

MILK FROM A MAIDEN'S BREAST

by

Elizabeth Scarborough

Trugemma was the bravest, the most powerful, the most beautiful, and altogether the most wondrous warrior in all Escore. Everyone said so. Her name was in everyone's thoughts, on everyone's lips. For she, with her many brilliant and decisive victories in the field, was Escore's hope against Darkness. She was absolutely marvelous, even in a land where marvels were routine, and absolutely undefeated. That is, until the day the weres cornered her and her small expeditionary band on the edge of the deep Moss Forest and growled and howled with the expectation of turning Trugemma into a lot of brave, powerful, beautiful bloody tatters.

This was *not* how it was supposed to go, and the moss wife Freyti hopped from one frost-furred foot to the other in agitation as she watched from moss cover at the edge of the deep woods.

Trugemma the triumphant would have had no problem with a few measly weres, Freyti knew, had winter not allied itself with darkness. Out there, where the trees stood naked and solitary, snow drifted deep from trunk to trunk, glittering beneath an anemic moon from which it seemed

to have sucked all light. Into this sparkling morass the horses of Trugemma and her band sunk, their efforts to turn, to go backward or forward, utterly useless in the drifts. Freyti had become aware of their predicament while she was still far back in the woods, for she had, as had all her people, the ability to hear at a short distance unspoken thoughts and feelings. She had set Fiibs, her babe, high in the fork of a tree, where she would keep until Freyti was ready to fetch her, and had scurried forth to offer her assistance.

The weres, unfortunately, also picked up unspoken thoughts and feelings and had come ahead of her, yipping taunts at the trapped Trugemma, flecking the snow with the blood of horses and riders, darting into shadow where the force whips could not reach. The riders, buried to their knees, could not maneuver to lash from a more effective angle. Slowly but deliberately, distributing their weight to keep them atop the snow and within striking range, the gray werewolves circled, snarling—twice around went the lead bitch. A third time and all would be lost, Trugemma and her band imprisoned, unable to help themselves with muscle or magic.

The wolves thus far had been unable to hamstring the horses only because the horses' hams had sunk below snowline. With the small band immobilized, the pickings would be easy. Already Trugemma and her men, wearied by months of siege and battle, felt the strength drain from their arms and the cold grip them hip-high as their leggings were torn loose by snapping teeth.

Freyti fretted to think that the small detour she had perhaps subliminally encouraged her heroine to take had resulted in this. She had not realized the snow would stop the warrior maid and her followers. Snow was no problem to moss women, who were mostly sheltered from it, and whose large hairy feet were as good as snowshoes when need be. And avoiding weres was as much second nature to

the moss people as avoiding hounds was to rabbits. The weres had about the same attitude toward Freyti's folk, too. She had personally never seen them close up before but she knew them with the knowing of her race and the knowing sent shivers up her that had nothing to do with the cold.

Still, standing around shivering all night would do no one any good. Her jeopardy would be slight. She knew the deep woods and the moss walls and the limbs for fast climbing as well as she knew her own gnarled hands, or the long gray hairs that fell in front of her face. Sprinting forth over the snow she shoved her hair behind her shoulders, her thumbs between her teeth and whistled, sharply.

"Ho, wolfie! Come play with me!" she shouted at the pack, and turned back toward her woods, knowing her heroine would cover her back and make short work of the pursuing pack while Freyti found her saving tree limb. But when she turned for the woods she saw the moss curtain away and part and knew she was lost. Fiibs had found her way down from her perch and toddled toward the edge of the snow. Freyti swung round at once and flew across the snow, toward the thinner trees.

She was only three steps beyond weres and riders when her momentum brought her down, her feet in their speed no longer skimming the surface, but sinking with the added pressure of her bounding. The weres abandoned their first sport and fell upon her, tearing at what they could reach without sinking into the snow themselves. At first it was only her long, concealing hair, and this they tore from her head and strangled in the strands that snarled them in its tangles.

As the fangs found her flesh, Freyti felt Fiibs's cry, puzzled and afraid, but the teeth and claws were tearing her then and she screamed as the lead bitch tore at her exposed belly. A thundering rent the air and the ground throbbed with power, though Freyti did not know if it was

the power of Light or the power of death.

The weres exploded around her, but even as she saw Trugemma bending over her, she felt the blood pouring from her and the pain slicing her into halves and knew that her heroine had delivered her somewhat belatedly.

"Courage, poor creature," the warrior-witch told her as she bent near, her wide green eyes and golden hair close enough for Freyti to touch, had she the strength left. "I'll give you a bit of a spell now to ease your passing. And notify your next-of-kin, of course."

"Fiibs—" The name gushed out of Freyti with what was left of her life. "Take Fiibs—"

"I beg your pardon?" Trugemma said, but she saw the spirit pass out of Freyti's eyes then and stood, saying to her executive officer, "These last wishes would be carried out more frequently if only the dying weren't so incomprehensible. What on earth, do you suppose, is a Feeb?"

"Maaaaa!" cried a small gurgling voice as what seemed to be a foot-high hairball tottered forth with its twiggy arms outstretched to the battered creature bloodying the snow.

"By the Lady!" Trugemma swore, swinging the hairball aside and scooping it up at arm's length for inspection. "What is this?"

Her executive officer coughed. "I think, ma'am, that may be one of the feeb things our late comrade here was referrin' to. Looks like what I've heard tell a moss wife looks like." His eyes scanned the deep forest with its heavily fringed trees. "Country for it, all right."

"Smaller, though. And I've never heard them called feebsees before. It might be—"

Fiibs, however, knew what she was and what Trugemma was, and upon hearing herself named stuck out her arms again and grabbed the glamorous general around the neck, clinging hard. "Ma," she said, and would not let go.

With her soldiers bearing the body of Freyti and herself bearing Fiibs, Trugemma led her band and their horses out of the drifts and into the shelter of the deep woods, where they were soon met by a delegation of hanging-haired mosswives who coagulated out of the mossy background without warning.

"How can it be that Freyti is dead?" someone's mind touched Trugemma's with wondering and a shade of resentment. "You have the power to blast the weres. You did so—"

Trugemma started, and the damp hairy thing she held snuffled unattractively. A good officer neither explains nor excuses herself, but a defense sprang unbidden into Trugemma's mind. "We were surprised and I was too busy fighting and too weary to gather the right words. I know it's not supposed to happen but *you* try campaigning for three years solid and see how well your vocabulary works. When she drew them off, the words came to me and of course I acted at once but . . ." The "but" was self-evident. Rather lamely, she said aloud, "She was very brave. A good trooper. Saved all of us and this child besides. I don't suppose any of you are next-of-kin?"

She had not intended to allow herself to be separated from her men, but when she and the moss woman in front of her stepped through the curtain, the others were not beside or behind them. She didn't notice it until she was halfway through another curtain. She was really overly tired and the weight of the child on her exhausted arms occupied most of her concentration. The ground beneath her feet was frosty but soft and spongelike and she had to pick her boots up and set them down again very carefully to keep from falling. She started to protest to her guide about being separated, but the child clung to her so that she knew she couldn't free her arms to back up her insistence. Besides, for a change she was among proven allies. Probably the woman was just showing her to a

sleeping place. She yawned and stumbled forward, across the threshold of a remarkable dwelling and almost into the lap of an equally remarkable creature who greeted her with a grunt.

"So. This is Escore's best hope since the Tregarths, is it?" came a grumbling thought from the creature. Trugemma knew her for the leader at once.

"Bush-Grandmother," someone whispered shyly.

The Bush-Grandmother sat among her minions. Any of them could have been mistaken for the child's mother, except the Bush-Grandmother herself, who was twice as wide and whose hair was twice as bushy and whose back was not humbly hunched and whose eyes were not down-cast or hidden behind the mesh of hair. Small star-shaped flowers speckled the mossy floor and wound up the tree trunk, and from these emanated a pearly glow that showed clearly the predominant color of these people as well as their home was gray—gray hair, gray skin, furrowed like that of tree trunks or the very elderly, though Trugemma received an almost childlike feeling from many of them.

Not the Bush-Grandmother though. Though she stayed seated and still, her manner was bristling enough to cause Trugemma to wish a clearer path to her sword than her living burden allowed. She turned toward the helpful whisper to offer the babe to a relative, but no one stood where the whisper had been. She knew the others were there, but now they were blending with the mossy walls, or sitting still as tussocks, leaving her to the auspices of their leader.

"Well, girl," the Bush-Grandmother said in the same tone Trugemma's fencing master had once used when she was—just once—less than perfect. "What have you to say for yourself?"

"I say thank you very much for the kind comparison, but I've not the honor of being related to the Tregarths, though I did sit in council with one—I think it was Kyllan—and I

say also that I think someone had better relieve me of this child. She's a bit damp and—" No one moved forward though she felt titters and rustlings around the edges. The Bush-Grandmother only stared stonily at her. It was less a last attempt at diplomacy than her knees giving way that caused Trugemma to sink down to the moss then, carefully hanging the bottom ends of Fiibs' hair and with it, she hoped, the bottom end of Fiibs, over the springy, moisture-absorbing ground cover. She found her legs and arms were trembling as she sank down and finally she managed to brace the baby with one arm and undo her sword with the other. She slid it hilt-first toward the glowering Bush-Grandmother, making the first gesture of truce.

"Somehow there has been a misunderstanding," she projected with ploddingly careful emphasis to each word, so that her tired thoughts did not tangle themselves. "I am not your enemy. I ride for Escore—not a blank shield but with my own company, entrusted with the companies of others, in the service of the Light. *I* did not kill your kinswoman. The weres did that. They would have killed my men and me as well or left us trussed for the Sarn Riders had not your kinswoman—"

"Freyti," the Bush-Grandmother said, and her thought broke. "Her name was Freyti. She knew your name. Can you not learn hers?"

"We were not introduced," Trugemma snapped, her patience spent with the Bush-Grandmother's antagonism. Where were the modest, self-effacing little creatures of which the legends told?

"We are not as you expected," the Bush-Grandmother said. "And you are not as we expected, Trugemma called Darksbane. Not as Freyti expected. She idealized you. I could have warned her to take no sides, to think not so highly on any of the race of man. But it made her pleased to think she might serve you. That is why she slipped past the wards that guard us from our enemies. In your service,

she need fear no enemies—”

Trugemma jerked her untouched sword back to her and Fiibs began to howl. Two mossy forms clustered close to pat the child to stillness but did not lift her weight from Trugemma's arm. Trugemma glared. "If I wished to waste my time in guilt, Old One, I have far more dire matters to take precedence. I did not come to bear your scorn or your judgment but to bring you your kin's—Freyti's body, and her child. Since we are evidently not welcome here, my men and I will be on our way if you will only be good enough to take this child."

At that Fiibs began howling again and clung to Trugemma in a stranglehold.

"Her mother died in your service, lady," the Bush-Grandmother said. "Fiibs is your child now. Take her and go."

"*My child!*" Trugemma was truly choking now and had to pull the little gnarled claws from her neck to catch her breath.

She stared for a moment with distaste at the drooling puckered mouth in the weathered little face, the tearing big eyes under heavy furred lashes, the tree-twig arms clutching and clinging like the moss itself. "Madame, that is impossible. You obviously have no idea what war is like." That she said aloud. What rushed to her mind were the images of the children who had died waiting too long for her to deliver them from siege—children more human than this one, and children cut down in battle, and children murdered in the aftermath, and the were whelps and kephan foals and thas kits she had wiped out herself. They were evil, of course, but still young. War was no place for the young, battle no respecter of innocence. The image came back to her of the supposedly evil—all magic said so, of course, and it wouldn't lie—face of a kephan colt, startled and wobbly as it tried to climb toward its mother,

and of her own sword. "Impossible," she said, but now she buried her face in Fiibs's hair. Fiibs's tears would have to do. Hers had steamed away in the heat of battle long ago.

"Young woman," the Bush-Grandmother said, but for the first time not unkindly. "It will be inconvenient for you, I agree. But you are the chosen foster mother. Freyti chose you herself to nurse her child and foster it—"

"Impossible—" Trugemma echoed her previous statement then raised her head enough to mutter, "She could not have known her babe would have need of another mother—"

"We of the moss always seek humans to nurse and foster our children—the most admirable we can find, and if sometimes that is not very, well, we don't any of us get what we want in this life always, do we?"

Trugemma's curiosity was not great but it was there and enough for the Bush-Grandmother to continue. "You have been thinking that you find us alien-looking, inhuman. What do you think we are? Vegetable? Moss itself? Mothers-in-law and ugly stepsisters to the beautiful woods nymphs men sometimes wish we were? That is not so far wrong, you know. Except that it had little to do with the moss or the woods to begin with. Our ancestress was beautiful as you are beautiful and more."

"That is not so very beautiful," Trugemma thought as she imagined to herself. By now she frequently forgot that the old one could hear her and she did not especially care. Somewhere beyond her own self-pity and self-reproach she realized that she was about to hear yet another tale of the early days of Escore, when the adepts experimented to find the perfect inhabitants for their domain. Each of the mutated races in Escore had their own version of this creation myth, but somehow she had assumed that the moss wives had always been separate—were a true magical race and not a mutation.

"She was the daughter of the leaders of the adepts—not

much more than that has come down to us except that they were reasonably good folk, with a sense of responsibility toward their fellows and their creations. Our ancestress—Flita was her name—was very talented with all growing things, could change them and raise them and make them grow bigger or smaller or in strange shapes. She spent hours making ornamental gardens and growing orchards with fruits offering full-course meals with all of the nutritional requirements of her people. She had a flaw, though—she was very impressionable. Her figure was not the only willowy thing about her. She was easily swayed. She fell in with an evil companion—a fellow adept, not so talented as she, but with large ideas for creating monstrous crawly things that ate nobler life-forms.

“She was too blinded by his handsome face and the reflection of her own loveliness in his eyes to see the potential ugliness of his imagination, and she agreed to marry him. Her parents, who suspected their colleague of being a bad lot and who had hoped for a better influence for their daughter, tried to forbid it. But her lover used his own talent for creeping and crawling and stealth to steal her away. To stall any future opposition to their union and his ambitions, he persuaded Flita to help him grow a vine that would encircle her parents’ dwelling and choke it to smithereens. Flita enjoyed engineering the plant to please her lover, but it is very doubtful that she knew that he planned to use it to kill her parents.

“Fortunately for them, they were quite a bit smarter than their would-be son-in-law. They saw the vine coming and destroyed it, foot by foot, following it backward until they found their daughter and her lover. By then Flita’s lover had confessed to her his plan and had promised that the two of them would be together and would take unto themselves all of the power and prestige possessed by her supposedly departed forebears. She was already weeping when her parents arrived, and when she saw them she flung

herself at their feet and wept even more bitterly, in relief and for forgiveness. She also prayed that they would spare her lover, and told them that she had disobeyed them because she needed him so.

"Her parents were far less emotional by nature than Flita. They saw that not only had she disobeyed them and become an accomplice at their attempted murder, but with her talent so easily subverted could become a menace to all Escore. Already they were fighting with colleagues of like mind to the lover, who wished to branch out from mutating creatures into better adapting species and try to create other, darker things, just to see if they could. The daughter with her talent would be a constant threat to humanity while she was so easily influenced, and so attractive to those who would use her.

"Her mother and father talked this over among themselves and then explained it to Flita, saying that they felt they had no choice but to do something harsh to save the world from her and her from herself—and also they needed to do something about that lover. She begged for his life and pleaded that she would reform him, that they would change, and her father bade her to stand on her own two feet then, and gave her twelve hours to change them into something harmless, and preferably benevolent. He further charged her that since she was a danger to mankind, the beauty that was the gift of himself and his wife to her was to be removed, so that people would no longer be fooled. They felt she was ugly inside, you see, instead of merely weak, but she was their child.

"Thus charged, the girl had to face up to the fact that her lover really was not a good person, although she loved him still and needed to cling to him as much as ever. As soon as her parents' backs were turned he tried to get her to plot with him again. She tried to heed her father's words and be strong, but her lover was so handsome he made everything seem reasonable, so she clawed her hair over her face so

she could not see him. Still he did not stop, but reached for her, still talking, so she changed him into a still and silent thing—a tree. And then she thought she could see his reproachful face in the pattern of the bark so she covered his branches and limbs with moss as gray as the despair she felt. She was trying to change herself into the same when her parents returned, and stopped the transformation, for when they saw how hard she had tried to obey them and the cost to her, they remembered that they loved her and did not want her to be forever lost to them. Already her skin had become barklike and her limbs—er—limblike, and her hair had gone from gold to the gray of the moss. But her eyes were large and loving and she clung to the tree. Then her parents promised her that the tree could become a creature like herself for one hour every year and be her mate, and that, if in subsequent years she and her progeny could prove to mankind their inner beauty, despite their outward hideousness, and be always healers and of service, they might be redeemed. For that reason, we of the moss always offer service to those humans who seem good and try whenever possible to persuade the humans to nurse and foster our children.”

“Excuse me, could you repeat that last bit. I missed it—” Trugemma said, bouncing Fiibs furiously, for the baby had begun whining near the end of the story and now was squawling louder than a were’s howl. Thought transference didn’t help. Trugemma could no longer hear herself think much less hear the thoughts of the Bush-Grandmother.

But she had heard much of the story, and now when she felt like shaking the screaming Fiibs, she looked down at that puckered little face and those tightly clenched eyes and wondered if the other children she had seen, the inhuman ones, were truly human too, or—or at least *like* her, in how they felt, despite their various bizarre appearances. How *would* this youngling grow if kept by a suitable

mother—not herself, of course, not a soldier with killing to do but a warm and loving human mother who would be kind to her. Not these poor pathetic creatures who scuttled about forever ashamed of themselves, serving probably highly unsuitable people because they had, as a race, a stupid tendency to cling to unfeeling trees, which changed into mates so wicked they could be allowed only one hour a year before they must disappear again. But then she remembered Freyti and wondered, trying to think if she knew of any human woman who would have first risked her unarmed self to enemies to save a band of armed soldiers. And she wondered how many, though there was much talk of motherly sacrifice, would have knowingly led the weres upon herself to save a child as ugly and presently as unpleasant as Fiibs. Though she had seen some valiant acts on the part of human mothers for their children, in her experience such courage was not as common among people, even people of the Light, as it was among animals.

Fiibs cried, but somewhat more quietly as Trugemma stopped bouncing her and rocked her thoughtfully. But though the crying was softer, it was insistent, and Trugemma looked rather desperately back to the Bush-Grandmother. “She must be hungry,” she said, feeling almost as useless as she had when coming upon the aftermath of the siege.

“Freyti was her mother and Freyti is gone,” the Bush-Grandmother said. “We are none of *us* her mother.”

“But a wet-nurse surely, or some substitute?”

“There is none. We may each of us nurse only the children of our bodies. Only a human nurse will suffice for second-milk.”

“That’s very convenient for you in this circumstance,” Trugemma observed. “But even if I were inclined to take this little one with me—strictly as a debt of honor, you understand—the facts do not change. I spend long hours in the saddle and sleep under the stars or in the rain. I ride

among enemies and cannot pause to clean a child's messes and if I had her to defend, I would always be preoccupied, not able to be as ruthless as—as ruthless as—as I need be at times," and her mind strayed back again and she was filled with such a bleakness and a grimness that she wondered that the child in her arms did not feel how the darkness clouded her heart and cry all the louder. "Besides," she said finally, "I am a maiden and to keep my witch powers, untrained as they are, I must a maiden remain. As a warrior, and as a maiden, I have nothing with which to nourish this child."

The Bush-Grandmother blew an errant strand of hair back over her shoulder and considered. "If that is so, Freyti was farther from the mark than she usually was. Though I did not agree with her in her adulation of you and in her following the thoughts of anyone who passed near enough for word of your deeds, I did not chasten her. Freyti always knew, somehow, what needed to be done. She was the best healer of us all, and not just with herbs and medicine. She knew where a pain was and what thing, however unlikely, would soothe it. She saw in you beauty and brilliance, it is true, but often she spoke of how your talent for war would be as strong for life and peace, if ever this land's ills permitted it. I wonder if she knew when she saw you that that talent was being poisoned by the very qualities that she admired—that because you are kind, you despise yourself when you cannot prevent unkindness. And that because you are responsible, you cannot help but commit unkindnesses yourself to prevent future ones on the part of those less scrupulous than yourself. And that with every act you perform that goes against your peaceful nature, you injure yourself and an infection of darkness sets in."

Now it was Trugemma who clung to Fiibs, cradling her furry warmth and mingling the tears she thought she no

longer had with the babe's. Her thoughts came out brokenly: "All that I could do was not enough, will not be enough. I—everything—anything—makes less. Destroys, withers, blights, burns. It none of it does any good—there is no building, only tearing apart."

"My child." The Bush-Grandmother's voice was tender now, and somehow she had moved to the place beside Trugemma. "Nourish for a time instead of destroying. Fiibs will cling to you so you need not fear losing her—we of the moss are very good at that—but more importantly she will be a healer, of great use to you and your men. Protect her as her mother protected you, and you will see."

Trugemma wiped her eyes in Fiibs's hair. If only she were able to do as the Bush-Grandmother urged. A child of her own might teach her how to deal with enemy whelps in a way that would not bring to her own soul the blight she ascribed to them. But if she let herself care for this legacy of Freyti's the child would stand a good chance of being killed, or worse. But then, that might happen anyway, if Darkness won its way into these woods.

She was not plagued with false modesty. She knew her own importance to her cause. Her effectiveness would be hindered by having to care for a baby. On the other hand, it was hindered perhaps more, and in a more insidious way that boded real ill, by this slow groping coldness that worked its way through her bloodstream and into her heart. It seemed self-indulgent and fool-hardy to wish for something—someone—of her own—but she suddenly had such a yearning wistfulness, after years of consigning life to rot, to help it grow instead.

Fiibs cried again, a snuffling whimper and it seemed to Trugemma the child grew lighter and frailer as she held her.

"She is hungry," the Bush-Grandmother repeated.

“Then for pity’s sake find someone to feed her—” Trugemma said, trying to disentangle her hair from Fiibs’s clinging fists.

“Maaa—” Fiibs said feebly.

The Bush-Grandmother did not need to answer. Trugemma knew no other mother was possible for the little creature. She could not disengage the tiny claws so she held Fiibs and rocked her and felt her grow flimsy, brittle somehow, like moss torn from its roots to crumble to powder, fine and dry. Fiibs was withering even as she held her, without her mother, or a human nurse to sustain her.

Trugemma hardly realized she was weeping again but she wished she had never come to this place. While she was cold, she was numb, and now everything was hot and hard and painful and the wounds reopened, the blood flowing with the tears, the sweat flowing in the dead of winter with a fever of remorse. Her tunic was soaked beneath her armor and she struggled to pull loose from the armor while cradling Fiibs. Twiggy hands tugged to help her and it was free. The front of her tunic was soaked, but not with blood or sweat. Fiibs quieted and snuggled eagerly toward her neckline.

The Bush-Grandmother sighed deeply with relief—this was some moss-magic then, but a wholly cooperative miracle. Trugemma’s body and heart had consented to cooperate without consulting her head. The Bush-Grandmother nodded gravely, and Trugemma opened the neck of her tunic. “Well, my dear,” she said aloud to Fiibs, who nuzzled her greedily. “I see you are a sensible creature who will do well on campaign after all. Very wise to provide yourself with magical rations and escape the camp cook’s gruel.”

Fiibs didn’t answer, but clung hard, as was her nature, and she continued to do so until she was old enough that others clung to her strength instead. And though she was known throughout Escore as Fiibs Mossdotter, no one was

sure what her last name meant, for most only recalled that she was the child of the venerable General Trugemma, one of the early engineers of peace and mutual understanding among all of the creatures in Escore. No one ever mentioned anything unusual about Fiibs's appearance, except for her long silvery hair, which was the envy of many maids. One old soldier, reminiscing about the time when he and his comrades had been bewildered for a night, stumbling aimlessly through a deep forest, before the general and her baby had finally found them and led them out, spat appreciatively and said, "Must have been bein' born in them woods made her hair like that—silver as that moss with the snow shinin' on it. Otherwise, of course, she was the spittin' image of her mother, and that's sayin' somethin'. For my money, no woman ever walked this land who was more beautiful, inside and out, than them two."

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Afterword

For all its intricately woven background of science and magic, the Witch World is an awfully lot like the real world. It has so much conflict, so much war, so many people who see its problems in terms of black and white, good and evil. I liked the Moss Wives, who seemed like ordinary folks minding their own business to me. I decided to contrast them with your typical sword-wielding Amazonian thewier-than-thou princess type. At the same time I was thinking about this story, I was trying to write a proposal for a book based on my own experiences in Vietnam. More than half of my patients were Vietnamese. So when I started to write about Trugemma the warrior, she just wasn't funny to me

anymore. Like many veterans I've known, she is unable to deal with the relatively innocent civilians because she is so contaminated by what she knows to be her own evil actions in the name of good. I couldn't solve a problem like that in a lighthearted manner so the Witch World anthology inspired my only-so-far serious story.

—ELIZABETH SCARBOROUGH