

## The Scarlet Circus

**Jane Yolen**

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In the fairy tales and poems of Jane Yolen's *The Scarlet Circus*, there are curious permutations of haunting, mesmerizing love stories.

Featuring previously published stories alongside new work and personal commentary, this entertaining book explores pleasures and disappointments that are as otherworldly in their expressions as they are humane. The entries are linked by desires that reveal themselves in steady, confident, and clever ways. They leave just enough leeway to imagine the provocative outcomes of their characters' fates; they're also often refreshing in their versions of happy endings, with occasional exceptions of loss. With their treasure-seeking, imaginative turns, the entries chase familiar themes into strange new territories.

Here, a marriage between a sun-cursed prince and a disbelieving woman results in regret. Elsewhere, an elf meets the ghostly inspiration behind Shakespeare's Juliet, prompting her fateful pursuit of love. In another story, an average princess with no marriage prospects discovers the power of wish-making through embroidery, orchestrating her own future; still elsewhere, an ordinary stepdaughter grieves her father's death, but still finds a way to secure herself love.

"A Ghost of an Affair" stitches worldly details with fantasy elements as a modern artisan's jewelry sales to Neiman Marcus are at home with silversmithing in Scotland. And the magic of love defies logic in other entries: people who were separated by a century meet during a rainstorm, and while an authorial voice steps in to quip about how "corny" it all is, the event also leads toward a sweet finale. It's in these splendid spaces between the book's winking tributes to sentimentality and its swerving surprises that an unabashed sense of romance lingers.

With romantic tales inspired by history, dragons, and literature, *The Scarlet Circus* is a bright romance anthology marked by people's agile maneuvers.

KAREN RIGBY (January / February 2023)

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