

Unbox Your Words

Fairy-tale-crime mashup!

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Newsletter and Unbox Your Words monthly prompts:

<https://taniahershman.substack.com/>

Red

by Melissa Ostrom

Matchbook Review

Should she have ignored him? He smiled. Should she not have smiled back? He asked her where her friends were. Should she have lied? Should she have said somewhere around here, somewhere nearby? Should she not have been alone in the first place? Was a girl allowed to walk in these woods alone? He said he liked her outfit. She said thank you. Should she not have worn this outfit? Not have worn red? When he asked her where she was going, should she have said to visit her boyfriend the cop, her father the pastor, her grandfather the judge? And when she opened the door to the house in the woods, should she have locked it behind her? Should she have realized a lock would make no difference? That safety, happiness, and hope were already gone? Should she have noticed the fruit flies over the bowl of Winesaps, how the flies weren't burrowing but hovering, disturbed, and traveling fast? And what about her grandmother? When Grandma didn't answer her hello, should she have left? Should she have grabbed the poker by the hearth, just in case? Should she have cleared her throat and prepared to scream, just in case? Should she have shouted out the window for help, for an eyewitness, for someone to believe her, just in case? Like the hunter she saw in the hunting blind by the stream. Would he hear her? Would he help her? Would he hurt her, too? And what about the stranger? Should she confront him? Fight him? Try to escape him? Would she stand a chance? Would she even see him coming? Would she notice his shadow in the uncertain, soft light that pooled across the floor?

THREE FEMINIST FABLES

Suniti Namjoshi



Case History

AFTER the event Little R. traumatized. Wolf not slain. Forester is wolf. How else was he there exactly on time? Explains this to mother. Mother not happy. Thinks that the forester is extremely nice. Grandmother dead. Wolf not dead. Wolf marries mother. R. not happy. R. is a kid. Mother thinks wolf is extremely nice. Please to see shrink. Shrink will make it clear that wolves on the whole are extremely nice. R. gets it straight. Okay to be wolf. Mama is a wolf. She is a wolf. Shrink is a wolf. Mama and shrink, and forester also, extremely uptight.

Miss Hood in the Nursing Home

There are at all times footsteps on the landing
It's March. Last autumn's last leaves hope and hope
like ghosts of frogs to find their late
lives in the pools of air the bare trees hold
outside her windows. She'll undress
and go to bed an hour to stretch
the day a little and then scold
her mind for wandering as it resolves
to call for Matron and confess
that she has fairytale for memory
and can't afford to stay at Grateloup.
She'll make for one more time the intimate
attempt to constitute the 'I'
without which we shall have no understanding.
Good. Good. Her eyelids have begun to twitch
in that exact way we term *gratum lupis*
which means of course agreeable to wolves.

by Peter Bennet

Before

by Joy Baglio

Fairy Tale Review

Let's talk about the fairy godmother, before. At this point, she is just a woman, still relatively young, approaching her life's precipice, fairy-status undiscovered, role of godmother yet realized. It doesn't matter how all that will come to be, only that right now she works at a diner, spends the day penciling people's orders on a notepad and running back and forth from the kitchen to her tables, carrying plates of eggs and buttered toast, a practiced smile on her face. On her breaks, she smokes outside on the picnic table by the road, or calls her children, who are with her ex-husband this week, and at night she watches TV with her mother, who lives with her and is slowly forgetting most things, including the plots of her favorite movies, which they now watch over and over. That weekend the fairy godmother takes her sister's children to the water park so her sister (who is going through a divorce of her own) can have a break from it all. The water park is in a strip mall surrounded by desert. It is full of screaming children and depleted mothers and overpriced junk food. The fairy godmother thinks it might be the closest place to Hell she's ever been. Tomorrow after work, she'll help a friend pick out a dress for the friend's wedding, then she'll make dinner for her mother and watch *Moonstruck* for the third time that week, and she has to schedule an appointment with the dermatologist at some point because a strange rash has emerged across her shoulder blades and back like something is trying to crawl out of her skin. She doesn't know yet that she has wings, or fairy blood, and what is magic anyway except wishful thinking, a dream that is not really her own? She has not met the girl she will save yet, who at this point is still only a baby, still loved and happy, but perhaps the two are already merged, connected across time and space, opposite sides of the same coin. Perhaps every fairy godmother who crystalizes carriages from garden vegetables, who breaks open the sealed shutters of someone else's dead-end life, first sits on the ledge of her own transformation, a starved hope inside her, a dream of her own, and wonders what she needs to become herself, wonders when she'll have the courage to leap.

The Stepsisters

Sage Tyrtle

1.

Mother is brushing my limp hair. She piles it on top of my head, she braids it, she arranges sprigs of baby's breath that only end up falling onto the floor. She throws her hands up, dropping the brush onto the dressing table.

My sister looks up and beams a gummy smile as she bangs two blocks together. Mother runs her fingers over my sister's fuzzy head and says, *You will have bouncy, glorious curls, yes, you will*, but when my sister's hair grows it is as listless as mine.

2.

Papa swoops through the doorway on shore leave. Snow-covered and roaring with joy. We run to him and he lifts us into the air, one in each arm. We nuzzle his coat. We breathe in his wildness. We smell the sea that clings to him, reminding him to come back. He sits by the fire and asks for stories and we trade the thread of the tale of when he was gone back and forth, words riding the warm air until we have lulled Papa to sleep and we curl up with him. Three sleeping hounds by the fire. Breathing like one creature.

3.

Every morning when Papa is at sea, the maid heats the tongs on the fire. She frames Mother's cheekbones with playful curls and Mother leans in close to the mirror to blow herself a kiss. Her eyes are a sparkling, enchanted pool and she loses herself in them sometimes. Shaking herself awake when she feels our small hands on her arm, she swoops down the stairs and out the doorway. We watch the horses trot away, their heads high and haughty.

As we grow taller she buys me silken gowns, dresses my sister in lace so delicate it bruises. She gives us matching pearl necklaces. She coats our faces with white and our lips with vermilion. She says *It takes attention from your nose* and *Can't you ever walk with a semblance of grace* and *Only one meal today, you fat ugly things*. Then smiles as if she is saying love words. Runs her hand over our too-plump cheeks.

4.

When Mother tells us that Papa's ship has sunk, we run upstairs to our room. I open the armoire and we pile in together, just two small shaking hounds now, sitting in the

dark. My sister asks for a story. *Once upon a time*, I say, pretending the warmth of our breath is the fire, pretending the gowns hanging behind us are Papa's arms. *Once upon a time, the sea fell in love with a good man. The good man loved the sea too, but he kept going to shore and every time he did the sea's heart cracked a little more. Until one day, the sea rocked the man to sleep. And pulled him down, and down, and promised to never let him go.*

5.

Mother sells the golden candlesticks. She sells the chaise longue. She sells the sable coat that turned us into bears and wolves on rainy days. She sells the chairs and the tables and the rugs. She sells the sapphire earrings Papa gave her when I was born. She sells my sister's doll, the one in the green gown with her own purse and tiny golden coins inside. Mother sells her own green gown, she sells every gown but the one she's wearing, she sells and sells until our whispers echo. She sells until all that's left to sell are her sumptuous curls or herself. So she chooses herself.

6.

In the new house Mother wears a diamond ring. Her new gowns are silkier, glossier. Her glittering reflection is everywhere. Mother's new husband looks at our too-plump cheeks, our too-big noses, our too-sunken eyes. He says to call him Sir. His daughter does not say anything at all. She sits by the kitchen fire mourning her mother, her tears making tiny dark spots in the ashes. We are impatient with her silence. We are impatient with her grief. We are jealous that her mother loved her so much that her love still hovers in the air. In the ashes.

7.

Often in the night I wake to Mother pacing our bedroom. Candlelight on her gleaming teeth as she hisses, *Monstrous girls. Hideous, dreadful girls.* My sister's sweet sleeping breath behind me. I close my eyes and count to ten, willing Mother away before my sister wakes. Sometimes it works.

8.

The new husband sits in the ashes with his daughter, trying and trying to get her to speak. When she won't, he sits with his head in his hands for a long time before standing. He snaps his fingers and the scullery maid brushes the ashes from his long woollen coat. The next day he leaves for a long journey to make money to pay angry shopkeepers for the gilt-edged carriage and the mirrors and the diamonds on Mother's long fingers. When he's been gone two days Mother brings a moth-eaten

blanket to the kitchen and sets it next to the girl. *You like it so much in here? You don't need your fancy bedroom, then.*

She turns to me and claps her hands. Her exquisite smile is focused on me and despite everything my heart soars. *There!* she says. *No more sharing a room with your little sister. You've got your own room now, won't that be lovely?* That night I lie in the girl's curtained, canopied bed which smells like lilacs, the way the girl always smells even though she spends her days by the fire. I lie there and all I can think of is my sister alone and Mother's seething words. The way the candlelight catches the spittle spilling from her mouth.

I stride back down the hall and under the covers I nestle my back against hers. I don't sleep in the girl's room again.

9.

Mother smashes the peacock vase when she discovers her new husband is not wealthy enough to rate her daughters a place at the Palace Ball. My sister and I stand on the stairs, watching, and we squeeze each other's hands, saying with our fingers *It will be all right* as our mother turns the peacock into powder with her boot. Then runs upstairs to smash us.

10.

My sister's eyes are closed. She's running her finger over the spinning globe in the new husband's library. *Stop*, she whispers, and I stop the globe. She opens her eyes and taps the globe, a place as far from Mother as it's possible to go. *We will sail there*, she says, and she is so sure, so earnest, I turn my head so she can't see my mouth twist. *And we will live in a small cottage. And the smell of the sea will be everywhere.*

Later I wait at the window until the cook has gone outside to fetch water then run to the kitchen. The girl doesn't even look up when I scoop a handful of ashes into my hands. Upstairs I hide under the bed. I inhale the stale smokiness and wait, but all I can think of is my father, showing me how to add and subtract. Telling me I am so very, very smart.

I don't feel a mother's love. Not hers. Not my own.

11.

The dark streets are damp with rain. It's stopped now, though, and we know to be out of Mother's sight tonight of all nights. We wander the town and hope Mother will have fallen into her wine glass by the time we return.

I stop, bow to a broom left outside a bakery, my nose almost touching the ground. *Oh fair lady*, I say in the Prince's plummy drawl. *Won't you dance with me?* The broom and I twirl and spin to the faint music that drifts from the Palace and when I grow tired of Miss Broom I throw her down on the ground. *Your ugliness displeases me!* I pronounce as my sister giggles. *Bring me someone beautiful! No, better, bring me someone rich!* And we wonder as we skip laughing past the dark shops — who would wish to be in that stuffy room, when they could be here in the wind? In the dark?

12.

The scullery maid is dusting the kitchen and chatting with the cook — *made of glass*, they say. She dusts the counters and the mantelpiece and the stone-silent girl. *Whoever fits it perfect, they gets swept away to the Palace!*

The cook says, *Oh yes? Well I got a dainty foot, me*, and pirouettes with surprising grace as the scullery maid goggles. I turn to leave and see Mother standing behind me. Her eyes bottomless.

13.

Mother taps on our door and opens it. We bumble our way to awake, my sister sitting up faster, saying, *Strawberry tarts! Oh!* and Mother puts the plate between us on the bed. The tarts are glistening, the tops cut to look like flowers.

I made sweets for my sweet girls, she says, and we are helpless before her dazzling attention, her gentle kiss on our foreheads, and when the tarts are bitter we only say *thank you Mother, thank you.*

14.

I am lying on the couch counting the squares on my gown when I hear my sister howling. I stumble down the hall, still counting the squares because I can't stop, and I see my sister clutching her bloody foot. Mother pushes me down on the sofa and all that's in my head are numbers and she wrenches off my boot *minus one* and opens her scissors and whispers, *You won't be ugly when you're Queen.* I draw breath to reply and the blade decapitates my foot, and on the floor my toes *minus five* mingle with my sister's toes *minus ten* and our toes are so surprised to meet each other in this spreading ruby pool.

I hear a flurry of knocks at the front door, a shout of *Open for the Crown Prince* and Mother drops the dripping scissors. She runs down the hallway and I grab my sister's hand. We stumble, two good feet between us, through the kitchen to the back door. The girl doesn't look up. I fumble at the latch and then we're in the fields behind the house, lurching through the tall grass, our ragged breath crowding our ears.

15.

And perhaps we run all the way to the docks. Perhaps a kind sailor, on hearing our tale of woe, bandages our too-small feet. Perhaps the golden bracelet around my wrist is enough to pay our passage to the other side of the world. That is the story I will tell my sister, as we lie together in the forest. Our blood soaking the soil underneath us. *We live in a cottage*, I will whisper, stroking her limp hair, hoping to see her smile. *And the smell of the sea is everywhere.*

Fairy Tales & Characters

Anansi - the god of stories, wisdom, and trickery, often in the form of a spider.

Elves and the Shoemaker - A shoemaker runs out of leather. In the morning, he finds a pair of shoes and sells them. The next night, another pair of shoes appears. The third night he sees two elves making shoes. In gratitude, he makes winter clothes for the elves.

Emperor's New Clothes - A vain emperor hires two people to make him new clothes. They trick him into walking around naked, telling him the cloth isn't visible to people unfit for his position or who are stupid. At first, people pretend to see the clothes, but a child says that the emperor is naked and people start to agree. The emperor realizes he has been swindled.

The Gingerbread Man - A woman bakes a gingerbread man but when she takes him out of the oven, he runs away. The woman, her husband, pig, cow & horse chase him but no-one can catch him. At the river, a fox tells him he can jump on his tail and he'll take him across. As they cross the river, the fox swims deeper. When the gingerbread man jumps on his nose, the fox eats him.

Mohammed with the magic finger: The baby is known throughout the city as 'Mohammed with the magic finger,' because, whenever he stuck out his little finger, he was able to see anything that was happening for as far as two days' distance.

The Black Cloth: a young orphan girl named Aïwa, whose mother has died, is set an impossible task by her stepmother: to wash a black cloth until it is white.

The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter: A bamboo cutter finds a tiny girl inside a glowing bamboo stalk. The girl grows into a beautiful and desirable woman, attracting numerous suitors including the emperor. However, she reveals that she is not from Earth, but from the moon and is eventually taken back, leaving the bamboo cutter and her suitors heartbroken.

Tokoyo: A girl vows to return to her father after the Emperor banishes him. She visits forbidden islands, spies on imperial gossip, and offers herself up as a sacrifice to save a young girl—though instead of dying, she frees the Emperor from a powerful curse.

Goldilocks and the Three Bears - Goldilocks goes into a cabin in the woods and finds 3 bowls of porridge, one too cold, one too hot and the other just right, so she eats it. She finds the three beds, one was too hard, one too soft and one just right, so she falls asleep. The bears come home and frighten her and she runs away.

Hansel and Gretel - The two childrens' wicked stepmother leave them in the forest where they find a house made of sweets. The evil witch that lives there captures them and is going to make soup out of them. Gretel escapes and pushes the witch into the boiling water. The children find treasure and they are never hungry again.

Jack and the Bean Stalk - When Jack trades the family cow for magic beans, his mother is furious and throws them out of the window. The next morning there's a giant beanstalk. Jack climbs up & finds a giant with gold coins, which he steals. Later, he returns and steals a golden egg from a hen. The 3rd time he tried to steal a magic harp but the giant chased him. Jack chopped the beanstalk down and the giant died.

SEARCH HISTORY

by [Iain Rowan](#) (Flashbang contest winner, 2012)

"internet dating"

"what wear on first date"

"seduction techniques"

"italian restaurants"

cheap rooms travel lodge

"love at first sight"

"how soon is too soon to propose?"

"engagement rings"

"engagement rings" platinum

"engagement rings" platinum "interest free credit"

"engagement rings" gold

"how not to be overbearing in relationship"

"wedding venues"

what does it mean partner want space

signs your partner is seeing someone else

can you undo clear all internet history

"how trace call hung up no answer"

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"keylogger for windows how do I"

"private detection agencies"

strategies keep temper

how keep calm

twenty ways to keep your cool

anger management

confront partner cheating what say

confront partner cheating how keep temper

anger management

anger management

plastic sheeting

woodchipper hire

"industrial bleach"

"carpet cleaning services"

best prices sell gold engagement ring

"internet dating"

Transient Views

by Rishi Dastidar

When thieves gather in a room
(they always do, crime is lonely),
what they're waiting for is lightning,
to illuminate the perfection of their
schemes, a change to gliff the future
riches coming their way.

They are waiting for the jiffy.
We could get more precise about this,
but then we would lose the thread
that connects jiffy to jemmy to jewel.
Let's get actual instead: it's the time
it takes for desire to take a form,
meet its want, Catch an eye,
change a life, wreck a heart.

This poem is inspired by a jiffy
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jiffy_\(time\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jiffy_(time))

Bluebeard's Daughter

Frances Gapper (Into the Wild Wood)

After Dad forbade me to enter a certain room, I simply waited until he'd gone out. Then I unlocked the door and found my dismembered mother and sisters. Luckily I've always been good at jigsaws, so I began putting them in order. Anna wore a blue-stoned ring, I recalled, while Jane had a long second toe. Some bits were missing – I made do with objects fetched from nearby bedrooms, e.g. substituting a lampshade for Nora's lost head. Then having pricked my finger I scattered blood, restoring them to life. Assembled, they made a fearsome army. Together we awaited Dad's return.

Sunita Namjoshi – 3 Feminist Fables

SINK, and forest also, extremely up...



A Room of His Own

THE fifth time around things were different. He gave her instructions, he gave her the keys (including the little one) and rode off alone. Exactly four weeks later he reappeared. The house was dusted, the floors were polished and the door to the little room hadn't been opened. Bluebeard was stunned.

'But weren't you curious?' he asked his wife.

'No,' she answered.

'But didn't you want to find out my innermost secrets?'

'Why?' said the woman.

'Well,' said Bluebeard, 'it's only natural. But didn't you want to want to know who I really am?'

'You are Bluebeard and my husband.'

'But the contents of the room. Didn't you want to see what is inside that room?'

'No,' said the creature, 'I think you're entitled to a room of your own.'

This so incensed him that he killed her on the spot. At the trial he pleaded provocation.

**NOVELS IN THREE LINES, BY FÉLIX FÉNÉON, TRANSLATED BY LUC SANTE,
PAPERBACK, 208 PAGES, LIST PRICE: \$14.00**

M. Jonnart denied to the commission that the new tax plan was a scheme to make the budget's ends meet.

A criminal virago, Mlle Tulle, was sentenced by the Rouen court to 10 years' hard labor, while her lover got five.

Because of his poster opposing the strikebreakers, the students of Brest lycee hissed their teacher, M. Litalien, an aide to the mayor.

Nurse Elise Bachmann, whose day off was yesterday, put on a public display of insanity.

A complaint was sworn by the Persian physician Djai Khan against a compatriot who had stolen from him a tiara.

A dozen hawkers who had been announcing news of a nonexistent anarchist bombing at the Madeleine have been arrested.

A certain madwoman arrested downtown falsely claimed to be nurse Elise Bachmann. The latter is perfectly sane.

On Place du Pantheon, a heated group of voters attempted to roast an effigy of M. Auffray, the losing candidate. They were dispersed.

Arrested in Saint-Germain for petty theft, Joël Guilbert drank sublimate. He was detoxified, but died yesterday of delirium tremens.

The photographer Joachim Berthoud could not get over the death of his wife. He killed himself in Fontanay-sous-Bois.

Lit by her son, 5, a signal flare burst under the skirts of Mme. Roger, of Clichy; damages were considerable.

On the bowling lawn a stroke leveled M. André, 75, of Levallois. While his ball was still rolling he was no more.

A dishwasher from Nancy, Vital Frérotte, who had just come back from Lourdes cured forever of tuberculosis, died Sunday by mistake.

"In Oyonnax, Mlle. Cottet, 18, threw acid in the face of M. Besnard, 25. Love, obviously.