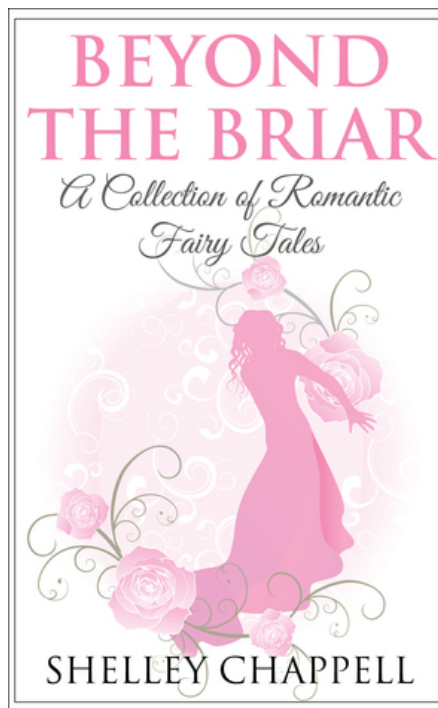




Beyond the Briar: A Collection of Romantic Fairy Tales

Shelley Chappell

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Beyond the Briar: A Collection of Romantic Fairy Tales Shelley Chappell

A collection of romantic novelettes, retelling four well-known fairy tales.

Stars on Dark Water: A Retelling of Rapunzel

In a tower in the desert, a young man is imprisoned by the lengths of his enchanted hair

Ranpasatusan: A Retelling of Rumpelstiltskin

A travelling storyteller gains a peculiar ally when she is compelled to spin straw into gold

The Sleeping Maid: A Retelling of Sleeping Beauty

A village blacksmith will do anything to reach his sweetheart, trapped behind a wall of cursed briar

The Old Boot: A Retelling of Cinderella

The boy who keeps house for his stepfamily must get to the ball to win the heart of the cobbler's daughter

Beyond the Briar: A Collection of Romantic Fairy Tales Details

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From Reader Review Beyond the Briar: A Collection of Romantic Fairy Tales for online ebook

Angela Oliver says

With wry humour and a touch of magic, these are a fresh and original take on the classics. Chappell has a knack of taking the familiar and weaving a new and enchanting spell with it.

Janna says

Overall I liked the book, had some interesting ideas and some very beautiful pictures. I enjoyed the different settings, stepping away from the traditional Medieval European settings but I felt there was so much retelling that not much remained from the fairy tales but the faintest idea. It thus lost a bit of the fairy tale magic. One problem for me was the quite formulaic approach: Three out of four couples in the book were childhood sweethearts and thus never really fell in love with each other but for a short flashback that seemed much the same in all three of them. And everyone in the village roots for the couple, because they are such a strong supportive community. It's no surprise that I therefore liked the story best that was different (Rumpelstiltskin's retelling).

While the main couple was fleshed out and the stories promoted modern-day concepts of society, it never went anywhere, nor did it pose challenges. The modern-day concepts were either wildly accepted or people didn't care (i.e. a small village gaining independence just-because), which is more true to the fairy-tale style but also let some potential go to waste.

Rapunzel:

I have to say, I really didn't like the story. I did enjoy the setting, but all three characters fell flat for me, the romance didn't evolve and the djinn's development didn't happen. I feel, like you can't give reasons and background for a character's behaviour and let the other characters realise that it's a fault of circumstances and then never try to change those circumstances but let your story go out by the easy route (i.e. kill the witch).

There was not enough of the original fairy tale, and what was in the story was changed to an even clearer black and white than the original tale. The father did break into the witch's garden on behalf of his demanding wife. Here, everything was of course an accident and his wife would never have been that demanding, because they were the good ones. One little logical mistake was that the father took the secret to his grave but somehow the mother knew it all anyway. I assume, she knew the whole time because she listened in, but there was no explanation and the text explicitly states, that she often wondered, why he was looking at his son with sorrow and took the secret to his grave.

Rumpelstiltskin:

As I said, I liked this story most. Sunny was an enjoyable character, as was her father, who was a charming grey figure. It was the most magical story with Sunny falling in love with a spring. The reference to silk worms was nice. The only thing I didn't enjoy that much was the ending itself. There was too much hesitance in their meeting and decision on whether to start a relationship or not that it lost most of its initial romance. On another note, it was very obvious from the beginning who the guy of her dreams was and how it all worked together, but compared to the other stories it felt completely thought out and came full-circle.

Briar Rose:

This was the second-best story. I liked the whole idea centering the story around the life of the normal people that got separated by the briar rose hedge and it was a sweet love story with a fairy tale ending. What didn't

work for me was that there was actually so much sorrow around the main couple, that it felt kind of wrong that only they should have their happy ending while everyone else had to live with the consequences. I couldn't really feel happy for Goran and Caterina because everyone else had to deal with the reality of their fears while they got off lightly. I also wasn't too glad about the choice that Briar Rose was a clichéd spoiled brat. Since we didn't get to know her in person or anything besides her, I naturally assume that her part of the fairy tale is intact, which means she was not just gifted with beauty but also with kindness, intelligence, fairness, generosity and all good things the other eleven fairies could think off (or twelve since apparently it wasn't the twelfth fairy that changed the death sentence to sleep but the thirteenth fairy's plan all along).

Cinderella:

The story was okayish. I didn't really get the gender change as it didn't really serve much purpose but for the brothers to be even crueler? The romance was alright but the story was sorely missing challenges. Everything fell in place too easily. Miguel might have suffered from the mistreatment but he turned his fortune around... or rather it got turned around for him completely off-screen. Thus the whole message of Cinderella got lost and turned into something else entirely, progressive villagers against superficial royalty without any true interaction or confrontation. The montage about what happened when the prince came to town didn't work for me and I was annoyed by the style after the fifth comma. I appreciate the experiment but it didn't work in prose style and might have been more fitting for a dialogue segment. I did however like the very real struggles of Beauty misunderstanding Miguel's silence and the absence of letters.

On the whole these were very interesting concepts that did work sometimes and sometimes not so much. Maybe next time there could be more variety not just in settings but in romantic set-ups.

Janine Lattimore says

“The stories she wove as a result were quilted masterpieces which audiences could tuck around their shoulders for comfort and warmth. By listening to the people she met, she learned what different folk feared and loved and laughed about, and she told tales that joined them together”

Description of the story-teller, Sunny, in Ranpasatusan - Beyond the Briar

In Beyond the Briar, author Shelly Chappell has taken four traditional fairy stories and given them an intelligent retelling imbued with beauty, grace and a deep understanding of the human soul. Ostensibly written for young adults, this insightful reincarnation of the stories of Rapunzel, Sleeping Beauty, Rumpelstiltskin and Cinderella also captivates adult readers. Chappell's narratives are sometimes light and playfully humorous, sometimes moving and thought provoking and sometimes beautifully lyrical.

While the stories retain the fairy tale elements of romantic love, magic and happy endings, Chappell's tales all contain significant twists on the original versions both in the story-lines and in the characters. In some stories the geographical location is different, in others the setting is brought forward to a more modern time, in others the gender of the key characters is swapped. The main female characters are all strong, confident women, but this is not a simple reversal where the women are strong and the men weak. The characters are much more complex than that. The strength of the female characters establishes a balanced equality with the leading male characters. In Chappell's stories there is no one hero, male or female, who swoops in to save the day, instead the main characters both contribute to save each other.

I have to confess that at first the idea of retold fairy stories didn't really grab my interest, but I decided to read this collection because it was a finalist for Best Collection in the 2015 Sir Julius Vogel Awards

(Ranpasatusan was also a finalist for Best Novelette and Chappell was a finalist for Best New Talent) and because the author is part of the writers' guild that I belong to. However, I was captivated from the moment I started reading the first story by the quality of the writing and the originality of the narrative. If you like romance, especially historical romance or fantasy romance I think that you will enjoy reading Beyond the Briar.

A great read for something fun and different.

Ella says

Short but sweet. (Also KIWI AUTHOR!! WHOOOOOO!)

Melissa Parsons says

In this highly-readable collection of short novellas, Shelley Chappell invites us to suspend our disbelief one degree further and to contemplate four famous fairy tales from a fresh perspective. The resultant stories take us down alternate trails and pose intriguing questions.

Have you ever wondered what it would have been like for the ordinary folk of the castle, enduring the Hundred Years' Sleeping Curse alongside her Royal Highness? Or imagined how the story might play out if Rapunzel were set not in a European forest, but in an exotic desert kingdom?

This book plays with these and other well-known stories in a delightfully quirky and romantic way. Each tale retains the basic shape of the original yet contains a unique twist: a different cultural setting, a reversal of the male/female roles, or an unusual narrative point of view. Through it all, the author remains true to the essence of fairy tale – that literary realm where kindness and virtue are rewarded as they should be, and where the things that truly matter are held in the heart and not beheld with the outward eye.

'Beyond the Briar' would likely appeal to aficionados of speculative fiction looking for a touch of whimsy or to romance lovers with a nostalgic leaning. It would undoubtedly make a welcome gift for any teenage niece or daughter.

Tabby says

Pure magic. If you love fairy tale retellings then I can't recommend this collection enough. My particular favorites are Ranpasatusan (Rumpelstiltskin retelling) and The Sleeping Maid (Sleeping Beauty retelling). Truly read them all, they are worth it!

Marquise says

This small anthology of retold tales contains the following four stories:

STARS ON DARK WATER

A gender-bent retelling of *Rapunzel* in a setting that reminisces the Bedouins of the North African deserts

and has clearly Middle-Eastern mythological elements, like Djinns. It's very original for the setting and the fact that the Maiden in the Tower is a male whilst the knight-errant prince who rescues the damsel is a woman instead. But besides these elements and the touch of *Thousand Nights and One Night* flavouring, its plot sticks rather very closely to the original European fairy tale.

As a criticism, I'd say that the ending was rushed and dealt with so quickly as to have the feel of a *Deus ex machina* crowning moment; the impression was that the attempt to stick to the original's ending prevailed over doing a better handled ending.

RAMPASATUSAN

For me, this retelling of *Rumpelstiltskin* was the weakest in the anthology and the least credible. A Western travelling musician gets the help of a Japanese mythological being when a cruel *daimyo* forces her to spin straw into gold to pay for her father's insult to his honour; that's plausible enough if you ignore the approximate period the story hints at, because when you remember that in that period Japan was a closed country and foreigners from Europe couldn't just drop by and be welcomed whenever they felt a yen to go visit the place... then it stretches believability too far even for a fantasy. And how come Sunny and John can communicate so easily with the Japanese as soon as they arrive if there's no clue at all that they can speak the language?

THE SLEEPING MAID

The best story of them all, that I'm rating five stars. It's not just very original for its plot and focus but also very touching and has a morale about loyalty and enduring love.

Most retellings of the *Sleeping Beauty in the Wood* tale I've read always deal with the princess or the prince who will awaken her with a kiss, and sometimes the witch. But what about the people from the castle who are trapped inside with the princess when the sleeping spell falls on them? Shelley Chappell aims to answer that with her retelling, whose focus is instead on the blacksmith sweetheart of a girl working as a maid in the castle that gets caught within when the spell hits it. This blacksmith, Gorran, tries everything in his power to enter the castle and rescue his girl, including going to find the fairy responsible for the curse. All in vain, because the curse is so powerful that only a prince kissing the princess will undo it, so poor Gorran has to wait patiently for years and years until Mr Right Prince arrives and breaks the curse.

THE OLD BOOT

Another gender-bent retelling, this time of *Cinderella*, and the only one without magic or spells or curses. In this take, the "cinder girl" is a cinder boy who is abused physically and emotionally by his stepfather and stepbrothers, and the "prince charming" is the pretty daughter of a well-off cobbler, both growing up together since childhood and becoming sort of sweethearts early on... until the Prince appears to ruin everything, which makes him the villain here (fancy Prince Charming being the bad apple?). Like the other retellings, this one also sticks pretty closely to the original, as there's even the famous ball at the palace and the lost slipper (in this case, boot).

Overall, it's a lovely collection, with very creative storytelling. The author has lots of imagination and I hope she continues doing retellings, because she'd find unexplored angles for other tales.

Renaë Rue says

I won a copy of this book. I've always loved fairy tales... I've been told my dad read them to me when I was still in the womb. I was so excited to find out I won the giveaway for this!!!! It is a fun read of short stories giving some of the fairy tales we all know and love a different sort of twist. I won't spoil any of the stories

for you but I recommend this if you, like me, are a lover of fairy tales, fantasy, or those sort of genres of books. :)

Shannon says

I received this book as in a goodreads contest. I thought this book was a fun retelling of traditional fairy tales. The book started out with a strong retelling of Rapunzel, the next story wasn't as story, however the book picked back up again. I with my favorite was the retelling of Rumpelstiltskin. The author does a good job at setting the stories in vibrant settings.

Em Lowe says

This isn't normally a genre I read, and yet, once I picked my Kindle up this afternoon, I found I couldn't put it down.

I absolutely love Chappell's style of writing, and found the unexpected twists of fairy tales I've known since childhood utterly fascinating.

I am really looking forward to further installments in the future.
