

MICHELLE SAGARA

— SHORT STORY —

The  
Hidden  
Grove

15

# THE HIDDEN GROVE

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MICHELLE SAGARA

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## INTRODUCTION

I remember very little of the writing of this story, written, as many of the early stories were, for Mike Resnick. It was written in very early 1994, by which point I was no longer working full-time at the bookstore; I had my oldest, and sleep was not his strong suit, which meant sleep was elusive. When suffering through constant, broken sleep, memory seems to be the first thing that breaks.

A series of anthologies from DAW books was *noun* Fantastic; in this case, *Witch* Fantastic. The guidelines for the anthology were: Write a story about witches or a witch. Only in rare cases were we asked for specifics of what we intended to write—and this was to avoid overlap in plot.

But in general, if you give authors a prompt—in this case: give me a story about witches—the stories they write, the themes they choose, will all be different, because their writer brains are a product of who they are.



## THE HIDDEN GROVE

The children had been crying for centuries. Here, in the willow groves that had defied farmers, and then developers, for centuries, the sounds of their voices had softened with time but they had never disappeared, and they never would. Just beyond the edge of the grove, grass gave way to concrete, concrete to pitted asphalt. People came and went, crossing the unnoticed boundary and leaving empty cartons, plastic bags and echoes of lunchtime gossip in their wake. They didn't hear the crying; the attenuated whisper of ancient voices sounded like wind.

Then she came, and the heart of the grove stirred as if it remembered her loneliness in its sleep.



THE WILLOW GROVE was a sinister anachronism, surrounded by office buildings and a restaurant that had seen better days. That wasn't why Alia hated it. She had chosen her

desk with a view in mind, but the view was now permanently shuttered to close out the grove.

What it didn't alleviate was the sound: Alia could hear, faint but unmistakable, the voices of weeping children. Sometimes they were gentle, almost rhythmic — a child's cry before sleep overtakes it; sometimes they were the sobs of resignation and unending pain.

The first time she heard them, she ran to the grove's edge. There, on the border between cement and grass, she stopped abruptly. Wary, she stared into the shade and the shadows, looking for children beneath the long, supple fingers of the willow trees. Instead, she found employees of Goodman, Lovich & Thompson, eating lunch, reading magazines, and generally enjoying the sunny weather.

She knew, without asking, that no one else could hear the weeping. And she knew better than to ask; she knew how laughter could cut. But she would not join her colleagues in what they called the park.



IT STARTED THAT WAY, with the crying. It ended a different way, and in between, Alia Stevens found herself driven to seek out the history of the willow grove. She had no idea where to start, but the insistent voices of dead children would not let her rest. Rest was all that she wanted; that and silence.

She began by asking her colleagues if they knew anything about the park. They didn't, but one of the clerks suggested, in a rather condescending way, that she might want to try the Department of Parks and Recreation. She ground her teeth, smiled politely, thanked him — and followed his suggestion.



“I’M SORRY, ma’am, but that property isn’t under City jurisdiction. Those trees aren’t ours, and if they’ve caused any damage to drains, pipes or power lines, you’ll have to take that up with the owner.” The young man was brisk and efficient — an unusual sight amid so much bureaucracy.

“Do you have any idea who owns the grove?”

“The what?”

“Park. The park.”

“No, ma’am, not personally. But it’s not that hard to look up in the municipal listings.”



BY FIVE O’CLOCK, Alia Stevens held a pad of paper that contained a day’s worth of scribbles, scratches and sketches. Two words stood out: Magdalena Rawlings. The name of the woman who had owned the grove for the last twenty-nine years. There were other names that came before it, but no owner — save one — had held the land for less than twenty-six years; no owner, save one, had held it for more than twenty-seven. Magdalena was the latter, and the former was the titled original owner; the only male name in the bunch.

Alia’s fingers traced the letters that were all she knew of the owner of the willow grove.



“ALIA!”

She started, and suddenly turned her face away from the sun. “Yes?”

“I said, it’s nice to see that you’ve finally decided to let a

little light in. Especially since you've got the second best window in the office."

The words took a moment to penetrate, and when they did, the person who had spoken them was gone. Alia barely noticed. She spun in her seat and stared, not at the outside world, but at the window itself. The blinds that she had painstakingly installed were gone; the window, instead of being a barrier against the outside world, now let too much of it in. She could see the heart of the grove: willows weeping like children in the wind.

She wondered how long she had been staring at it without really seeing it. She wondered who had removed her venetian blinds, but she was almost afraid to ask.



THERE WAS ONLY one name in the phone book that was even close: Magda Rawlings at 333 Hazelton Crt. There was a regular seven digit phone number as well; Alia copied it down. Then she curled it up and tossed it aside.

You're just being crazy, she told herself. Forget about it.

But she could hear the children crying, as if for justice, throughout the night — and when she did finally sleep, she dreamt of uprooting the great old willows and exhuming hundreds of decayed little corpses from beneath them.



SHE WANTED to hurry through work, but four emergencies came up, and three of them required her immediate attention. Overtime had never been so unwelcome, and Alia struggled to concentrate on it as the sun set and the shadows cast by the grove grew longer. One by one her co-

workers' desks emptied; the office became, by degrees, a hushed and quiet place.

Except for the children's voices, there was no noise; Alia's fingers had long since become rigid and frozen as they hovered over her keyboard. She was not, she told herself, as she grabbed her purse and jacket and left her office in disorder, frightened. She did not expect to see the ghosts of feral children crawl up through the pores of the earth's surface to confront her.

But in the light of street lamps, the grove's shadows twitched against the wind as if struggling to escape. She walked away on the opposite side of the street as quickly as she could without drawing the attention of anyone — anything — that might be watching.



HAZELTON COURT WASN'T within easy walking distance; in different circumstances, Alia would have taken either a cab or public transit to reach it. But she didn't know she was going there until she saw the smudged street sign at the corner of Hazelton and Cross Road. She knew she had been walking; her feet ached, and the moon had shifted its position, lowering itself gently toward the horizon.

She stopped walking and stared up at the signs. Since she first heard the cries of the grove's children, reality had eroded, and this strange waking dream had shifted gradually to take its place. Why else would she be on this dark road, beneath this moon, at this place?

She drew breath, noticing as if for the first time the faint traces of traffic and industry that settled into her lungs. 333 was not that far away, and she had come here to talk of the willow grove, although she hadn't done so deliberately.

The street was empty; the lights seemed dim. Houses in the city had very little frontage, and what there was of it was usually expensive. But the two and three story homes had receded into shadows; they were obvious if she squinted hard to read their numbers. Soon, she stopped taking care to do even that.

There was one house, on the left hand side of the street, that seemed well-lit and well tended. It was a small, brick cape cod cottage, with roses on trellises at either side of an elaborate door. Ivy covered brick like a shadow. In the darkness, Alia could hear the tinkle of water in a fountain, although the fountain remained hidden from her vision.

She turned up the walk to this house; it had no brass numbers, no plaque, but it was the right one. She walked up to the door, stopped, and inhaled deeply, for strength. The smell of roses wiped clear the hint of city pollution. With a lighter hand, she reached up and gripped the big, brass door knocker; there was no bell, nothing that looked electronic. In fact, the lights at the house's front looked almost like kerosene lamps.

The door opened with the friendly creak of joints that need just a little oil. Alia had thought to see shadows, darkness — but the woman who stood framed by carved, Victorian lintels stood in front of a well lit, cozy vestibule.

“Hello?”

Alia had the grace to blush. “Hello.” She paused, because she suddenly didn't know what to say to the middle-aged woman in the clean, but unpretentious clothing. “You — you've never met me.”

The woman's lips curved in a friendly, if somewhat confused smile. “No, I don't believe I have.”

“My name's Alia Stevens. I'm terribly sorry to intrude on

you, but I was hoping that you could —” could what? She turned self-consciously to look out into Hazelton Court.

It wasn't there. Grass and fields stretched out for miles as far as her night-eyes could see. Her mouth went dry; her eyes lost their ability to blink for a few minutes; her hair, just like that of any story's frightened victim, stood on end. She turned back to the older woman, as if forced to it.

The woman's expression hadn't changed. “Yes? Ms. Stevens, are you all right?”

“I —” she spun again, and this time in the fields of night, she could see the dark shapes of rustling willows. “C-could I borrow your phone?”

“Yes, of course. Has your car broken down? Has something happened?”

“I — no. Yes.” Alia shook her head and lifted her hands to her cheeks. She wanted to be out of the fresh, country air; wanted to be confined behind four safe walls, with light and warmth for company.

“Maybe you should come in and sit down for a moment. You look rather pale.” The woman extended a hand, and as Alia shook it, she said, “My name is Magda Rawlings. I'm pleased to meet you.”



THE VESTIBULE GAVE way to a parlour — for want of a better word — with a love seat, two wing chairs, a low, rosewood coffee table, a fire-place and a rather ornate writing desk. On either side of the fireplace were bookshelves with leaded, bevelled panes enclosing antiquarian volumes.

“Do you like books?” Magda Rawlings asked, noting the direction of her unusual visitor's stare. “Most people don't

these days.” She shook her head; a strand of greying hair fell loose from her bun and lay across her forehead.

“I like them,” Alia said softly.

“The phone is over there. It’s inside the upper right drawer of the desk. I don’t like the look of it in this room, so I do my best to hide it.”

“Phone? Oh — the phone.” Alia swallowed. “I — thank you.” She walked over to the desk and gingerly pulled open the delicate drawer. Light flared up like solar fire; Alia screamed and pulled her hand back, clutching it tightly to her chest. Open mouthed, she turned to stare at Magda Rawlings.

Magda Rawlings was staring back at her, only this time there was no confusion in her gaze. Instead there was something that resembled compassion — or worse, pity. “My name,” she said, in a voice that was subtly altered, “is Magdalena Rawlings. I own the witch’s grove.” She began to move toward Alia, and Alia scabbled away. “Look at your hand, Alia. Look at it carefully, and tell me what you see.” Her words had deepened and strengthened so much it sounded as if they should had been spoken by many people, not one.

Trembling, Alia did as ordered. In the flesh of her palm, tip touching the base of her middle finger, was a slender willow leaf. She could not name it. Instead, she raised a shaking hand and turned it, palm out, fingers spread, to face Magdalena Rawlings.

“As I thought,” Magdalena said. “It’s the witch-mark.” She shook her head slowly, deliberately, and as she did her hair came down in a widening spiral at her back. “The parlour isn’t the place for you, Alia; not yet. Come out to the farm with me.” She held out a hand.

Alia stared at it, and after a moment, it was withdrawn.

“Come,” Magdalena said again, her voice softer. “I’m well past my time, but there are things that you have to understand.”

Alia didn’t want to understand anything; she wanted to leave. More than that, she wanted to eradicate all trace of the mark from her left hand. She was surprised to find herself following Magdalena Rawlings as the older woman led her through the parlour, the hall, the kitchen and a small mud room. It was as if she were under a spell.

A spell. The Witch’s grove.

“What do you see, Alia?” Magdalena’s voice was quiet, almost subdued, as she opened the mud room door into the night. “I had a garage built fifteen years ago. My neighbours have a grape arbor in full bloom near my fence; it surrounds a pool.”

Alia shook her head; she heard the words as if they were uttered in a language she could not speak but knew enough of to identify. She had never seen stars so clear or the moon so bright. There was no light pollution hovering across the horizon like a white cocoon; there were fields, and beyond them, forest.

Then, as her eyes readjusted to the night, she saw a tall rectangular shadow that loomed above the fences and cattle-runs in one pasture. Light flickered in the cracks between two boards that had seen better days.

“Barn,” she whispered.

“Yes.”

Just beyond the barn, but visible from the house, was the willow grove.

“You’re twenty-seven; you are of the age. You came to ask me about the witch’s grove. Return when I call you.”

Alia turned to speak to the woman beside her. There wasn’t one. And there was no house, no lights, no warmth.

There was a chill breeze through the tall grass and the sounds of sleepy crickets in place of the city sounds that were so much a part of her life she didn't know what made them anymore.

I don't want the answer. Her mouth mimed speech. She tried to vocalize the words, but none came; the corn stalks bending in wind had a stronger voice, a greater presence, than she. She looked down and saw grass, weeds, the scuttle of something nocturnal. Minutes passed before she realized why this felt wrong.

She had no feet, no legs, no physical presence; the moon caused her to cast no shadow, but rather, to be one. The chill she felt had nothing to do with the weather, and everything to do with the darkness.

But light came from one place on the field: the barn. She searched the shadows that enfolded her, seeking what remained of Hazelton Court. Then, squaring her shoulders and changing the fall of linen against her skin, she began to walk in a straight line towards the flickering light.

Light came out to greet her, leaving a tail like a meteor's in its wake. She raised her hand and in it an old lantern began to creak and sway with the night wind. The ground was treacherous in the darkness; she had to be careful of the well and the sudden little precipice that jutted out just before the barn.

She wiped her hands in her skirts and felt her lower lip as her canines bit through it. No, no — she couldn't do this. She had to go back, had to go home; he would see her soon and then she'd be in for it.

Where is home? Who is he?

She stood, frozen, and the lights continued to flicker in the barn. There were no screams; whatever work was left

was silent work. She wanted to run, but whether forward or back she could not say.

Mary was not in her bed. Not in any room of the house. Neither was he. They had both vanished without a sound, and like as not, only one of them would return come dawn. It'd happened three times before. Once, when she was nineteen, pregnant again with her third child. Once, when she was twenty-one. The third time when she was twenty-three. This was the last time, the last one. She'd sworn it. She wasn't young anymore, not at twenty-seven, and she'd lost all but one of her children; all her daughters. She'd given him no sons.

Then get moving, get moving you weak-willed fool; it's late, time's pressing. But he would hurt her, she knew it. If he found her, he'd hurt her. And what had she thought she'd do here? How had she thought to stop him? She swallowed; the sides of her throat clung together like frightened children. Fear kept her here, halfway between action and flight. Fear held her in its deceptive arms as time passed. She told herself that she heard nothing, that nothing but light was amiss in the barn. She didn't believe it.

Maybe if she'd left, she could have.

The barn doors blew open; the light of a single lamp glowed at his side like an inferno. He held his night's work by the hair. It followed him limply; there was no life in it to put up any resistance.

She dropped at once to the ground, using the hill's shelf to hide her lamp and her expression; using it to try to protect herself from the truth: her failure. Her throat moved; her stomach twisted. In their wake, a sour smell. Too late. Always too late.

Now was the time to run home; he'd catch her here, and it would all be for nothing. Mary was beyond her.

No, it won't be for nothing. They've been buried like heathens. I'll find out where; I'll find out that much. At least then they wouldn't be trapped for an eternity.

Oh, but she would be. Because she'd seen him, with Mary behind him like any farm animal chosen for festivities. She wouldn't forget it, or what it meant. Not even in heaven, if heaven was open for women who failed all of their earthly charges, could she ever stop seeing it.

[Alia. Alia Stevens. Return now.]

She rose, catching the lamp in a shaking hand; Alia Stevens did not. On a cedar deck, she finished throwing up and then sat rocking back and forth, her arms wrapped tightly around her shoulders.

"Did you see the grove, Alia?"

Alia shook her head, trying to take in air and reality at the same time.

Magda Rawlings looked up at the waxing moon, the hint of a frown across her forehead. "That's bad," she said softly. "You've not much time, and the moon might well be too strong." Then she shook her greying head. "Come in, Alia. Come in and I'll try to tell you what you've seen."



ALIA KNEW what was buried in the willow grove. She knew whose voices she heard when she worked at Goodman, Lovich & Thompson. She knew who she dreamed of, and what their deaths had been. She even knew why the cries were quiet; terror does that.

She gazed down at her hand; the willow leaf trembled there as if in wind. "What is a witch mark?"

"The moon will tell you," Magdalena answered. The older woman seemed tired, even apprehensive, as the hours

dragged by. "You've been long in coming, Alia." She glanced out of her windows, seeing what Alia could not: city streets, city lights. "And you've the hardest stretch to walk yet. Ah. There. It's time." She rose, although what clock told her to gain her feet, Alia couldn't say. "Come."

This time, Alia followed with greater reluctance and less fear. The moon was low and full and waiting; she could see the sorrow and anger in its ancient face. Almost, the expression there began to deepen and strengthen as Alia watched.

"This is important, Alia: Return when I call you."

The barn was dark; the light had been leeched from it by the centre of the willow grove. It flickered, giving the shadows a life of their own. The shadows had voices; those voices called Alia.

She was walking, quietly, in the moonlight. She and Alia were not the same woman, but they walked, step for step, the same road this night. They found the same path through the tall grass and goldenrod, trod it with the same care, lit by the moon's white light, cool heat.

And when the grove opened its doors and revealed its heart, they were both struck silent at the sight of her husband, digging by lamplight. His sallow skin was filmed with sweat and darkly stained.

He was singing.

His song was a wild croon, a savage keening; as they came closer they could see that not all of the water that gleamed on his cheeks was sweat. Tears ran, dark and dirt-mired; he shuttered his eyes every time his hands crossed his extremely narrow field of vision.

Alia stood frozen with lack of comprehension. The other woman slipped away from her, drawing closer and closer to husband and daughter. "What have you done to my Mary?"

He turned, his shovel spraying dirt at her feet. In the

lamplight other bones could be seen, jutting above their disturbed earth coffin. His singing stopped. “You shouldn’t have come here, Eleanor. You’re too old for the willows.”

“The willows?” Her voice was almost plaintive.

“Can’t you hear them? They’re magnificent, Eleanor — and they’re mine. I do —” he swallowed and closed his eyes, “what I have to for them.”

Alia looked down at her hand, at its mark. It shimmered in the moonlight with its own life. She listened; she could almost hear its voice. It spoke as he did.

“They say, give me children.” He stepped forward, his arms raised, his shovel just above the line of his shoulders. His wife took a step back, raising her own to defend her face, her head.

“They were not speaking to you, James Barnow.” Both husband and wife turned at the sound of Alia’s voice. She should have been surprised that they could see her, but she wasn’t; the willow trees were glowing faintly over the open grave.

Oh the waste, the waste of it. Some part of her wanted to weep. She was no longer afraid. The moon above her head was a tiara; the trees at her side were her honor guards. She forgot that she had ever feared them.

“I own them,” the man shouted back, wife forgotten. “Who else would they speak to?”

“Me.” Alia spoke with the moon’s voice. “They were never meant to be left to anyone but us; their voice is too strong.” She lifted her hand to catch a spill of moonlight; the willow leaf sat in her palm like the tip of a spear.

“James Barnow,” her voice was cold, “the only life you had to give to the grove was your own.” Moonlight became lightning, an act of wild magic. The man’s face wore his outrage, his fear, his longing — but he had no time to

express them. His shovel hit the ground with a thud, and Alia turned to Eleanor Barnow. The third of his wives.

She raised her hand again as Eleanor stared, speechless. “The groves are your responsibility. They must never be given to anyone who does not bear this mark.”

Eleanor Barnow nodded, speechless, and then bolted like a rabbit, severing all ties, all the hidden links, between them.

[Alia. Alia Stevens. Return now.]

Alia heard the call; felt the pull of a witch’s voice. But the willows exerted a call of their own, their voices soft and sinuous, their fingers a gentle rustle in the night. Hushed, expectant, they whispered their joy and their desire to Alia Stevens, and she listened because she had never been spoken to in such a way by anyone.



MAGDA RAWLINGS SAT in her kitchen, her hands warming a cold cup of coffee. Her brow was creased with worry and concentration as she called a second time. And a third.

The moon was strong. Magda feared a return to the farm, but what else could she do? Alia Stevens had not returned — and it was imperative that she not remain in the grove at that time.

Magda went out the mud room doors, lifted her left hand, and began to speak, when Alia Stevens, surrounded by a lambent silver, walked onto the deck. Before she could stop herself, Magdalena Rawlings dropped to one knee and smiled with relief. “You’ve returned.”

“Yes,” Alia said slowly. “I’ve seen what the grove holds. I know why we’re charged with its keeping. I will guard the grove to the twenty-seventh year; I will find a new keeper

when I tire.” She held out her left hand; Magdalena grasped it peacefully. When they parted, Magdalena’s left hand was unmarked.

“Thank you, Alia.”

But Alia was no longer listening to Magda.

The children were still crying; she could hear them, would hear them forever.

But above them, she could hear the purr of the willows. She placed a hand gently over her stomach. In three times three months she would return to the grove with a mystery, and the voice that she added to its circle might one day be raised in joy.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michelle writes as both Michelle Sagara and Michelle West; she is also published as Michelle Sagara West (although the Sundered books were originally published under the name Michelle Sagara).

She lives in Toronto with her long-suffering husband and her two children, and to her regret has no dogs.

Reading is one of her life-long passions, and she is paid for her opinions about what she's read by the venerable *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. No matter how many book shelves she buys, there is Never Enough Shelf space. Ever.

Although she doesn't have a newsletter, if you subscribe to her blog, you will get everything that's posted there—book news, cover reveals, random answers to questions, etc.

If you would like news about new books as they're published—with no other clutter—sign up for my news only mailing list.

Either can be found here at her web-site.





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## OTHER SHORT STORIES

The first six stories released are connected to the Essalieyan Universe of the novels I write for DAW as Michelle West. Since those are my most asked-for short stories, those are the ones I wanted to make available first. The rest of the stories will be released in chronological order from the date of their first appearance, which are listed in brackets beside the titles, along with the anthology in which they first appeared. All of the stories have introductions (which will probably come through in the samples if you've already read the stories but want to read those.)

*In the Essalieyan universe:*

1. Echoes (2001, *Assassin Fantastic*)
2. Huntbrother (2004, *Sirius, the Dog Star*)
3. The Black Ospreys (2005, *Women of War*)
4. The Weapon (2005, *Shadow of Evil*)
5. Warlord (1998, *Battle Magic*)
6. The Memory of Stone (2002, *30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary DAW Fantasy*)



7. Birthnight (1992, *Christmas Bestiary*)
  8. Gifted (1992, *Aladdin, Master of the Lamp*)
  9. Shadow of a Change (1993, *Dinosaur Fantastic*)
  10. For Love of God (1993, *Alternate Warriors*)
  11. Hunger (1993, *Christmas Ghosts*)
  12. Four Attempts at a Letter (1994, *By Any Other Fame*)
  13. Winter (1994, *Deals with the Devil*)
  14. What She Won't Remember (1994, *Alternate Outlaws*)
  15. The Hidden Grove (1995, *Witch Fantastic*)
  16. Ghostwood (1995, *Enchanted Forests*)
  17. When a Child Cries (1996, *Phantoms of the Night*)
  18. The Sword in the Stone (1997, *Alternate Tyrants*)
  19. Turn of the Card (1997, *Tarot Fantastic*)
  20. The Law of Man (1997, *Elf Fantastic*)
  21. Flight (1997, *Return of the Dinosaurs*)
  22. The Vision of Men (1997, *The Fortune Teller*)
  23. By the Work, One Knows (1997, *Zodiac Fantastic*)
  24. Under the Skin (1997, *Elf Magic*)
  25. The Dead that Sow (1997, *Wizard Fantastic*)
  26. Kin (1998, *Olympus*)
  27. Step on the Crack (1998, *Black Cats and Broken Mirrors*)
  28. Diamonds (1998, *Alien Pets*)
  29. Sunrise (1999, *A Dangerous Magic*)
  30. Elegy (1999, *Moon Shots*)
  31. Return of the King (1999, *Merlin*)
  32. Work in Progress (1999, *Alien Abductions*)
  33. Water Baby (1999, *Earth, Air, Fire and Water*)
  34. Faces Made of Clay (2000, *Mardi Gras Madness*)
  35. Sacrifice (2000, *Spell Fantastic*)
  36. Shelter (2000, *Perchance to Dream*)
  37. Pas de Deux (2000, *Guardian Angels*)

38. Déjà Vu (2001, *Single White Vampire Seeks Same*)
39. To Speak With Angels (2001, *Villains Victorious*)
40. Lady of the Lake (2001, *Out of Avalon*)
41. Truth (2001, *The Mutant Files*)
42. The Last Flight (2001, *Creature Fantastic*)
43. The Knight of the Hydan Athe (2002, *Knight Fantastic*)
44. Legacy (2002, *Familiars*)
45. The Nightingale (2002, *Once Upon a Galaxy*)
46. A Quiet Justice (2002, *Vengeance Fantastic*)
47. The Augustine Painters (2002, *Apprentice Fantastic*)
48. How to Kill an Immortal (2002, *The Bakka Anthology*)
49. Fat Girl (2002, *Oceans of the Mind VI*, ezine)
50. Diary (2003, *The Sorcerer's Academy*)
51. Dime Store Rings (2004, *The Magic Shop*)
52. To The Gods Their Due (2004, *Conqueror Fantastic*)
53. The Stolen Child (2004, *Faerie Tales*)
54. The Rose Garden (2004, *Little Red Riding Hood in the Big Bad City*)
55. The Colors of Augustine (2004, *Summoned to Destiny*)
56. Unicorn Hunt (2005, *Maiden, Mother Crone*)
57. The Snow Queen (2005, *Magic Tails*; with Debbie Ohi)
58. Shahira (2006, *Children of Magic*)
59. Choice\* (1997, *Sword of Ice: Friends of Valdemar*)
60. Winter Death\* (2003, *The Sun in Glory: Friends of Valdemar*)
61. Childhood's End (1998, *Tad William's Mirror World*)

\*Set in Mercedes Lackey's Valdemar, as the anthology titles suggest

