one, the spiders will curl and ossify. This new type of stone will not melt until the earth has shifted its weight and leans towards the sun once more.

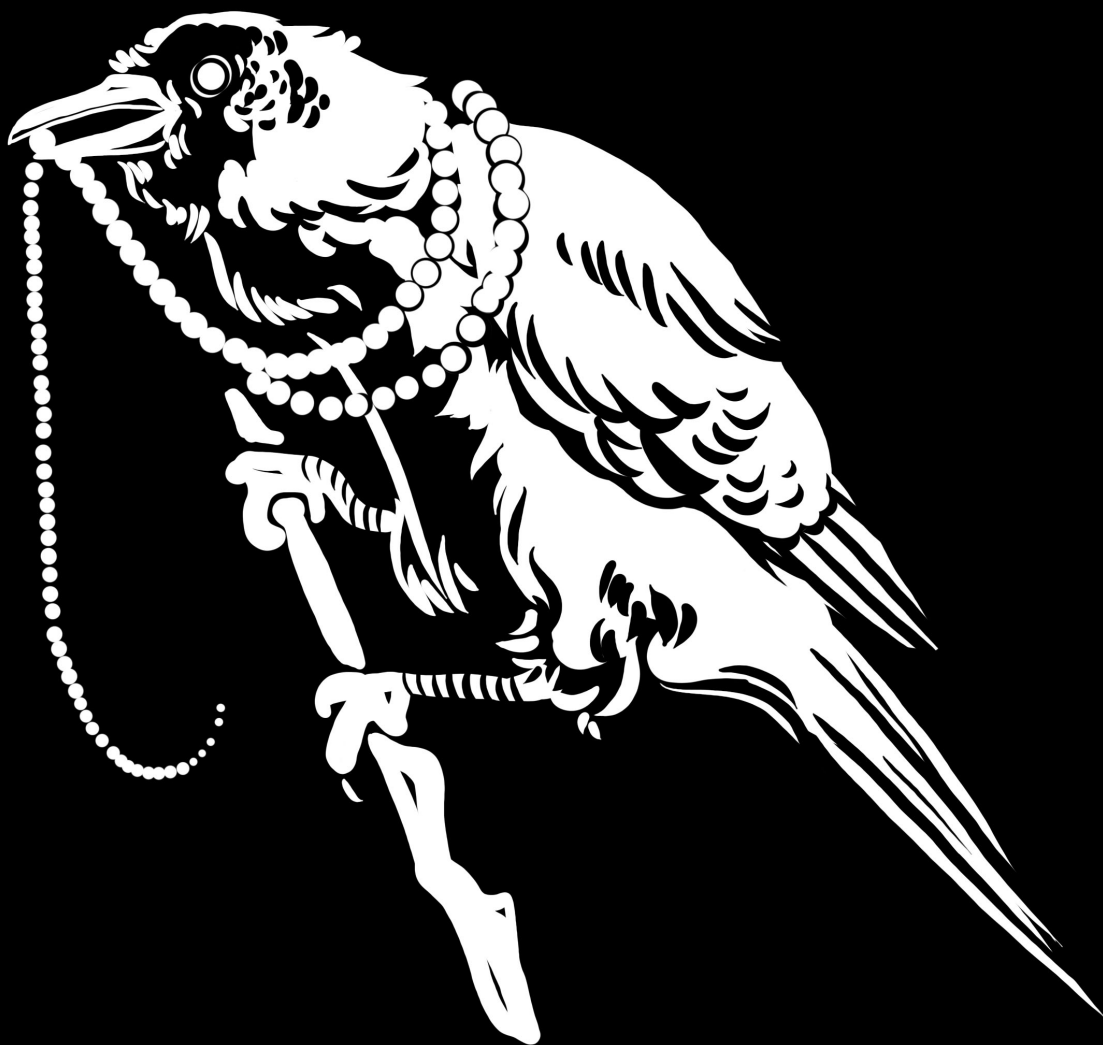


he Toll

The little girl threw the old crow the buttons off of her elegant Sunday dress. She picked and pried at the holes in her tights until they were nothing but thin shreds around her polished buckled shoes. The brooch neatly pinned to her chest was ripped out.

“Pearl, my birthstone” she said quickly, as she added it to the growing pile. The lace around her collar became undone. The girl’s glittery hair pins were plucked out, and her hair fell stiffly, crimped in odd places. The last item she turned over was her necklace, damned as vanity. As it fell to the floor it chimed like the bells. “Will this be enough? I simply cannot return,” the girl demanded.

The crow eyed his new hoard greedily, “Who am I? Charon?” he laughed. “It’s plenty.”





God of Doubt

Once there was a poor boy who had many wrongs laid against him. Life loved to take out it's furry on the child. His parents, his siblings, and what little wealth he held to his name soon turned to none. Despite all of this, the boy was deeply invested in the providence of his creator. He knew that keeping faith would result in a reward beyond all earthly desires. However, after visiting church, after temple, after shrine, he began to grow anxious and doubtful. His prayers had gone unanswered for too long. The boy's faith faltered. He, the humblest of servants was ignored, while those undeserving of compassion basked in blessings. The boy decided to abandon the temples, and to climb up close to the sky in an attempt to be better heard. "Perhaps my agonized cries are being drowned by prayers of the town," he thought to himself. He decided to make a journey to the mountains, to talk with his god.

The boy had nothing to lose but his faith, and it pressed him up the mountains. An unintentional fast made his stomach ache, yet he had no food to satisfy it. He took this as a sign of some divine plan, and found comfort that this journey was accompanied by a holy burden. Finally, he reached the top of the mountains. He erected himself, poised on the fangs of earth gnawing the sky, and with a deep breath he wailed out into the dead firmament, "My god, please hear me!"

Underneath where the poor boy stood, under miles of ancient dust and rubble, woke a beast. The sleeping dragon raised one eyelid lethargically and blinked off the soot as it stared unseeingly into the darkness deep underground.

"Who's god?" The earth spoke, sending tremors throughout the mountain range. The boy was brought to his knees, relieved to finally receive

an answer.

“Mine! Oh how I have prayed, oh how I gnashed my teeth, have shaken my fists, and slit my wrists in agony to have your gracious ear inclined towards me!” The boy shouted, exultation flowing through his body.

“For nothing.” The voice thundered. The eyes of the dragon rolled back into his head, disinterest lulling him back to rest.

“No my lord! My father, my creator! I have devoted soul and mind to you daily. I know in my heart, that you set a beating, that you will not forsake me!” The boy said shakily. The beast laughed and the mountains shook.

“Send your prayers to the emptiness of the sky. No one mourns for your strife. The angels were false. The notions conceived for your comfort. I am the closest you will ever come to hearing a god, for I am beyond death with age. Yet, I wear no crown of stars, nor mere thorns, and I boast no love for the creatures of the earth. From dust you came and to dust you will recede with no sorrow of the world. Hear me. While your skin stitches itself together when you bleed, it cares not, nor will it comprehend when you finally perish. While you perceive yourself as lord and ruler in your own mind, so does the humble ephemera. I care not for you, as you care not for me.

Sanctify me not, for I shall not sanctify you. Hear me. Gnash your teeth, shake your fists, and spill your blood to feed the earth as endless have before you. Hear me.”

The dragon spoke, drifting back into his eternal sleep. The eyelid sweeping closed on the unseeing eye just as before. “Already, I have forgotten you. I have forgotten you and your callow delusion.”

And so the boy was forgotten, and he was left alone on the mountain with his god.



Revenge of the Hurricane Goddess

The mighty fish dragon launched over the turquoise waves with his lady on his back. The golden scales waxed and waned like the moon as the dragon bounced over the ocean in the light of a thousand crystals. His master, only clothed in raspberry red gems and cloth ripped from the rays of the sun.

The maiden lifted her glistening arms as if commanding the waves, the clouds, and the sun to rise with her. Her steed twisted and breached, it's mouth stretching into a smile that matched his mistress.

The land was finally in their sights. The lady tiptoed forward elegantly, and found her perch upon the fish dragon's nose, a figurehead upon her peculiar ship. Nothing but wind held the goddess aloft as they sped onward. The land

steadily came closer and the woman began to whip the flecks of the sea around her head bringing the violent cataclysm to fruition. Reaching the shore, she launched herself and her companion into the air. A mad bellow burst from her chest as she married the wind and sea once again to do her bidding. The dragon let out a boisterous guffaw with her. Together they raced to the mountaintops, the goddess of the hurricane longing for the reunion of her treacherous lover.

hispering Meadows

A few miles outside the village lay a massive spread of wildflowers before a tiny household on a hill. It was a secret spot that comforted one forsaken and tired soul. The young man came to the meadow often for he had a fondness for the simple delights of sitting and watching the day go by. He leaned with his back against the steep hill, his body propped up to overlook the field. The day was clear except for a few billowing clouds like lonely ships. As his eyelids drifted, threatening to overtake his eyes with sleep, the flowers stirred and turned to address the man. The honeysuckles, the daisies, and the poppies leaned in around him.

“Oh how sickly you look today. Much much worse than you were yesterday, I dare say,” said the poppies. “Certainly won’t be long now.” The adolescent’s face had slid from content to sullen, eyes flicking to the poppies as if asking for an explanation.

The buttercups bowed over the tired face, “So young and handsome,” they whispered, “what a shame.” The young man’s hair blew in the breeze over his thin face tickled by petals and wild grass. His eyes now wide and staring at the sky as he listened.

“A shame indeed,” scolded the tulips, “soon he will rest beneath our roots without a blink from the world.”

“Your skin has begun to grow very cold. Almost as if you’re dead already, maybe you’ve been gone for a long time,” the daisy said, gently brushing against the man’s cheek.

At this touch, the man’s breathing grew heavy. The wildflowers tipped towards the man, pressing their faces against his to bestow an



innocent kiss goodbye.

A buttercup rested on his wrist. "I feel no pulse," she said through sobs. The young man felt tears of his own fall from his eyes

"Oh who shall guide this soul back to those who loved it in life?" A weary honeysuckle weeped, "He was taken too soon. Too soon! How shall we avenge this life, just as precious as ours? We can only mourn."

"Quickly!" The thistle cried. "Do not disgrace yourself to be seen another minute! You are a walking corpse! Hide your sickly face! Dive beneath our roots, where we shall cover you with the dantiest of lace and caress your cheek with our fingers. Join us below the earth."

"Yes!" the madow sang in chorus. The man turned to his knees and faced the ground where he began to dig, ignoring the sharp dirt underneath his fingernails as he began.

"Even the sun does not bounce from your eyes, how repulsive you are to our mother with her unconditional love!" Shrieked the poppies. Agonized cries escaped the young man as a response.

"Sweet thing, now there certainly is nothing else to do."

"Oh my I hear the very worms eating away at you now! You hear it? This surely proves your decay!" The man's sobs and digging became frantic under this new fact.

"Lord, I pray for this soul to be returned! Let him come to you." The meadow whispered.

"Dearest me! The very skin of your lips are

coming undone! Speak no more! Your flesh is falling off your bones by the minute," the tulips scolded.

"Your skin is bruised more violet than the iris of the village! Use what fingers you have left to hollow out a spot for you amongst us! Yes!" Frenzied, the man threw clumps of dirt over his head, tears streaming down his bloodshot eyes. The meadow hummed with various prayers for the young man's soul as he returned to dust.

"Oh you are rubbing the fingers raw to the bone! Hurry you disgrace! This grave is where you belong! The earth is so much warmer is it not? How can you have ever left?"

"Yes! Now lie deeper still! Relieve the earth of your trespasses, forgive yourself, you have done all you can do. Now cover yourself up! Let us swallow you whole! We will take care of you now! The flowers of the field will always be here to celebrate your life, and tell your story."

The cries of the wildflowers grew louder in the man's ears until finally they fell silent. The frantic digging stilled and a new and perfect corpse was made in the meadow under the hill. Time passed and the flowers punctured the soft unbroken skin with their needlework. The following spring, new seedlings sprouted from the young man's empty eye sockets to become his new eyes. In his eternal rest, the young man was free to watch the days go by and other simple delights in his secret sanctuary.



Rise of the Beetle Queen

The Beetle Queen felt a change in the winds and it made her wings twitch. She stood on the balcony overlooking her kingdom, contemplating her studies that preceded her coronation as Queen. In that time, she had become well acquainted with the uncertainty of the world. Staring suspiciously out over the shadowed horizon, the Queen felt that she must begin her plan to earn the everlasting respect and admiration of her people. She gathered her courage.

The Beetle Queen wrote to the three surrounding kingdoms who shared the massive forest floor. In her letter, she bled out a tale of woe of her failing clan. She reminded the three Kings that she held one of the largest portions of land compared to the other kingdoms, but related her struggle to to sustain it with a dwindling population.

“The men in my region will add a significant contribution to any army, and the vast amount of earth left to my control is brimming with promise. I shall offer these to the king who is able to court me”, she wrote, “my hand in marriage and the union of our two kingdoms.” The Beetle Queen solemnly signed the letters and returned to the window to oversee their send off.

Raucous reply to the letter! A contest of strength, and the opportunity to become the most powerful kingdom on the forest floor! With the promise of more land and more men to make their armies rise, the kings of the west, north, and east roused themselves for the spectacle. The Beetle Queen found herself whisked away to her surrounding nations.

The western Beetle King showered her with the spectacle of his wealthy nation. He showed her

the exotic foods that only his providence could grow and he taught her in the trade routes that served as the backbone of his civilization. The western King also boasted of his ingenuity to use streams and boats to increase commerce in half the time. The Beetle Queen watched with quiet amusement as she saw the inner workings of this foreign land, something she had already become familiar with while completing her studies as a prospective ruler.

As a final celebration of her visit, the western King demanded a demonstration of the western military strength, and summoned his fiercest warriors to perform the exhibitionism. Out of all the Beetle Queen had seen, this was the most intriguing. While the Beetle Queen was already well studied in the industry of trade and the politics of her surrounding kingdoms, every nation was very secretive about their military strengths.

“As they should be,” the Beetle Queen thought, her eyes fixed to the gladiators with an ere of true fascination. The warriors horns’ were forked on their curved ends and served as a protective helmet over the soldier’s face and head. The dominant strategy was to toss your opponent with massive strength and speed, using the horns as a method to sweep the enemy off their feet. The Queen made note. Her quiet smile pleased the western Beetle King, who took her fascination as a sign of her adoration. This satisfied the King, and when the Queen gave him a quiet smile with a promise to return, his chest swelled with pride at his success.

The northern Beetle King followed a similar pattern. Gifts, a tour of the bold nation, and a demonstration of the strength of the militia.

“The north”, the Queen mused to herself,

“have horns like pincers, that could crush and overturn the adversary in an instant.” Pleased, she whispered her promise to return to the northern King and moved to the third.

The beetle kingdom of the east also held a test of strength among the champions of war. They demonstrated their serrated, spear like horns in action. In one swift blow, any men who’s footing did not hold good form would find themselves skewered. At this point, the Beetle Queen was brimming with excitement at all her discoveries. She left a soft kiss on the cheek of the eastern King and sang her repeating promise. A false confidence bestowed upon them all.

Upon her return home, she called together her army at once. Her letters describing the low numbers of her population were fabricated. Her men were at the peak of their numbers, strong, and resilient. She rose to the balcony and addressed her people with the same strong voice of those who ruled before her.

“My people! I have returned from my escapade to find a suitor from the surrounding kingdoms. I know you have been told these rumors, but nothing but false rumors they are! I have thought long and hard about the fate of our beloved land, I have studied the politics of our society, and the nature of war is to collapse on those who are weaker. I have decided to the benefit of you and our kingdom that we shall not be found weak. Instead, we will be the unseen force of chaos. We will strike before others can turn on us! I will teach you to counter the fighting methods of the west, north, and east. I will demonstrate the fighting style of those with the catapult, the crushing

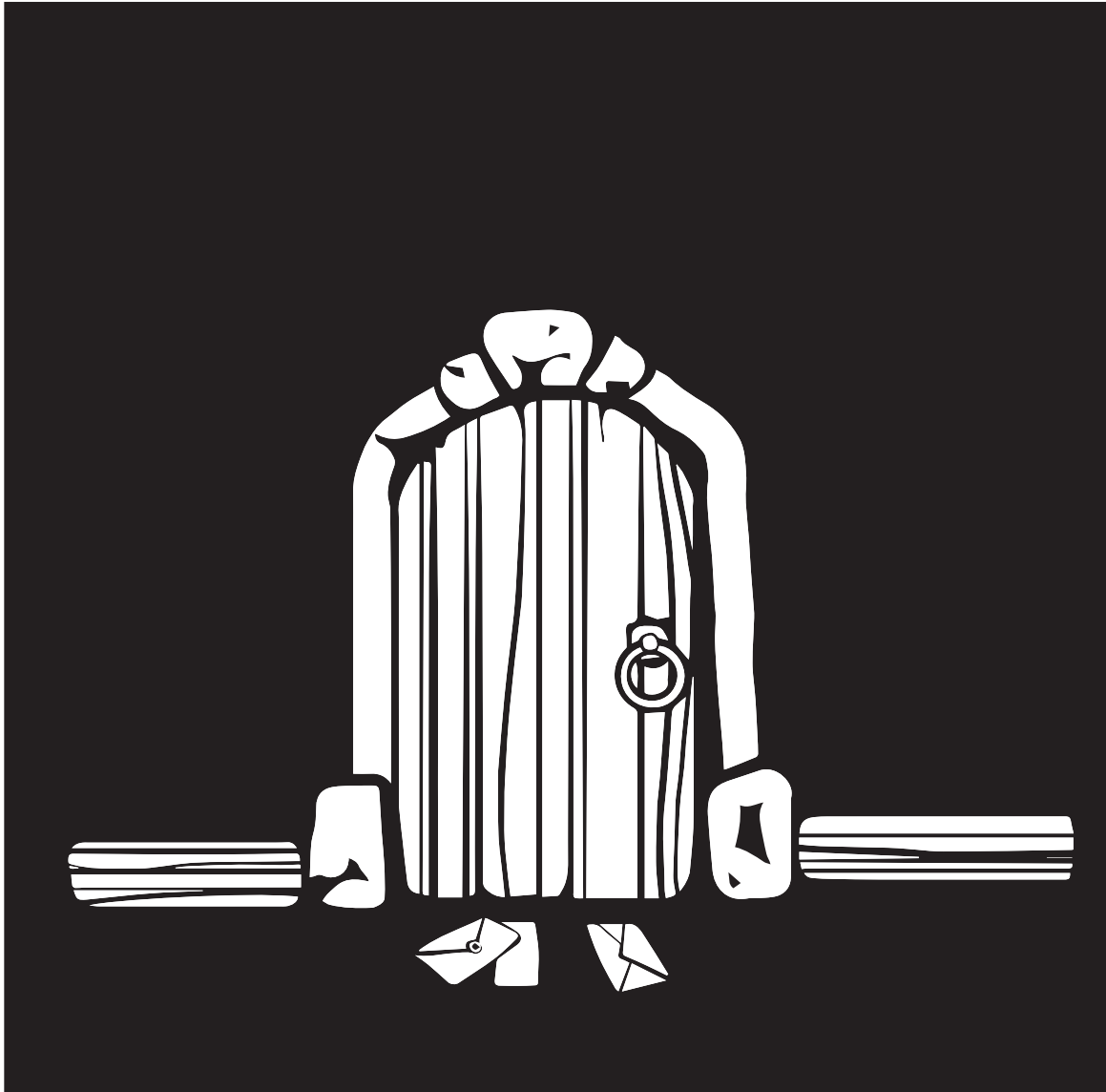
pincers, and those with horns like swords! No nation holds the secrets of all three! And with each nation conquered, we shall inherit their strength!” At these words, the Beetle Queen threw her long arms towards her people to great cheers! She paused to bask in their praise before continuing, “As of now we are perceived as unthreatening, their guards will be down. Now is the time.” As her men bellowed their assent, the Queen stepped down from her tower to join the men of her army and train them in combat.

She did return to each nation as promised, starting with the east, and moving counterclockwise. Finally returning to the first King she had met on her journey. The Beetle Queen arrived in full regal attire and marched down the streets in a parade, her army stepping in time just behind her. Fanfare erupted from the crowd as they watched their new Queen reach the castle. Drowned in the applause, was the confused comments that the Queen looked different than when she had first arrived. Surely this was surely of no consequence, as their King had won the contest in demonstrating the strength of their civilization. When the Beetle Queen made her way to the grounds of the castle, she left her army behind her.

The King held out his arms to his new Queen as she whispered a request to give a speech to her new citizens about their new union. The western King joyously agreed, just as the northern, and eastern had before him. Perched upon the castle’s highest balcony the Queen addressed the western kingdom with a warm speech. Upon its conclusion, she turned and held out a hand to the King. The cheers that erupted from the crowd were abruptly broken with a cold silence. For once the Beetle Queen embraced her new mate, she twisted the King’s head until it broke free.

At this cue, the Beetle Queen’s army demonstrated their strength upon the unsuspecting nation. The Queen’s army featured new weapons, new strategies, and new numbers amongst them, and the western army was easily cut down. The civilians who stood their ground bravely were overwhelmed. Confusion and fear at this unbridled strength showed on every innocent face. From the balcony, the Beetle Queen watched the chaos, wearing the horns of their usurped King upon her brow with the others she had stolen.







Daughter of Spring

The village is full of very tall, compact houses lining every bustling street. The houses may lean or creak to one side or the other, but they never touch. All except for two houses, which were joined by a covered bridge at the very top room. The history of this peculiar occurrence is recalled by one current resident. Some rich lord who decided he should own two houses rather than one, and that they should be joined together for his convenience. Thus the bridge was built connecting the attic spaces of the consecutive dwellings. Once the lord passed away it was distributed to two families who each could not afford two houses at once. They ignored the conjoined spaces entirely. The families each had a daughter, one named Arya and across the bridge, was Elle.

Arya first met Elle when she crept into the attic of her house to explore. After climbing the rickety stairs she noticed a pair of dusty

handprints on the floor, and followed them to the black curtains covering the back wall. Arya tugged the heavy curtains to one side, revealing a door. The handprints came to a stop over a twisted hole in the floorboards, a rusty old fashioned key just visible underneath. Taking a deep breath, and praying not to find a nest of mice, she quickly wrenched the key out from under the floor and eyed the keyhole of the mysterious door. Curiosity brimming she slid the key into the rusty lock and a rush of excitement flowed through her when she heard the affirming click. The door creaked open and Arya poked her head through to see a hallway that was the bridge connecting the two consecutive houses. There were thick window frames placed evenly across the hall, and it was surprisingly roomy for Arya's small frame. In the center of the room between the walls, sat Elle.

Little doll chairs were set up surrounding a crate acting as a table for an elegant tea set with golden flowery handles, much too fine for playing house. Elle was evidently involved in some kind of fantasy when she heard the door click and Arya reveal herself. Her chattering to the empty seats stopped and Elle twisted around to take her in from behind the rim of her teacup. An impish grin broke out across Elle's face and she expressed her satisfaction that the key had been found. Arya shifted and looked down apologizing, unable to hold the child's strange golden eyes. Brimming with joy and excitement Elle waved her apology away and commanded her to sit down at the "table" for tea. Once Arya took her spot she listened to Elle ramble on and on about her plans for the bridge room. These plans included snagging some curtains for the windows and cutting out paper stars to hang from the ceiling. Arya was enchanted by Elle's matter of fact way of speaking, and her unbound imagination. The two girls laughed while they enjoyed a cup of tea in vessels much too valuable to be trusted in little hands. Here began the strong friendship of the two girls.

Arya was delighted to have made a friend, as she was often confined to her room to study under the strict guidelines of her father. But whenever she could get away, Arya would meet Elle and decorate their secret space with discarded knick knacks, and snippets of poetry ripped out of books. One day, Elle asked where Arya kept her key. Elle revealed that her own was tucked under her dress on a long string as a necklace. Arya was delighted at the prospect, and Elle fastened Arya's key around her neck the same. The key rested right on top of her heart. As Arya rose to see her new reflection in the mirror shard glued to the wall, Elle snatched her hand and held her down. Arya was startled as Elle's strange golden eyes held still and serious before

her own. After a moment of chilling silence, Elle whispered a solemn request.

Arya must promise to meet Elle in the bridge behind the attic door every night. Arya nodded, genuine love for her friend and their secret room shining in her heart. Elle's impish grin returned as they entwined their pinky fingers and kissed their thumbnails to seal the promise.

Arya's studies grew more intense, but still she managed to spend the last light of day in their secret playhouse between the walls. Whenever Arya swung open the door, Elle was always already there. A bright smile gripped Arya whenever she saw her friend, and she felt immense gratefulness for her presence. She thought of Elle as more than just an intimate companion. Elle reminded Arya of the guardian angels sent to children in need to watch over them. "Of course, this couldn't be the case, angels were adults and Elle was the same age as me. Perhaps Elle was some kind of good fairy", she pondered. "Elle's golden eyes might be a fitting description for some kind of fae creature, but where were her wings?" Arya was unable to decide on the reason for the way Elle fit so perfectly into her life, but regardless she was beyond content.

Eventually, the days grew shorter due to the winter sun. Arya struggled to reach the space before the gold leaked out of the windows. On days like these, Arya resolved to write letters and hastily shove them under the door before racing back downstairs to her desk. The written response was always found in the morning. Soon it became two days in a row of sending letters before Arya could get away to make an

appearance to the secret room. Then it was weeks. As days slid by, Arya forgot to write her evening letter at all, and in the morning she guiltily collected two envelopes from her friend.



Arya climbed up the narrow stairs to the attic for the first time in months. She couldn't recall the last time she had bothered to check in on the little home she and Elle had built between their own. When Arya pulled back the black dusty curtain that covered the door, her heart broke then she found a small pile of letters addressed to her. Ashamed, Arya slumped to the floor to scrawl out an apology letter and slipped it under the door. Entering the space now would be disrespectful, so she promised she would read the response before intruding. Besides, Arya wasn't wearing the key under her clothes that night anyways.

The following morning Arya looked for Elle's response, but there was none. Panic seized at her throat, only to be quickly smothered at the thought that Elle herself had probably forgotten to return. Arya would be no hypocrite, therefore Arya resolved to be patient. After a month of no response, Arya frantically tore her room apart to search for the key necklace that Elle had given her. Ripping books off their shelves, piling clothes out from her drawers until she heard the clink of something hard hit the floor. Out of an old apron's pocket was nestled the necklace. Arya rushed up to the attic, and cranked the door to their wonderland open.

Arya's letter to Elle skimmed across the floor

in her haste. There was the crate, topped with the tea set much too expensive to be used in a playhouse. There were the little doll chairs neatly positioned on every side. Arya's eyes slid to the empty cups collecting dust from the light streaming in through the uncovered windows. The paper stars they had cut out together, hung stiffly from the ceiling like little corpses of men sentenced to the gallows. For the first time, Elle wasn't there. The transient world they had created for each other was uninhabited. Heartbroken, Arya slumped down the stairs to ask her parents what had become of the neighbors their household was attached to. Her father looked confused but promptly answered that they had packed their things and relocated away some time ago, the counterpart of their house was empty. The last letter Elle had slipped through the passageway door confirmed this. Elle had begged for Arya to come through to see her again. Elle vowed in her own writing to forgive her transgressions on their childhood promise if this last wish was granted.

With tears in Arya's eyes, she thought of how ironic the request was. That she, the one who had abandoned her friend, has become the fairy godmother who had the power to grant wishes. Meanwhile Elle had been the mysterious force behind their entire companionship.

Elle's handprints were left not in dust, but fairy dust, on top of the table where her key had been left. It must have been some magic spell Elle had weaved to allow Arya to enter the portal in the first place. Where had the little changeling with the golden eyes gone off to? Arya already knew the answer. Elle had been called back to heaven. A guardian angel was no longer necessary for a busy, grown up child.





Artist Statement

Alexa Black's "Away with the Fairies" is a contemporary collection of fairy tales with original illustrations by the same. In this, her first writing project, she endeavored to express herself in a new medium combined with her practiced hand in digital illustration. In her extensive study of fairy tales, she noticed that these stories represent the fears and cultural values of the time. Taking this to heart, she began to write in the same fashion, but with a new and less tangible villain.

These stories reflect on the artist's life and experiences with intense anxiety and depression. The modern monsters of today are represented in the stories' themes of loss, sanity, and the unknown.

