

A Warning about Swans

R. M. Romero

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Fairy tales and myths form a seamless whole in R. M. Romero's fantasy novel *A Warning about Swans*—a story about fate, identity, belonging, and deception.

In the far reaches of the Bavarian forests, Hilde is one of six daughters of the air—a dreamed creation of Odin. Unlike her sisters, who bring life to the woods and swiftness to the beasts therein, her gift is tinged with darkness: when wearing her swan-wing cloak, Hilde can guide the spirits of dying animals to peace. But she loathes being linked to death, and thus shucks her swan wings to play human with a mortal friend, Richter, a destitute baron with dreams of wealth. As a creature fashioned from dreams and magic, Hilde can create jewels for Richter, riches that bring them both to the capital in style.

But Hilde's strangeness marks her as Other in the human world, even as it draws the affection of a Jewish, nonbinary artist, Franz, whose place in the modernizing German world is uncertain. Torn between her obligations to the forest and her heart, Hilde struggles to escape the deceptions that wove a prison for her.

Echoes of *Swan Lake* and folktales about animal bride transformations infuse the story with folklore. Written in prose poetry, it leaps across the page in italics and indentations, mimicking the flights of Hilde and her sisters. At times, the narrative flies too fast: its denouement of treachery and sacrifice unfolds on the last few pages. But its characters, who are shaped by memories and desires, guide it well, even as their predicaments take on a mythic sense of inevitability.

Grounded in history and myths, *A Warning about Swans* is a dreamy, eloquent fairy tale with timeless reflections on love, duty, and betrayal.

JEANA JORGENSEN (July / August 2023)

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