



Red as Blood, or Tales from the Sisters Grimmer: Expanded Edition

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What if Snow White were the real villain and the "wicked queen" just a sadly maligned innocent? What if awakening Sleeping Beauty would be the mistake of a lifetime -- of several lifetimes? What if the famous folk tales were retold with an eye to more horrific possibilities? Only Tanith Lee -- "Goddess-Empress of the Hot Read" (Village Voice) could retell the world-famous tales of the Brothers Grimm (and others) as they might have been told by the Sisters Grimmer! This special edition, put together for the 30th anniversary of the original edition, adds a new Grimmer fairy tale written especially for this volume!

Red as Blood, or Tales from the Sisters Grimmer: Expanded Edition Details

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From Reader Review Red as Blood, or Tales from the Sisters Grimmer: Expanded Edition for online ebook

mark monday says

Fairy tales transformed: victims turned victimizers; mythologies mixed and matched; Christianity made pagan; the subtext of fables become the actual text. Silken prose and disturbing undercurrents.

I first read this at age 13 or 14, back when it was initially published in the early 80s. I still remember the hard look my mother gave me when I asked her to buy it for me; the glance down at the tawdry-cheesy cover; the almost-shrug and finally the "I'll read this after you've finished." It became one of my favorite things; over 30 years later after my second read, it remains so. And mom liked it too.

"Paid Piper" - *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*. A complacent town full of smallness; a girl who wants more from her life. The Son of God, appearing before the Christ was born, dispensing both New Testament kindness and Old Testament vengeance. A strange and beautiful tale.

"Red As Blood" - *Snow White*. A vampiric princess and the seven stunted horrors that follow her; her enemy, a kind and brave Witch Queen and her ally Lucifiel (also known as Satan, the brother of the Son of God). A mirror that can see all but one: the girl with the dead-white skin and lips of blood. This was my favorite story when I first read the collection.

"Thorns" - *Sleeping Beauty*. A city frozen, in stasis for hundreds of year; a wandering prince who will wake them all. The passage of so much time becomes a barrier all of its own between princess and prince, a barrier more insurmountable than a wall of thorns. This reads like a melancholy, mournful dream.

"When The Clock Strikes" - *Cinderella*. A vengeful daughter, servant of Satan: Ashella. A prince, broken. My least favorite story both then and now. It felt like a pale reflection of "Red As Blood".

"The Golden Rope" - *Rapunzel*. Another witch and another servant of Satan; another daughter, but this one an innocent. Golden hair and blood sacrifice may open the gateway to hell, but the Son of the Morning Star will pick his own paramour. The vision of the golden hair creating a path to the underworld was weird and entrancing.

"The Princess And Her Future" - *The Frog Prince*. Something patiently waits at the bottom of that lonely cistern; a princess' golden ball will betray her. Fabulously grim and perhaps the only true tale of horror in the collection. A cruel joke of a story. Poor princess!

"Wolfland" - *Little Red Riding Hood*. In frozen Scandinavia, an obstreperous young lady meets her formidable Grandmother; a legacy of lycanthropy is detailed. I loved this eerie story, the surprisingly unpleasant personality of our heroine, and was moved by the story of Grandmother's early life, married to a sadistic human monster. Being a werewolf sounds like a great alternative lifestyle. My favorite story of the collection, after the re-read.

"Black As Ink" - *Swan Lake*. Black as ink and creepy as fuck. A bored and very wealthy young man meets an odd young woman, more marionette than human, and falls in love; he meets her again, 15 years later, to his eventual distress. An un-man controls an un-woman; the ennui of the very rich makes their lives a living death. An unsettling and somewhat frustrating tale.

"Beauty" - *Beauty and the Beast*. The aliens have come and made the Earth a place of peace; all they ask in return is the occasional son or daughter to join them. The sole piece of science fiction. Gorgeously written. My second favorite story, after the re-read.

Sarah Sammis says

For the last couple of years I have been focusing on including more short fiction in my reading routine. Likewise, I have been trying to go back to reading more fantasy and science fiction, two genres I devoured in my teens and early twenties but have gotten away from in recent years. *Red as Blood* by Tanith Lee fits both categories as it's a collection of retold fairy tales, each one with a dark twist.

The stories are based on the Grimm brothers' tales but given a feminist focus. The Grimm stories do tend to boil down to fantastic and supernatural things happening to young women who then often (though not always) need rescuing by a male hero. They can do with a good turning inside out but the ways in which that's done in this collection feels too gimmicky.

The other major problem with these stories is the emphasis on evil. So many of the female characters are doing evil deeds that the positives of giving the old stories a feminist spin are undone. I didn't come away with a favorite story. I found the whole process of reading this book tedious, although the discomfort was quick as the book is short.

Allison says

LMAO, I really liked all of these.

It should probably be renamed "Princesses Behaving Badly by Dabbling in the Dark Arts and Worshiping Satan".

yellowbird says

Tanith Lee writes wonderfully lyrical horror stories that sound like fairy tales, so it's only appropriate that she should rewrite some of the old standard. This book contains *When the Clock Strikes*, a retelling of Cinderella which is worth the price of admission alone, and *The Princess and her Future*, a heartwarming tale about a princess who marries a handsome prince who promises that "...I will love you for the rest of your life." He keeps his word.

While Tanith Lee's novels can be a little bit of a let down, her short stories are beautiful, horrific, and not to be missed. Definitely a must read.

Werner says

The common thread binding the nine stories (five previously published in various magazines) of this collection is that they're all re-imagined fairy tales, and all of them are of high literary quality; but otherwise they exhibit a wide variety. Lee wasn't well-served by the jacket copy, or by the above description, both of which tend to sensationalize these stories, under-stress their emotional complexity, and paint an exaggerated image of grimness. Only two of the tales could justly be called "horrific," and Lee's fertile imagination isn't "fiendish," in any reductive sense --it embraces the upbeat and beautiful as often as the dark and tragic (and various outcomes in between), and her moral vision discriminates between good and evil, in favor of the former. She also writes (at least here) with very little violence, mild bad language only in a single story, and no sex; an element of erotic attraction is present in some stories, but not in any degrading or defiling sense. Her prose is sumptuous and evocative --a treat to read.

Each of the chronologically arranged stories is fitted with a loose setting in history and geography, ranging from "Asia: The Last Century B.C." to "Earth: The Future." The last selection, "Beauty," is straight science-fiction; the title story and "Wolfland" could be considered supernatural fiction. (Those three are my favorites here.) "Black as Ink" really has no speculative element; it employs ambiguous suggestions of the supernatural, as in Hawthorne's novels, just for color. In most of the stories, though, the supernatural element is clear, and the setting is vague and removed enough from real-world reference points to make in effect a fantasy world.

Several stories have religious elements, borrowed from various religions; these should be viewed as literary conceits Lee uses without literally endorsing any of the religions --including Christianity, though "Red as Blood" has very real Christian symbolism. (The reference to Satan as the brother of Christ there reflects a sub-Nicene Christology, not an exaltation of Satan, and the picture of Satan as used by God to serve His own ultimate purposes is actually biblical --though Lee's Satan serves these more willingly than the real one probably does.) "Paid Piper," on the other hand, is the most theologically flawed of these stories.

Julie says

At the head of the stem there blossomed a rose slender as a tulip, its petals a pale and singing green. There were no thorns, or rather only one and that metaphysical, if quite unbearably

penetrating.

I adored Tanith Lee's *Biting the Sun*, and I'm always a fan of fairytale retellings, so I randomly picked this one up from the library. It's mingled fantasy/science fiction, with versions of the familiar stories that are ever so slightly askew, or play around with perspective so that the heroes are the villains & the villains are the heroes. Part of the delight was wading partway through a story and trying to guess/figure out which fairytale it is.

My favourites were:

- "Red As Blood": Snow White turned on its head, and very reminiscent of Neil Gaiman's marvelously disturbing "Snow, Glass, Apples".
- "Wolfland": My absolute fave, because combine Red Riding Hood with werewolves & empowered women & an aloof, powerful beldame of a grandmother & a Gothic manor, and I am *so here for this*.
- "Beauty": In which the Beast is an alien. I am really intensely averse to xenophilia in my sci fi, but this one is well-told, and the twist in this one made it work for me, somehow.

As a whole, I did get tired of the "the witch is a satanist and Lucifer is real!!" turn that so many of these stories took, but they were still v. enjoyable as retellings and it was a quick, engaging read. I read *much* worse in *My Mother She Killed Me, My Father He Ate Me*.

Sidebar: I read the Kindle edition, but I absolutely *hate* the cover (there's even a typo on it!?) so I'm setting my read to the paperback.

Anna says

If I hadn't read Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* first I think I would have liked this even better. As it is, it feels more uneven than Carter's work and probably unfairly suffers from dealing with the same material, which is rewritten and re-imaged fairy tales. Carter also has a more powerful take on the old Beauty and the Beast theme, I think.

There are still a couple of really good stories in this collection, among them being the Snow White as a vampire and the evil stepmother as the good Christian, but the one that really stands out head and shoulders over the rest is *Wolfland* where Lee really gets her fangs out (even literally). The other stories rate from ok to good but *Wolfland* above all manages to be *different*.

Just like in *Silver Metal Lover* Lee writes a pretty annoying protagonist that you really just want to shake your head at, but that works well in how the story is structured. She is supposed to be immature, annoying and insipid at the start in order to grow and make informed choices. Instead of an antagonistic relationship with her mother, in *Wolfland* the protagonist, Lisel, ends up in the shade of her extremely formidable grandmother, whom she initially loathes and fears. Of course, the more we learn of *grandmère* Anna's story, the more the story changes. This is also why *Wolfland* is both the best of Lee's entries and the most disturbing. Grandmère Anna's tale is filled with poison and caution:

"I tell you, Lisel, because very soon your father will suggest to you that it is time you were wed. And however handsome or gracious the young man may seem to you that you choose, or that is chosen for you, however

noble or marvelous or even docile he may seem, you have no way of being certain he will not turn out to be like your beloved grandpère. Do you know, he brought me peaches on our wedding night, all the way from the hothouses in the city. Then he showed me the whip he had been hiding under the fruit. You see what it is to be a woman, Lisel. Is that what you want? The irrevocable marriage vow that binds you forever to a monster?"

Again the comparison with Carter is impossible not to make, but when Carter focuses on the wild, beastly and how that conquers and provides some hope, Lee focuses on the human side in the beast/monster study, and it's far more disturbing for it. Grandmère Anna telling Lisel of how she finally worked up the strength to save Lisel's mother and then finally, herself, is gruesome and extremely disturbing.

"Beat me," she said. "Please beat me. I want you to. Put down the child and beat me. It would be so easy to hurt her, and so soon over, she's so small. But I'm stronger. You can hurt me much more. See how vulnerable and afraid I am. Beat me."

Then, with a snarl he tossed the child onto the bed where it lay wailing. He took the whip and caught Anna by her pale hair-

As always, Lee's prose is flowing and beautiful, and especially in *Wolfland* almost hauntingly provocative in places. Yet at times it slows things down just a little bit too much, especially in the slower moving pieces.

The take away from this book is: Don't get married, especially not to a demon, unless he is the Prince of Darkness and/or you are a werewolf(!), and don't go looking for swan maidens in lakes, that way lies 25 years of ennui and death in unexpected pneumonia. If you receive strange flowers in glass cases, you are most likely an alien.

Overall, an engaging read, but should probably not be read too close together with *Silver Metal Lover* or Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*.

Brandy says

Godliness is next to more Godliness, apparently. This collection of fairy tale re-imaginings could have been good--a lot of her ideas are excellent and I'd love to see them in the hands of a better writer--but I only got through about half the stories in this collection. And of those six or so, five were varying degrees of allegory, usually of the "wicked person worships SATAN and GOD won't save you then." A little too much in the Christian tradition for me, particularly when the stories were set in distinctly non-Christian eras/places. Any more ham-handed and it would need mittens of bread and mustard.

Jadis LeFeu says

Oh my. That was *fantastic*. My favourite genre, riffs off of well-known fairy tales. Dark and twisted new takes on old stories. Lovely. Absolutely lovely. I do wonder what Black as Ink is supposed to be, though. Wikipedia says The White Duck, which is ridiculous. It has not even a nodding acquaintance with The White Duck. With the swans I'd think it was The Swan Princess, but bits of it made me think of Giselle... though

Giselle isn't well-known enough for that kind of thing, generally. For that matter, neither is The White Duck. The Swan Princess makes the most sense, in the context of how well-known the stories in the book are. It really is a wonderful book. Love.

Marquise says

This collection of fairy tale retellings contains 10 stories ranging in length from traditional short-stories to near novella-length pieces, all varying in quality as well as in styles, from standard fantasy to Sci-Fi to steampunk and horror/gothic. Tanith Lee is a really inventive author with one of the most daring imaginations out there.

Each story appealed to me in different ways, and so despite giving the book an overall rating that shows in the tag, it doesn't apply to each story, because some got five stars whereas others got only one from me. In listing the individual ratings, they would go like this:

PAID PIPER

3 stars.

A retelling of "The Pied Piper of Hamelin" set in a distinctly Medieval-looking village that could be located anywhere in Europe, or even in Colonial America. It's one of the stories that felt the most realistic, because besides the magic of the mysterious Piper's music, it could pass off as a real-world story. I didn't like the ending much, though I do admit it fit the story.

RED AS BLOOD

5 stars.

This story, which retells "Snow White," was by far the most shocking (and the most imaginative) of them all. Oh, sure, to cast the Evil Queen as the misunderstood party isn't new, I've seen other authors do the same, and Lee's take on Snow White is also not quite unknown to me (I've read Neil Gaiman doing a variation of the same), but . . . the symbology! The metaphors! The creepiness of it all! The mirror! The ending! Fit to knock one's socks off, I'd say.

THORNS

3 stars.

This looked like it'd be a rather straightforward rehashing of "Sleeping Beauty," but once the fool of a Prince awakened the dormant maiden . . . Heh, you'll have to read it. A very creative twisted ending, but the body of the story is a bit flat and linear.

WHEN THE CLOCK STRIKES

1 star.

"Cinderella" was the basic foundation for this story, but I think Tanith Lee torpedoed the premise into nothingness with the demonic and Satan-worship kinks she introduced. By this point, I began to notice she seemed to be rather obsessed with Satanic and religious elements that, to me, had a distinct Catholic flavour. The twist by the end wasn't good either, both Ashella (the main character) and her mother came out as cartoon Goth melodrama queens. Frankly, an annoying tale.

THE GOLDEN ROPE

3 stars.

A "Rapunzel" retelling that had the same issues as the one above, but that was better written and whose

ending didn't look forcedly bitter for the sake of it. I found the witch here a bit more sympathetic than the golden-haired girl, which is also looking like a Tanith Lee characteristic, because this isn't the first nor the last story where the "bad" character ends up being either more interesting, smarter or more sympathetic than the "good" one.

THE PRINCESS AND HER FUTURE

2 stars.

It looked like it could be a retelling of "The Frog Prince," judging from the elements in common with the original folktale. Too forgettable for my tastes, and it read not well-planned and its conclusion had the taste of something unfinished.

WOLFLAND

4.5 stars.

This was Lee's take on "Little Red Riding Hood" and my second favourite story in the anthology. Extremely creative concept, good deliver, good characterisation and a fitting ending. What else can I ask for? Maybe a sexy Big Bad Wolf, but that wouldn't have worked that well for the plot.

BLACK AS INK

3 stars.

Not sure if this was supposed to be a retelling of "The Swan Maiden," or "The Six Swans," or Tchaikovsky's "Swan Lake," or all of them mashed up. Not that it matters much, anyway. This story had the most tragic ending and overall read like a tragedy, too. Quite in line with the Russian peasant folktale/Tolstoyan novella aura that surrounded the style Lee used for this story.

BEAUTY

3.5 stars.

I know I'm cursed by the gods to forever nitpick and trash any "Beauty and the Beast" that I put my hands on, but for a change I didn't dislike this one (. . . *much*, she whispered as she crossed fingers behind her back). The Science Fiction setting and the fact that Beast wasn't some pretty boy prince that'll soon return to his pretty boy prince ways after a few kisses helped a lot, and despite the heroine being rather unlikable to me, I ended up liking the story in a positives-outweigh-negatives sort of way.

THE WATERS OF SORROW

3 stars.

I didn't recognise what fairy tale this story was based on, maybe the legends of the maidens and ghosts of the Rhine that supposedly haunt and lure sailors to death? Maybe. The feel is supposed to be tragic, but it didn't work for me. I took it for an average ghost story instead, and not as imaginative or as ambitious as Lee had got me used to expect from her.

I'm giving the anthology 4 stars overall in spite of the variance seen above, because I liked the book and liked Tanith Lee, who reminds me somewhat of Angela Carter, one of the best tale retellers and a personal favourite. Highly recommended!

Karin says

This was a wonderful book. I am generally *not* a fan of short stories. I like stories that with lots of character development and there isn't time for that in short stories. Maybe this collection was improved by

already "knowing" the stories, but I don't think that's the only reason. They were definitely not for kids and one or two were rather disturbing, but riveting all the same. I would only say that one had any real innuendo, but the themes were adult (or, at least, young adult).

I read a collection of retellings by Robin McKinley, *The Door in the Hedge* that was okay, but I didn't particularly love. This was a completely different bird. I really enjoyed it.

Maricar Dizon says

original post: [Books Are My Lovers](#)

Red As Blood is a dark retelling of the famous fairytale *Snow White*. In this story, Tanith Lee created a very vivid and eerie depiction of the tale with the Evil Queen as the center of it all. In her version, the Queen is not evil. In fact she is a good witch. *Snow White* here is named Bianca, a princess with a very mysterious and dark disposition who hates to go out of the castle before dusk, with skin as white as snow and lips as red as blood. And for an eerie reason, the magic mirror of the Queen can see all the creatures in their land aside from Bianca. The story unfolds with the same plot and elements as the original fairytale but with darker twists and turns that made me want to read it again and again.

This is actually the first time I ever encountered Tanith Lee and I was amazed by her writing style. There is something magical about her voice that captured me. I also like the way she combined Fantasy and Religion in *Red As Blood*. From the silver cross the queen tries to give to Bianca, to the spell the queen requested to the fallen angel Lucifer and most especially, the "Prince Charming" who saved Bianca in the end.

I only gave this four stars instead of five though, because I think there is something missing at the end of the story. I just can't quite point my finger on what it is.

Red As Blood also reminded me of Neil Gaiman's own version of *Snow White* entitled *Snow, Glass, Apples*, in which the Queen is not really the evil one and that *Snow White* is also not what she seemed to be. I'm still trying to find out if these stories are related to each other (like maybe these stories were in the same anthology or something?). Anyway, I like both of the stories. They are even written differently. I just can't ease away this curiosity. I hope I can find out the relationship between these stories soon.

Kara says

EDIT, just bought my own copy to reread:

Tanith Lee retells nine fairy tales in this darkly delicious collection. Part of her magic is, what she does, stripping out details and ignoring rules of grammar when it suits her, work perfectly in her hands, but in the hands of a lesser writer would be as clunky and amateurish as a 6th grader's essay on *How I Spent My Summer Vacation*. But Lee's so good I'm tempted to *eat* her books in hopes of absorbing some of her writing ability.

Excuse me now while I gush...

Paid Piper -retelling of The Pied Piper of Hamelin

In which the Pied Piper is played by Jesus Christ, who has moved far away from the whole ‘lamb and love’ theme. His price of the “your children” here is much, much cruel than the original version.

Oddly, I didn’t agree with his point that the villagers needed to be less concerned with money and more appreciative of the beauty of life since he frames it badly – he seems to be saying EVERY day should be a care-free, eat, drink, dance, do-no-work party day. In which case – when would you ever *make* the food, clothes, shelter, etc, ?

So, end of the day, everyone comes out looking bad.

Red as Blood- retelling of Snow White

The photo negative of Snow White. Here everything is opposite of the original and it works *perfectly*.

Also, as a weird extra to ensure a happy ending, Jesus Christ plays Prince Charming and does the Superman turn-the-clock back trick.

Thorns- retelling of Sleeping Beauty

It tells the Sleeping Beauty tale in a somewhat straightforward manner from the prince’s POV – and then keeps going to point out just how horrific the curse really was, and even if it was broken, it still has lasting effects on those who were under it.

When The Clock Strikes- retelling of Cinderella

Again, Lee takes the characters and has them switch places so antagonist becomes protagonist, and vice versa. Prince Charming remains as tofu neutral as ever, poor boy.

The story is stuffed full of details that make the story glow as bright as the descriptions of Cinderella’s hair. Tiny details sing out, comprising a whole that is exquisitely wrought.

This story has been reprinted multiple times in several different collections, and it is understandable, since it pretty much embodies the definition of “retelling.”

The Golden Rope- retelling of Rapunzel

Here, for a change of pace, Prince Charming is played by the devil, and oh my, how he enjoys toying with both witch and Rapunzel!

The Princess And Her Future- retelling of The Frog Prince

An interesting explanation to one of the weakest points of the original tale – why was the princess playing with a “golden ball” and why was she so upset by its loss?

Despite enough foreshadowing to know this story isn’t going to have a happy ending, the end still comes as a shock. I think the story could have used a few more down to earth details about time and place, but that’s just me.

Wolfland- retelling of Little Red Riding Hood

Most versions of Red Riding Hood, even ones set as far away from the original tale as modern day Los Angeles, stick to the idea that Red and family are on the lower end of the economic scale.

So, it was a surprise here to see Red Riding Hood's family elevated to rich nobles. But, despite wealth, rank and privilege, there are still some very scary monsters to deal with, both those with, without and with both, pelts and fangs.

The setting was absolute *perfect* for this retelling – autocratic rulers pitted against both a cruel season and animal that doesn't care about someone else's' absolute power.

Black As Ink- retelling of Swan Lake

A story in the “magical realism” genre that doesn't take advantage of the between-the-wars setting nearly enough. It also strays so far away from the original fairy tale as to be just about unrecognizable, and therefore there is nothing to connect to.

A good story on its own, but I didn't think much of it as a fairy tale retelling.

Beauty- retelling of Beauty and the Beast

The jewel of the collection and the only Sci-Fi offering. We follow the tale of Beauty and the Beast in a future that is dazzling to behold where Beauty has to pay a price, not just for her father, but her whole species, which make her family shudder with fear and revulsion.

The story would be disdained by a fan of “hard” sci-fi, but I thought it was absolutely wonderful – and a great example of the old chestnut about magic and technology being indistinguishable, which, of course, made it so perfect for this collection, despite the far future setting. I wanted to *live* in this world, and oh wow was I jealous of Beauty!

Bronwyn says

A wonderful classic of dark fantasy; every short story in this collection is a small jewel. Comparable in quality and prose to Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber* of which I'm confident Lee was heavily indebted to.

James says

Many of these are pretty grim and are a fun twist on the old fairy tales. A good read but maybe not her best. I think I've read some of them in the distant past and possibly even this collection. The impetus to read this came from a list posted by author Kate Elliott, consensus seems to be it was a mixed bag. I think for a first Lee read, I would recommend *The Gorgon and Other Beastly Tales*.

There's one thing I hate about GoodReads: finding out that an author I like has passed on, which is the case with Tanith Lee. I'm happier thinking they are working on their next book or restoring an old mansion or otherwise enjoying life.
