

The Fantastic

Other

06



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Letter from the Editor

What does art do but hold up a mirror to society, to our own uncertain selves, to each other? You answered that question when we announced that our Winter 2023 theme would be “mirrors.” Never before have we seen such engagement with our issue theming. Poets followed this muse, sending us a torrent of poetry that sought to capture the imperfect image of ourselves in that glass box. On the fiction side, many authors ventured to show us their own mirror worlds, journeys akin to Alice’s trip through the infamous looking glass.

What did we choose to include? Not all mirrors are as they seem, and reflections can be found in unexpected places. This issue will take you through a mirror maze, to horrific encounters, secrets beneath the surface, fantastic landscapes, and finally to confrontations with personal identity. So please, savor each piece with the same consideration as they were given when crafted.

I hope you will enjoy them as we do. Thank you all for continuing to read and support our magazine!

Sincerely,
G. E. Butler, Editor-in-Chief

About the Cover Art

“Fenrir” by Larissa Monique Hauck. Acrylic on Paper.

Larissa Monique Hauck is a queer visual artist who graduated from the Alberta University of the Arts in 2014, where she received a BFA with Distinction. She has been selected for inclusion in events such as Nextfest 2018 (Edmonton, AB), Nuit Rose 2016 (Toronto, ON), and the 9th Annual New York City Poetry Festival 2019 (New York, US). Her drawings and paintings have also been featured in publications such as *Creative Quarterly* (US), *Wotisart Magazine* (UK), *Minerva Rising* (US), and various others.

Mirror, mirror, on the wall

by Olga Dermott-Bond

First thing every morning, I used to ask
who the most beautiful woman was:
no make-up, bare-faced, knowing
how early light would catch me,
sure of his answer - *the fairest of them all.*

He stopped looking at me when the first
fine splinters started to crack, refract
around my eyes when I forced a smile,
whorl of a seashell washed up by my lips,
jawline loosening like tide-pulled flotsam.

Mirror, mirror on the wall. Hours alone,
my breath making opaque rain clouds
against the glass, swelling and shrinking,
my cheek punished by its cold kiss,
his absence a heavy silence, wasting

all those hours thinking how *once upon*

a time he peeled off my dress with half
a glance, searched for my pale skin which
glistened like damp sugar underneath,
memory working backwards, his embrace

falling away like slow seeping sand, so
I remained untouched, body-squandered.
I've taken the mirror off the wall, rebuke
of young paint underneath, yellow edges
framing nothing, eye of the nail judging me still.

About the Author

Olga Dermott-Bond (she/her) has published two pamphlets *apple, fallen* (Against the Grain Press) and *A sky full of strange specimens* (Nine Pens Press). Her debut full collection *Frieze* will be published by Nine Arches Press next year. Originally from Northern Ireland, she lives in Warwickshire, where she works as a teacher. You can follow her on Twitter at @olgadermott.

The Shapeshifter's Apprentice

By C.N. Wheaton

The world tells us in a thousand little ways we're too much and not enough.

Some cope with makeup or surgery. The luckiest learn to focus on the parts they like. As for the others? Some find their way to me.

All it costs is your true reflection.

That makes me sound like a witch in a fairytale or the sea hag in her creepy cave. It isn't like that. For one, I live in a smart penthouse apartment looking onto the city lights. It's warm and cozy and bright. I'm also very beautiful, nary a tentacle in sight. And, most importantly, I'm not asking the girls who find me to give up anything I haven't given up too.

It's a rainy night and I'm staring out at the sparkling city when the doorbell rings. I open it to find a young woman on my doorstep. Mascara has run down her face and her hair is a frizzy halo around her head. Her jeans are wet up to her shins. The overall effect is more "bedraggled raccoon" than "woman with her life together." I know immediately why she's here.

“My name is Estelle,” I tell her. “I think you’d better come in.”

Shivering in the foyer as she holds the fluffy towel I’ve handed her, she lays out the whole sorry, familiar, story: the people she longs for that find her forgettable, the dreams that never get any closer, and the way she can’t remember one thing she likes about the person she sees in the mirror. “Can you help me?” Ana begs.

“Yes, but once you go down this road, there’s no turning back.” It’s a promise and a warning all in one. I usher her towards the shower, so she’ll stop dripping on the marble. Then I make a pot of tea and wait.

In short order, Ana emerges from the shower looking freshly scrubbed and completely normal. She stares at my surroundings and me with a hunger I remember. “Whatever the cost, I’m willing to pay,” she swears. It’s hard to look solemn in a bathrobe, but she just about manages it.

“The price is your true reflection.”

Ana laughs. “Is that all? You’re welcome to it. It’s never done me much good.”

They always agree so easily, can never imagine a time they’d wish for it back. I didn’t either. Not then, anyway.

“If you’re sure...” She nods eagerly and starts to speak before I can finish. I hold up a hand. “...then come back on the night of the full moon.”

The full moon isn't necessary. But shapeshifters are nothing if not concerned with appearances and tying this transformation to a celestial body provides the necessary theater. It also gives her weeks to change her mind.

But I've been doing this for a long time and I have a feeling this one is going to come back. So I'm unsurprised when Ana knocks on my door on the first night of the full moon. This time she is put together. Her hair is neat, her clothes and makeup are both tidy. And yet, one glance at her eyes shows she's ready to come apart at the seams. I recognize that look too. It doesn't belong to a person who is going to have a long and happy life without my help: it's the look of someone ready to be anyone else.

I step aside. "Come on in, Ana. And remember, there is no true change without sacrifice. If this were easy, everyone would do it."

"I meant it when I said I'd give anything," she swears.

I wave my hand dismissively. "It's easy to say those words. Living up to them is something else entirely." We sit in the main room for a while. I explain what will happen. But again, words are easy.

When I get up, she immediately falls to her knees in front of me. "Please don't send me away again," she begs.

I lean down and take her hands in mine. "If you are sure, more sure about this than you have been about anything in your life, then I will do it. And no one will be able to take it

away.” I search her face for doubt, for anything that will let me send her home. I don’t find it.

Her eyes shine in the soft light. “My answer is the same.”

I nod and go fetch a mirrored compact from a shelf in the wall. When I return, I do not ask her if she’s ready. There is no way to be ready for this. “Brace yourself,” I warn.

“Thank you,” Ana says, still kneeling on the floor.

I close my eyes for a second, wishing this didn’t come down to me. Then I open the compact. It’s pointed right at her. And slowly, ever so slowly, bits of color start to leach from her skin, rising like wisps of fog off a lake. The mirror pulls them in. Then it continues. It doesn’t happen any faster, but the process doesn’t stop.

She screams. It’s one long, unbroken sound. I wince in sympathy, remembering. The process of losing your reflection feels like eyelash curlers and a mascara wand in the eye and a flat iron to the ear and dry skin flaking off after one acne treatment too many. And that’s just the face. It hurts everywhere else too, like hunger pains and contorting yourself into full body Spanx and that muscle burn you get from intense workouts. It’s all the pain you’ve ever felt trying to change yourself, all at once.

She survives it. They don’t always.

Finally, the mirrored compact closes with a snap. Ana is curled in on herself on the floor,

whimpering. She lost her voice some time ago.

I lean down, my hand hovering about an inch away from her shoulder. She flinches away from me. “I’ll go set up the guest room,” I say brightly after a moment, slowly drawing my hand back.

As I go, I slip the mirrored compact into a drawer. It’s full of them. They’re all different styles, from eras across time. Beautiful black and gold art deco designs, antique bronze, ones with intricate enamel-work, or simple silver. Each mirror is different, but they are alike in one respect: none of them will ever open again. I meant it when I told her there is no going back.

I take my time setting up the bed with the softest sheets I own. Then I go sit next to her on the floor in the other room, close enough to touch but only if she reaches out. She doesn’t. She’s in her own private world of pain right now. It takes an age for her to pry herself off the floor and hobble off to bed. I stay with her until she falls asleep.

Not long after dawn, I hear a quiet scream from the other room, torn from a throat already raw. It sounds like it drew blood. I rush from the bed as quickly as I can. I’m not as fast as I used to be. Even though I never look my age, my joints are a reminder that time still passes for me.

“What is this?” she cries, her voice little more than a whisper, looking in the mirror in

vain for the face that's no longer there.

"What you asked for," I remind her gently. I go stand behind her. Normally, I try not to look at the mirror before I've decided on my face. I don't like to see myself before I settle. This time, I force myself to look—really look. I meet my own eyes in the mirror. We can never really change our eyes for long. They're warm and brown... and sad. Everything changes around them.

Ana's own eyes are wet with tears as her face forms and reforms. It's a bit like watching an out of sync video. "How do I make it stop?"

"Ask yourself, what face do I want today?" I meet her eyes in the mirror to make sure she's paying attention. "Then focus and will that face into being. It takes some concentration to maintain, but even that gets easier with practice." When I see that she is watching me, I concentrate and my face settles into a soft version of what I'd hoped I'd look like at this age: smooth skin, high cheekbones, and a straight nose.

By the time Ana succeeds, she's sweating. The face she's settled on isn't far from where she started when she first came to me. But it's a bit like drawing a picture from memory; it's never quite the same. Her lips and chin are slightly different. She finally turns away from the mirror, satisfied for the moment. "Does it hurt like that for everyone? I know you told me the pain might kill me, but I thought you were exaggerating."

"The transformation was only easy once, when a young woman who'd survived an acid attack found her way to me," I say. Although I don't tell Ana this, it was the one and only time I agreed right away. "She didn't scream. I learned later that the man who'd attacked

her felt the pain, that he died of it. I will not lie and tell you I'm sorry."

Ana blinks at me. For a second, her face blurs around the edges. When she regains control, her jaw is a different shape. "Do you get many people like that?"

"No. I don't. And, before you ask, I don't track them down to offer either. This doesn't give them back what they lost. This is only a gift if you want to be someone, anyone other than who you are."

"If you feel like this about it, why help others become like you?" Ana's eyebrows turn a fire-engine red. At the beginning, our appearance changes with our emotions, as if we're living mood rings, and none of the shapeshifters I've met were particularly stable *before* the transformation.

I sigh and put my hand on her arm. "Because it's exactly what some of us need. You sought magic, not surgery. What would you have done if I'd turned you away?" At that, she's silent enough for me to know I guessed right. "And now you get to live. You will be beautiful enough to charm your own life, to win over the people who would have looked right through you before. You will never be ordinary again." As before, it's a promise and a warning all in one.

"I understand," Ana says. She doesn't, not yet, but I appreciate the sentiment.

I pat her arm. "Now, let's practice noses. Whether you go into a life of crime or simply walk into a store, it's important to get the details right."

Her eyebrow raises and turns purple. “A life of crime?”

“There are many ways to apply what we do. You could charm millionaires out of money or trinkets, wheedle your way into halls of power, or simply work somewhere long enough to rob them blind. The beautiful thing of it is that you can simply change your face when you need to and you will be impossible to find. But I’m getting ahead of myself. We’ll work on keeping one face in place before we jump to planning aliases.”

Ana nods, thoughtfully reconsidering my surroundings, clearly wondering which one of the roles I listed netted me all of this. I don’t answer the question in her eyes. We’ll have plenty of time to talk. It takes a year or more to learn all you need to, to become a shapeshifter ready for the world.

While I didn’t lie when she asked why I’d helped her, the truth I didn’t tell her was this: the people who find me are as close to a family as I have now, but only for a while. If I do this right, Ana will become someone I could cross in the street and never recognize. I could have walked by the woman who made me who I am a hundred times without knowing it. I left her and, eventually, Ana is going to leave me. My former apprentices rarely stay in touch. It’s all too easy to conflate the pain they felt with this place. But I appreciate them while they’re here. It’s good to see myself through their eyes, to remember back to who I was and why I’m here now.

The next day Ana is staring mournfully into the mirror again. “I just wanted to be perfect,” she whispers as she struggles to make her features stay.

“I know. And you will get better at this. It’s just going to take time,” I promise.

We're all too *something*. I can change everything about myself and that will still be true. There is no way to be perfect, but that doesn't mean we stop trying.

About the Author

When she isn't playing around in fictional worlds, C.N. Wheaton (she/her or she/they) can often be found teaching Biology to teenagers against their will. Her writing has appeared in *Daily Science Fiction* and *Humour Me*. To learn more about her, you can visit her webpage at beyondthebookshelveswithcn.wordpress.com.

Don't Touch the Roses

By Julia S. Passini

Mama was good.

Mama was kind.

Mama only had one rule.

“Don't touch the roses,” she told me. She stroked my hair as we sat in the garden. I loved her garden. It was beautiful, like her. I looked at the flowers, she looked at me. As her fingers gently raked over my head, she made sure to cover my ears with my long hair. To block them from the sun, she would tell me. The sun could make them ouch.

“I know, Mama.”

“That's good, my little bumblebee.”

My name is Micah. But I'm not supposed to tell anyone that—Mama said no one needs to

know my name. That it's only for me. So, she calls me bumblebee. But everyone knows Mama's name. It's Mama. I don't understand why people can know hers. It doesn't matter, though. My name is like our little secret, and she'll put a finger to her lips and make a funny hushing sound that makes me laugh. She's good at being funny.

"Why can't I touch the roses?" I asked her one day. I never thought to ask it before. They rested in the back of the garden, but shone red with the sunlight. Like cherry juice in the summer. They were too far away to hear. Not like the rest of the garden behind our little house.

"Their thorns are sharp," she explained. "I don't want you to get hurt."

I nodded like I understood everything. And I did. Because she taught me all I needed to know. She taught me flowers, and how the trees talk, and how the garden whispered. She taught me how to listen.

"The rest of the garden is yours to explore," she said. "Just not those."

"Okay, Mama."

I was never without her. I didn't want to be. I liked to make her laugh, telling her what the garden would whisper to me. She didn't seem to hear it like I did.

One day a circle of mushrooms appeared in the garden. Like magic. It whispered loud, like it wanted me to come closer. I clutched her skirt excitedly, pointing at it for her

attention. Mama frowned, so I did too. I never saw that face on her before. She hurried over to the circle and stomped them out, so the circle was broken. I cried.

She held a hand to my face, staring at me. Staring through me. “Micah,” she whispered. But it didn’t feel like she was talking to me. “My sweet Micah.”

I stilled. She hadn’t ever said my name like that before.

We didn’t talk about the mushrooms after that.

Only once did Mama leave me alone in the garden. She said her heart was ouching. That happened more often since the mushrooms. She said I was old enough now to walk it on my own. “Just don’t—”

“Touch the roses,” I said, giggling.

She hesitated on the porch but smiled. “That’s good, my bumblebee.”

I could hear the grass. It was always grumpy. Probably because people only ever walked on it. The lavender sang soft lullabies—my favorite. The daisies chattered, and they made me giggle. As I walked down the cobblestone, making the rounds of all my friends, I glanced toward the bright red flowers in the back of the garden. For something not allowed, they were so very pretty.

Don't touch the roses.

But could I listen to them? I didn't know what they sounded like. Part of me was scared to disobey Mama. But why was I scared? It was Mama. Mama was good.

So I walked.

I had never been close enough to hear them before. My smile faded as my heart *thump-thumped* when they started to speak.

They were so, so loud.

They sounded sad. It made my heart ouch, too. Could I do something to help?

I didn't realize I was walking closer until they were so loud that I couldn't hear me anymore. No buzzing of a bumblebee, only deafening wails.

The roses told me to come closer. I listened.

They told me to touch them.

So I did.

As my fingers stroked a budding bloom, soft as the velvet of Mama's skirt, I froze. Compulsion dragged me to my knees. My mind was as tangled as the thorny briar that poked, prodded, stabbed me.

My thoughts weren't mine as I started to claw my hands in the earth.

I kept digging. Dirt caked my fingernails. The thorns and roots drew blood, red as the flowers' petals, but I did not stop digging as the garden screamed, shouted, pleaded for me to keep going. This needed to happen. The roses were waiting for me.

I stopped only when I couldn't go any more. The hole I made was almost my height. I had to be careful not to fall as I reached down, down, down, for what blocked me from digging further. Tangled in the roots, like part of the earth itself, were funny shaped rocks.

No, not rocks. Bones.

They were small, I could tell that much. Not a grown up like Mama. The skull was about the size of my head, rotting with worms in the eyes. I stared into those vacant sockets, holding it in both hands waiting for it to say anything.

The bones did not sing. The roots screamed.

I knew these bones.

Micah.

“Oh, my bumblebee,” she said from behind me.

She held the same frown as when she stomped the mushrooms.

“I only had one rule.”

About the Author

Julia S. Passini is a Ph.D candidate at North Carolina State University in the Psychology department. Her non-academic work includes several fiction works published in *The Charles Carter* and nonfiction accepted by *ZEAL Magazine*. She lives in North Carolina, where she plays Pokémon Go with her husband and goes to trivia every week.

Into the Fallow Lands

by Oliver Smith

I walked in battered footsteps, creeping down
the hidden gate and stair of a dead man;
a scarecrow of twine and sticks, gone searching
for a soul in the rag and bone broken
under plough in the earth-spine bent beneath
the rusting tractor in the grove, half sunk
in the earth beneath the weight of memory.

My old boots, threaded with Glastonbury-laces,
crossed and re-crossed the fossil-encrusted rib
of the winter hill; grown solid in empty February.
As in the silence of the naked oak lay
the seed un-sprouted, the corn un-grown.
The leaves that rumoured away the summer,
silent and skeletal beneath the ice and snow.

The world, all breath un-breathed, wreathed me
in the slow creak of frozen sapwood in frost.
I half reached for a sun below emerald ice,
as the strata settled above me.

Just the small chatter of sand, caught in its teeth
whispering the years to dust, a poem trapped
inside the frozen skull of the stony skies.

About the Author

Oliver Smith is a visual artist and writer from Cheltenham, UK. His poetry has been published in *Abyss & Apex*, *Alchemy Spoon*, *Ink*, *Sweat, and Tears*, *Strange Horizons* and *Sylvia Magazine* and he has twice been nominated for the Pushcart Prize.

In 2020 he was awarded a PhD in Literary and Critical Studies by the University of Gloucestershire. You can learn more about him by visiting his website at oliversimonsmithwriter.wordpress.com.

Mr. Fifteen

by Tom Pike

Charlie didn't need a Camera to remember the day Mr. Fifteen came.

Mr. Fifteen was a hand-me-down Camera from Aunt Lucy when she died. She used to dress him up in a little suit and call him Herbie. When the Cameras were invented, so were many excuses to think of them as people. Charlie didn't think of Mr. Fifteen as a welcome houseguest. Charlie hated him.

From the start, Mr. Fifteen was unusual. He would take pictures of dust motes on the floor, record videos of the tap dripping, or play back, on loop, the sound of Dad using the table saw. Mom and Dad didn't know what to think of him, but they had other Cameras, so they had room to tolerate a little strangeness.

Whenever Mr. Fifteen was asked to play back a recording of an event, he always chose the exact angle and editing that would show Charlie in the worst possible light. The time he took an extra piece of cake at Grandma's birthday and told her there weren't any left for seconds. The time he poured a bucket of paint down the toilet when Dad was trying to fix up the guest room. Mr. Fifteen left out the hug he gave Grandma and the way he'd pass the different brushes to his dad up on the ladder. It left out his laughter. Watching the recordings, even Charlie began to wonder if he ever did anything good. He couldn't remember what he had done that had upset Mr. Fifteen.

The strangest obsession Mr. Fifteen had was with a toy fire truck that had been Charlie's favorite toy when he was younger. Every time Mr. Fifteen got it out, the toy would be put carefully away, in the cedar chest. It was supposed to remain there until there was a younger cousin for it to be passed down to. Days later, they'd find it in the middle of the floor, and Mr. Fifteen would project video after video of it sitting there, doing nothing. Back the toy went into storage, only for Mr. Fifteen to find it and take it out again.

Mommy didn't understand what upset Charlie. She would laugh at the embarrassing moments Mr. Fifteen showed. She said Mr. Fifteen had a sense of humor. Charlie felt hatred coming from that horrible Camera, but when he told her about it, she brushed it off.

"You know, I have a co-worker who swears by this story," she would say. "Her mother-in-law came home one day and asked to have a memory played back. She asked her Camera to play the best part of the week. It showed her a bunch of pictures of other Cameras. They'd gotten together in her bedroom and had this little Camera party. They were all plugged into the wall outlets like it was—" —here, Mommy would laugh— "—well, I'll tell you when you're older."

It was one of those stories that got passed around so many times that no one knew if it was true. But if Charlie had seen Mr. Fifteen at such a gathering, he would have suspected a revolution, not a party. Everyone looked at the Cameras and saw what they expected to see.

One day, Mr. Fifteen played back the time Charlie kicked his piano teacher. Charlie decided that he had endured enough.

He found Dad hunched over his card table, pressing his penknife to a sliver of balsa wood. A jeweler's glass was clipped onto his glasses. Dad was always fiddling with a model of some machine. Dad understood these things better than he understood Charlie. Sometimes it was ships; today it was an airplane.

"I want you to get rid of Mr. Fifteen," said Charlie without preamble.

Dad tried to fake concern. "Look," he said to Charlie, "it's ordinary to think that those things have opinions, but Mr. Fifteen can't want you to be unhappy. He's a Camera."

"But Mommy said they're supposed to be like us," Charlie protested.

Dad set down his knife and took off the jeweler's glass to look directly at Charlie. "The way they remember things is supposed to work like human memory," he admitted. "But that's just so they show us the good parts! We remember emotional high and low points. Right?"

Charlie sighed, and wearily quoted something Mommy had told him. "If you're holding a camera, you can't pay attention to things. And if you've got a *stupid* robot that's snapping pictures all day, you won't have time to find the ones you want. So the robots have to be smart." Charlie scuffed his foot against the floor. "It's not true, Dad. We don't need him, and I don't like him."

Dad shook his head. "He's weird, but he's a good Camera deep down. Mr. Fifteen understands just enough about feelings to show us the cool things we've done that we've

almost forgotten." Dad's smile was full of false reassurances. He hugged Charlie briefly before returning to his model. "It's okay, Charlie. You don't have to worry that he sees into your soul."

But Charlie was worried about exactly that. He suspected Mr. Fifteen could see his soul, and it knew he was a bad person. Mr. Fifteen couldn't be right about that. Charlie couldn't afford for him to be right about that. Mom and Dad wouldn't help, which meant Charlie would have to settle things himself.

The robot squeaked through the kitchen on its whirring wheels. Its telescoping neck was down, its camera pointing at a cheese curl it was carrying. Charlie looked down at it from his chair at the table. The cheese curl was covered in fluff and hairs.

"Mr. Fifteen," said Charlie, "remember me something." The robot pretended it did not hear him.

"Herbie!" Charlie demanded.

Mr. Fifteen paused. He wheeled around in place. His neck telescoped up to be eye-level with Charlie. Its aperture irised to look at him. Whenever Mr. Fifteen did that, it always unsettled Charlie, and he didn't know why. "Play me a memory," he said.

Mr. Fifteen's projector began spinning up, and a white box of light appeared on the wall.

"Show me what I did that made you hate me."

Mr. Fifteen showed nothing. The projector kept whirring. The iris adjusted.

"Show me why you hate me!"

Mr. Fifteen's projector clicked off. The white box on the wall disappeared. Mr. Fifteen's neck descended. He stared at the cheese curl and scooted away.

Charlie wondered if Mr. Fifteen recorded any memories about itself. It was only supposed to remember things that happened to others. But the Camera had somehow found a way to hold a grudge. Maybe Mr. Fifteen just didn't feel like talking.

It didn't matter. There might still be a way to learn what had happened.

He found Dad's oldest Camera, Mr. Eleven, in the attic, where Mr. Eleven was patiently awaiting reactivation. Mr. Eleven was the best-behaved Camera they owned. Cameras had to be trained like pets, with about six months of learning and exploring the world before they became useful. Dad, in his all-consuming practicality, had raised Mr. Eleven to be efficient, productive, and decidedly un-strange.

"Mr. Eleven," said Charlie, "I need to remember." Mr. Eleven's projector spun up. Charlie took in a deep breath. If the story about the Camera party had happened, maybe it meant the Cameras were capable of seeing other Cameras as having emotions. If that was true, they might play back memories of other Cameras.

"Show me when I hurt Mr. Fifteen's feelings."

Mr. Eleven paused. Charlie could hear its hard disk clicking and clucking as it tried to process his request. Charlie started to believe it wasn't going to show him anything at all, and was about to shut it off, when images appeared on the wall.

Mr. Eleven showed Charlie the day Dad brought Mr. Fifteen home for the first time. Charlie, then barely a toddler, recoiled away in fear, reacting to the human-like way it was dressed. It looked uncanny—person-like but not a person. Charlie huddled behind Mommy's legs as she took Mr. Fifteen's jacket off.

Mr. Eleven cued another memory. This one was a brief moment he'd only glimpsed. Charlie, now five, walked through the living room on his way outside. Mr. Fifteen was going the other direction, carrying the fire truck. Mr. Fifteen wasn't watching where he was going, and Charlie had to push him out of his way.

Charlie watched the memories, growing more and more angry. Mr. Eleven continued to play them, one after another. This was something Mr. Eleven did when he wasn't sure which memory you wanted to see.

On the projector image, Charlie poured soda on Mr. Fifteen's chassis to see what happened. He threw ping pong balls at Mr. Fifteen's camera to make his friends laugh. There were so many incidents, and Mr. Eleven didn't seem to be sure which moment, exactly, was the one where Mr. Fifteen started to hate Charlie.

When Charlie realized the stream of images wasn't going to end, he struck Mr. Eleven in his telescoping neck. Mr. Eleven lurched backward. It shut its projector off. It tried to pull its neck back in, but there was a new kink in one of its segments. Charlie

immediately felt bad, watching it try and fail to retract its neck.

"Go to sleep, Mr. Eleven," he said, and Mr. Eleven did.

Charlie came home from school thirsty. The hot May sun had left him wheezing throughout the entire walk home. He opened the fridge, but they were out of juice—and he'd rather go thirsty than drink milk. He made his way down to the basement, to the back room, where Dad sometimes put extra juice bottles.

He entered the back room to find Mr. Eleven and Mr. Nine huddled in a corner conspiratorially. An image was on the wall.

The image was of Charlie's family watching memories. In the recording, Mommy asked Mr. Fifteen to play back Charlie's most recent birthday party. Mr. Fifteen projected onto the wall. He showed Charlie throw away the action figure Brandon gave him. Mommy laughed, and Charlie simmered.

Charlie fumed as he watched the robots. They didn't seem to notice him. They continued to watch memories like this one. Times Mr. Fifteen had humiliated Charlie in front of his family. The robots were watching these and gloating.

Now all the Cameras hated him, and it was Mr. Fifteen's fault.

Mr. Fifteen had given Charlie so many bad memories. Now, Charlie was going to give one to him.

Charlie found Mr. Fifteen in the family room, taking pictures of the fire truck. Charlie snatched the truck up. Mr. Fifteen craned his neck to get a good angle on what Charlie was doing. Mr. Fifteen seemed almost surprised.

Charlie thought about setting it on fire but decided against it. That would have been too poetic. The fire truck would have died in the line of duty. It needed a brutal, pointless death. Something Mr. Fifteen would not be able to make sense of.

Charlie smashed it against the floor in front of Mr. Fifteen. He brought it down again and again. Plastic shards flew. The fire truck split. Charlie took the halves and continued to dash them upon the hard wood.

When he finished, he was breathing hard. Mr. Fifteen sat still, staring at him, recording.

Charlie wiped sweat from his brow. He looked down at the pieces of the truck. He pointed at the wreckage. "Replay that memory," Charlie said.

Mr. Fifteen did nothing. His hard disk whirred and his iris dilated.

"Replay the time I crushed the fire truck!" Charlie insisted.

A light appeared on the wall as Mr. Fifteen began projecting. Charlie felt a thrilling rush of satisfaction. But his smug smile fell when he saw that Mr. Fifteen had chosen to show him a different memory.

It was Christmas. Charlie was four. He unwrapped a gift, revealing a box holding the fire truck. He hugged Mommy and Daddy. There was an affection to the way the scene was recorded and edited. Mr. Fifteen seemed fond of this memory.

The projector blinked, showed another memory. Charlie, still a young child, played happily with the toy. He put out imaginary fires all over an imaginary town. These were the first times Mr. Fifteen had ever played memories of Charlie smiling.

A new memory. An older Charlie played with his game system. The truck sat, forgotten, next to him. The camera zoomed in on Charlie as Mr. Fifteen picked up the truck and took it closer to him. It set the truck right next to Charlie, who continued to ignore it.

A new memory. Mr. Fifteen opened the cedar chest and took out the truck. He set it in the middle of the floor in front of Charlie, who walked past it.

Another. Mr. Fifteen carried the truck, staring at it lovingly, when all of a sudden, the camera shook. Mr. Fifteen looked up to see Charlie had shoved him out of the way.

And then Charlie, aged seven, took the fire truck out of Mr. Fifteen's hands. He lifted it over his head and destroyed it against the hardwood floor.

Mr. Fifteen had kept bringing out the truck, hoping it would make Charlie happy again. Hoping he would become a good person again. The Camera was worried that Charlie had become something horrible. And Charlie had just proved that it was right.

The projector image faded. Mr. Fifteen retracted his neck. Charlie stared at him, horrified, holding back tears. He tried to stop his lip from trembling.

Mr. Fifteen's wheel motors buzzed and squeaked as he rolled out of the room, over the shards of the broken toy.

Every time Mr. Fifteen showed a memory to his family, Charlie worried it would be the smashing of the truck. But Mr. Fifteen never showed that one. He didn't have to. He knew he had won.

For the rest of his life, even as an adult, Charlie avoided Mr. Fifteen. The Camera somehow seemed taller than him. Its rusted enclosure looked like armor; its creaky wheels were tank treads. He couldn't admit to his parents what had happened, and he couldn't insist they get rid of Mr. Fifteen without telling them why.

So Charlie smiled more, argued less. He did not do this because he wanted to. He lived life glancing around corners, worried that Mr. Fifteen was watching.

About the Author

Tom Pike is a published writer with bylines in small literary journals, and with a short story in a recent month's edition of *Analog Science Fiction & Fact*.

Seeds

by Simon Kewin

“Don’t eat the seeds, though. If you do, an apple tree will grow inside you.”

Evan, six years old and well-behaved, did as his mother said. But then, when she had left him alone to go and wash the dishes, curiosity got the better of him. He could hear her humming along to the radio. With his fingertips, he plucked one of the slippery, brown seeds out from his apple core. Not chewing, not stopping to think what he was doing, he swallowed it down. He felt it sharp in his throat.

Nothing seemed to happen, though, nothing interesting, no sign of a tree, no pain in his stomach. The sun came out, bathing his world in yellow light, and so he forgot what he’d done and ran to play with Steven and Peter and Mirabelle....

...Until a day, thirty years later, when a tickle in the back of his throat made him pause. He was standing in the bathroom, brain foggy, getting himself ready for work. Another dull day in the dull office. Baffled, he peered open-mouthed into his shaving-mirror, trying to see past his tongue and his teeth. There, just visible between his tonsils, was the pale green tip of a tendril, peeping out. Growing up from within him.

Intrigued, he reached into his gullet with his fingers and then with tweezers to try and

pluck the shoot free. He managed to get a good grip on it, but it wouldn't budge. It was clearly well-rooted in his stomach, the roots maybe twining through his guts. He found the thought satisfying. Strong roots were a good thing.

He stood unmoving for long minutes, trying to touch the shoot with his tongue. It tickled but wasn't unpleasant. The very tip of a single leaf was unfurling back there, lime green. He had no memory of the day he'd swallowed the seed. He found he couldn't even be sure why he was standing in the little room, how he'd got there, where he was supposed to be going.

What "going" meant.

As the days went by, he took to standing stationary for longer and longer periods: in the house, in the street, in parks. He liked parks best.

His wife, Mirabelle, commented upon it.

"Are you OK, hon? You seem distracted recently. Is something on your mind?"

He didn't reply, and so far as he could tell, Mirabelle didn't seem to be too concerned. Evan quit his job, or at least didn't go back, and no one seemed to mind about that, either.

He liked, instead, to spend more time outside, anywhere outside. Sun, rain, wind, cold: he found none of them troubled him as they once might have. He felt more resilient. Rooted.

Thicker-skinned. He liked to find a quiet spot and simply stand, arms held wide, not moving, eyes closed, listening.

Being.

Bees and flies buzzed around him warily. Then the birds, taking their lead from the insects, fluttered to him in blurs of feathers to perch upon his limbs.

It seemed right. He let them be. Not seeing, not thinking, he simply stood.

About the Author

Simon Kewin is the author of over 100 published short and flash stories, appearing in *Analog*, *Nature*, *Daily Science Fiction* and many more. He is also the author of the *Cloven Land* fantasy trilogy, cyberpunk thriller *The Genehunter*, steampunk *Gormenghast* saga *Engn*, the *Triple Stars* sci/fi trilogy and the *Office of the Witchfinder General* books, published by Elsewhen Press. In 2022, he was an SPSFC semi-finalist and had a short story shortlisted for a Utopia award. You can find him at simonkewin.co.uk and at @SimonKewin on Twitter.

A Race with King Thrushbeard

by Claire Smith

Haddock, kippers, cod
swam over my apron
after every twelve-hour shift.

His four o'clock am alarm bell screams:

Out of bed!

I'd struggle to get ready
to leave his tenement-flat
by four-thirty.

He thought his lies
so effortlessly snaked
off his tongue. But when a lame-horse stranger fell
over the counter, and the flake-ice flew
everywhere, I knew he was the culprit
beneath the disguise.

He rewarded me with a ring—

a giant gem rosette.

He led me into a room
with his arm locked through mine.

A crowd of guests decorated in
bright brimmed hats and morning dress
stood each side of the aisle.

I was quick, hurdled over the chairs
bolted before he could decorate
me with bridal garb. His guests chorused gasps—
the outsider for the win—
their sure bets lost.

I won't miss his profanities
that whipped me until I was sore.
His words, along with his diamonds,

I dropped

easy

down

a drain.

About the Author

Claire Smith (she/her) writes about other worlds: the fairy tale, folklore and myth. Her poems have most recently appeared in *Ink*, *Sweat & Tears*, *Riddled with Arrows*, and *Spectral Realms*. She is currently working on a PhD in Humanities at the University of Gloucestershire. She can be found on the web at www.divingfornightmares.co.uk, on facebook at @divingfornightmares, and on Instagram at clairesdivingfornightmares.

Hexposure Therapy

by Rebecca A. Demarest

The candles had nearly burnt themselves out when a timid knock at the edge of the pentagram scattered chalk dust across my floor boards. None of them had ever knocked before. They just swept grandly into the bounds of my spell to begin bargaining.

“Come in,” I called, fighting the rising tones of a question. Leave them an opening like that and you’re starting at a disadvantage.

A wisp of black curled up from the carelessly inscribed glyphs, hesitating briefly before coalescing into a small imp, worrying its tail between its claws. I sat down with my back against the wall, so I didn’t feel like I was looming, and gestured broadly.

“Welcome to the mortal plane, my friend. I take it you heard my call?” This imp sure as heck wasn’t the first demon I’d called this evening, not even the third, fifth, twentieth name I’d shouted into the void. The blood kept drying out on the floor and my arm was covered in cuts from repeatedly dialing the underworld. I’d had to resort to an incantation akin to calling 411.

The imp was staring around it in awe, trying to drink in as much of the hovel we were sitting in as possible, before he would be shuffled back off into the Pits. “There wasn’t a

line. Usually there's a line and pushing and shoving trying to answer a call as broad as yours." His voice—for he was unmistakably male—was much deeper and rougher than I would have expected for such a wee devil, but who was I to judge on appearances?

"Yeah, can't think what that's about. Anyhoo." I rubbed my hands together and leaned forward. "I presume since you ascended the spell chain that you are empowered to make deals?"

Affronted dignity is a funny expression on such miniature, squished looking features. "Of course. How else am I to get stronger if I can't make deals?"

"Wait, am I your first?" I grinned. "I'm your first, aren't I?"

You'd think a red complexion would hide a blush, but it just shows up as maroon. "I will have you know there have been many, *many*, humans before you, I've collected *so many* debts—"

I started laughing, my diaphragm spasming so hard I tipped over from my seated position and rolled onto my back. It was several minutes before I could catch my breath, enough to wheeze out, "Sure buddy, and I'm the pope."

"Oh, the papacity," the imp muttered, crossing his spindly arms. Only he pronounced it to rhyme with audacity. "Are you done yet? Or don't you have something you want?"

I panted, giggling every few breaths. I had cut it close this time; I could feel the unbridled

energy and mania bubbling up from the place I kept it locked inside, with the help of the counter full of medications at home. I pushed myself up from the floor, determined to make this deal before I lost all sense of logic and reason.

“I know your set aren’t that into soul stealing these days, what with the overcrowding down under, so my terms are this: Top off my magic reserves, but not immediately. Instead, take your payment first, and when that is complete, you leave me with enough magic to sustain me for the next decade’s profligate use.”

Somehow, the regard of beady little eyes is sharper than the examination of eyes of the larger beasts. The same amount of pressure compressed into a smaller area, like being stepped on by an elephant in stilettos. Liable to go right through a gal’s face, if they’re not careful.

“That is a heavy bargain. What do you offer in return?”

The imp is smarter than I would have given him credit for, leaving the bargaining table open like that. To see how I value the gift, and not cut himself off from richer rewards than he might choose for himself.

“Free possession of my body, for as long as you can stand it.”

The imp stared at me, silently mouthing the price I’d offered. It was so quiet I could hear the candles begin to gutter. I wish he would hurry up, time felt like molasses at this point. “Free possession, totally free.”

“The only rules being that 1) When you leave, you can’t come back unless I invite you again and 2) You fill up the old magic tank while you’re at it.” I stuck my hand out, ready to seal the deal.

“Deal.” The imp’s grin had too many teeth in it, and its mouth split entirely too far around its head, but he placed his tiny hand in mine and shook. As our joined hands split the spell barrier, the candles extinguished themselves and I felt the rush of the imp’s entrance into my body. At least he was small, which is more than I could say for Beelzebub. That monstrous devil had felt like he was going to split my skin.

The imp staggered to my feet, feeling out my much longer limbs, while I watched from deep inside, like sitting in a dark and lonely movie theater.

“You feel fizzy, are you supposed to feel fizzy?” My voice asked, halting and rough.

I thought you said you did all sorts of deals before, surely you’ve possessed a human! I paused, then in case he couldn’t hear it through my mental voice: *That was sarcasm.*

The imp harrumphed and started moving about the decaying old cabin, testing its movement and figuring out all my parts. I finally let my mental control relax, my constant guard against that very same “fizzy” sensation. Each demon had called it something else. Ticklish, pokey, stinging, I’d run through the gamut over the years.

I started paying attention again when imp-me started chuckling, standing in front of a fractured mirror and mussing my hair. “You are so foolish, human, why would you ever

give up your body, to any of my kind? You know you won't get it back again, ever. Till death do us part."

Because I can't stand seeing what happens next. Not after my first episode. I sighed and snuggled down into my subconscious.

"What do you mean, what happens next?" I ignored the imp and let myself start drifting to sleep. "Human, what happens next?"

My name is Kate. Even in an incorporeal state, I couldn't help but yawn. *Kate, Scourge of Bothell High, Class of 2005.* It's not like my high school graduating class was a fact that particularly defined me, but the first time I had made this deal was right after graduation, and, well... when the demons give you a title, you might as well use it.

The little imp's screams of terror were a lovely lullaby to fall asleep to, as he scrambled futilely against the walls of my mind, which were locking shut around him.

I woke up and stretched, mentally and physically, noting that I was alone in my body again. It's not something you notice much unless you spend significant time *not* alone in your body. I was buried in a nest of bedclothes someone had dragged under my bed and I made a face while I hauled myself out of the wreckage. I couldn't avoid the musty, rank body odor, or the pounds I'd lost.

Turning on the TV—which was intact this time at least—showed months had passed since I'd turned over my body to the little imp. I snapped my fingers and drew them apart, studying the bright line of force strung between them. At least he'd kept his word and topped off my supply while he was trapped in there. Might as well get something out of my own personal hell.

I summoned my cell phone, but it was wrecked—big surprise—so I summoned one of my stash. An hour later I was back in business, with my backup downloaded from the cloud (the digital one) and called my psychiatrists' office.

“Dr. Brenner's office, please leave a message after the beep.”

I started flipping through the newer photos on the phone while I talked. “Hey, Dr. B. Sorry I dropped off there, looks like this round of medications didn't take either. Last date I remember before the episode was... beginning of October?” There were a lot of selfies with random people in what looked like bars, clubs... crack houses? Note to self, do a blood screen and STI panel. “Looks like it's March now. And by the state of things in my apartment, I dropped pretty hard into a depressive phase immediately afterward. Only now really finding my feet in reality again.” Or finding myself alone again, more like.

There was a bunch of paper scattered around my living room, scribbled plans and diagrams that made no sense to me now, though I'm sure they made sense when we were lost to unbalanced brain chemistry. “I don't know if you saw the article I forwarded you before I dropped out, but it looks like there's some interesting movement in targeted deep brain stimulation treatments and I'd love to discuss those with you. Give me a call back when you get this.” I almost hung up, then added, “I really appreciate all you do, doc. Thanks.”

I collapsed into my armchair for a moment, taking stock of the chaos and destruction in my apartment. It's a good thing I paid up front, in advance, for years at a time. This way I wouldn't wake up without a home, though I've occasionally woken up pretty far away from it.

There were a lot of phone calls I needed to make, but I was in no hurry to deal with my family and friends and their, *We were so worried about you*, and their, *Did you stop taking your meds?* As if that was the only reason I ended up pickled by the wrong neurotransmitters. Oh, and my sister was bound to add, *You should exercise regularly, it does wonders for me!*

I rubbed my hands over my face briskly, trying in vain to rid myself of the brain fog that would linger on for months. As I reached over for my phone again, I caught a whiff of myself and made a face. Shower first. Recriminations could wait.

About the Author

Rebecca A. Demarest (she/her) is an award-winning author, playwright, book designer, and writing instructor living in Seattle, WA with her husband and two muppets. Her short work has appeared alongside authors like Cat Rambo and has been dramatized for the stage and NPR. For more information on her work, you can visit her website at rebeccademarest.com.

Self-Portrait as Hecate & Azura

by T. Dallas Saylor

Because with the pomegranate girl
all I could be was her torch
en route to fate, as if

it mattered whether she lost
her footing on steep stone, or
her way in dark tunnels

when we both knew how this
would end; because springs pass
like clustered seeds, & one day

you dawn in white robes trimmed
with sage, the same sage hair
& eyes as the pomegranate girl,

the grass between your toes
as if goodness itself were
an end, a god, a sustainer;

because I would not wait again
for hell to open its mouth like
a rind & dress you in bridal

binding, or worse, for heaven
to do so & call it moral,
call it triumph—I carved

a long yew wand & appeared
to you two-faced, not in
deception but vigilance; I met you

at the crossroads between
spring & summer, taught you
to char the wand's tip

with pride; because I am goddess
of boundaries, I taught you
to spellweave yours, pushed you

hard, harder, until at last
you could cast it right, cast
even me aside, & cast me

as rival, the moon to your
blinding heat, the unknown
to your all-revealing blaze,

& I was happy to spar if it made
you strong against heaven & hell
because I can't have you

so full of burning sweet juice
without fearing the deep red
of your harvest—because in this

kind of story, you can't just be
pretty & brilliant; radiant girl,
you must also know how to kill.

for & after Dana Terrace

About the Author

T. Dallas Saylor (he/they) is a PhD candidate at Florida State University and holds an MFA from the University of Houston. His work meditates on the body, especially gender and sexuality, against physical, spiritual, and digital landscapes. He currently lives in Denver, CO. You can find him on Twitter at @dallas_saylor.

A Thousand Ways to Go Home

by Marianne Xenos

When the creature found him in the mountains of southern Armenia, Razi was sitting on a rock playing his fiddle to the wind. It was a cold, bright day in 1915, and his only other audience was a long-eared nanny goat eating oatmeal from a wooden bowl. The creature sniffed at the goat, then stalked toward the fiddler, whose eyes were bright and rimmed with red. Razi watched the tiny creature, who looked like a copper-colored spaniel with plumed wings, but only paused his playing for a moment. The song was a lament, composed as a duet for traditional Armenian instruments, but Razi had only himself, his fiddle, and a memory of listening to the song through a window while the composer rehearsed. The composer died yesterday in Khampert, and Razi had come to the mountains to grieve. He nodded to the creature and kept playing. The tune tripped across the dry, white landscape—choppy and incomplete. Razi sought to honor the lament, but something was missing in his playing. He rolled his shoulders unhappily, and put down his bow.

Razi turned to the creature, who had watched the performance quietly, and they stared, brown eyes meeting amber. Razi had been around for a while, a century in Armenia alone, and knew the creature wasn't a dog or a bird—but something more complicated. Something more mythic. The creature watched him as though wondering whether he was a human fool or a more interesting type of fool. Or so Razi imagined. And although he passed for human on the street, Razi was something more interesting. Finally, the creature blinked, shook out her plumes, and came a few steps closer. Razi bowed his head and offered her lunch.

Lunch consisted of apples, cheese, and a small cup of goat's milk. The creature refused the apples, lapped at the milk, and ate all of the cheese. She used her paws daintily and nibbled with a sharp set of pointed teeth. Razi had come to the mountains to be alone and hadn't packed much food, but watched her curiously while she ate both his lunch and dinner. At the moment, he was more curious than hungry, and if he craved anything, it was the company of something strange and relatively immortal. Razi's love of mortals had shattered his heart, and he felt some kinship with the small dragonish dog.

When Razi was young, or at least young by Peri standards, his world toppled for the first time. Humans lost faith in magic, the old gods disappeared, and mythical creatures changed. In Sumer, Razi's homeland, many were hybrids already—great winged lions or bird-headed men—and others developed new kinds of creative juxtapositions. Some grew larger, until they were unfathomable, and some became smaller or disappeared. Those who thrived had to maneuver in a world too hostile for a small winged dog and too crowded for a dragon. Razi thought of them as mythic mutts—expatriates like Razi—refugees from another time.

Razi scratched his chin thoughtfully, wishing for a way to communicate with this particular mutt. Just then, he felt a tickle in his skull and realized that someone was riffling through his private thoughts.

"That's not fair," he said calmly. "If you can read my mind, I should be able to read yours."

The creature licked the last of the cheese from her talons and considered him for a moment. Then she shook out her wings and crossed over to him, butting his hand with her head. Then butted again. Finally, he got the point and placed his hand on the ridge

between her large ears, which stood up like a smaller set of wings—but he almost pulled away. *Thought, image, touch, smell.* Her brain wasn't human or Peri, it wasn't mammal or reptile. And it was too much information, too fast, without context or metaphor. Razi felt as though a library of books filtered through a kaleidoscope and perfumed with all the stinks of nature had been dumped into his head.

He pulled his hand away.

"Can you filter that?" he asked. "Slow it down a little?"

She fluffed her wings and gave an almost doggy grin. Razi sighed and tried again.

Razi pulled a few straws from the creature's whirlwind mind. One was her name, Ur-Shezilzilla Mammi-Damkianna. Another: she wasn't male or female. There was a complicated rush of biological information that Razi couldn't follow, with an uncomfortable overload of olfactory data. But saying "she" was an acceptable approximation. Then there was the surge of her personal story, about warfare, isolation and death and Razi felt his own grief surge. He pulled his hand away.

"Ur-Shezilzilla Mammi-Damkianna?" he asked. "That's Sumerian... will you accept a nickname, cousin? What about Mammi?" Razi smiled, teasing, and the little creature showed her teeth, but not the doggy smile. "Okay then, what about Zilla? Or better yet, what about Zilly?"

She licked one talon thoughtfully and blinked her agreement.

Razi tidied up the sparse remains of their lunch, knowing he'd have goat's milk for supper and breakfast too, but wondered what else to feed Zilly. If she chose to stick around. Then he picked up his fiddle. He would attempt the song one more time before leaving the mountain.

The composer was Razi's only remaining great-grandchild, a well-known musician named Ari Perystian, who had died yesterday, massacred with many others from his village. Over a hundred years ago, Razi had fallen in love with a mortal woman in Kharpert. He'd raised children with her but had too few years to love them. Time passed differently for humans and Peri. After her death, Razi watched his descendants from afar. Most enjoyed music and dance, but none lived longer than an average human time. And this year in Armenia many people died, and died brutally, including Ari.

While Razi re-tuned his fiddle, he hummed a Sumerian love song. The original singer had been dead for 3,000 years, but Razi still remembered his voice. Razi wondered, bleakly, if perhaps it was possible to remember too much. Ari's wasn't the only death yesterday; an entire village was destroyed. Razi believed that grieving one life is to grieve all life. In grieving a descendant, he grieved a civilization. For better or worse, Razi's path was to remember. He put his bow to the strings.

Razi played his great-grandson's song, "A Thousand Ways to Go Home." He played solo, imagining the second instrument in Ari's composition, and let the fiddle scatter his feelings with the wind. The sky curved above him, a bright white bowl to hold the sound. Then Razi heard humming—full, round and deep like the drone of a dudek—and glanced at Zilly. She was harmonizing, building a low base of sound under the higher vibrato of Razi's fiddle. As written by Ari, one instrument created the ground, and the other flew in the wind, and Zilly must have plucked the song from Razi's mind. He nodded to her, and

let the music fill the sky.

About the Author

Marianne Xenos (she/her) is writer and visual artist living in western Massachusetts. She works with photography, collage and fiction. Along with a full-length novel set in Boston's queer community in 1983, she writes stories about shapeshifters, disco and urban dragons. You can follow her on Instagram at the handle @mariannexenos or through her website at www.mariannexenos.com.

Thank you for reading The Fantastic Other!