

# Write of Passion

LITERARY JOURNAL

## Magic in the Mundane

Vol. 3 | Issue 1



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# Letter from the Editor

By Chaz Beebe

Hello family, friends, and fans!

I am Chaz Beebe, Journal Team Lead here at *Write of Passion*. I am filling in for our wonderful Allison Hinkle for now.

Have you ever noticed magic in the simplest of moments? Maybe you had all green lights on the way to work? Someone may have paid it forward and you received a free coffee. You might have made a wish to see your great-grandmother when you saw a picture of the two of you, and you were able to spend time with her through your reminiscing.

We hope that we can help you to find that magic in the mundane in the following stories. You might be surprised. Maybe you will relate? You may be reminded to find joy in the little things in life that are made magical, just because you wish it to be so.



Writers, if you want to be a part of future magical moments with our literary journals or anthologies:

- First, make sure the work is a polished final draft on the theme for the submissions period listed on our [Important Dates](#) page of the *Write of Passion* website.
- Make sure the work has not been published. This includes on personal blogs or websites.

- Use the specific guidelines set out on the [Submissions Guidelines](#) page to prepare and submit your work for the theme requested in the time period it is being requested. (Currently literary journal submissions are unpaid, but we are trying to change that. Accepted works are automatically a part of our annual anthology, along with accepted second-chance works.)
- Once submitted, look for communications by email on the next steps.

Find out more and follow *Write of Passion* on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#) as well as our [website](#), and with me on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and my [Patreon site](#).

# Meet the Staff Spotlights



Ani resides in Tulsa, Oklahoma, surrounded by family. She is currently a grad student at Southern New Hampshire University studying English and Creative Writing. Ani aspires to become a published author writing fantasy stories for young adults. In her free time, she likes to read anything in the fantasy, science fiction, and futuristic dystopian genres. Her guilty pleasure is manga though. A solid portion of her inspiration comes from watching Marvel and DC cartoons as a child. The other portion results from playing with Lisa Frank stationary with her big sister.

Contact her for all of your “Ask Ani” questions at the Ask Ani email: [askani@writeofpassion.com](mailto:askani@writeofpassion.com), or if you have questions or suggestions for the short serial, “Purdy and Dork,” you can email her personal email: [ani@writeofpassion.com](mailto:ani@writeofpassion.com).

~

Leo Otherland is a dreamer, martial artist, queer author, and lover of all things strange and unordinary from the arctic north woods of Wisconsin. This elusive scribbler acquired his passion for weaving stories of dark and broken things through a childhood spent huddling in books and dodging the unfriendly spirits residing in the haunted house he called home for several years. Currently, Leo is doodling out several different novels at once as well as various short (he laughs at this description...) pieces of fan fiction in a very ordinary apartment, hidden away somewhere unobtrusive. During the slight occasions he is not writing, this finicky, unrepentant otaku enjoys reading web comics, watching anime, and playing JRPGs. And, while it’s rare to catch this skittish pensmith out in the daylight, his published works can be found in *Balance of Seven's* number one best-selling and award winning anthology, *Dragons Within: Guarding Her Own*, *Write of Passion's* top ten best-selling anthology, *Fractured Realities*, and on *Archive of Our Own*. The author himself can be located on his Facebook page: [facebook.com/LeoOtherland/](https://www.facebook.com/LeoOtherland/) or in his personal writing Discord server: <https://discord.gg/jsQw96p>.



# Author Spotlight: Rachael Callahan

By Avery Graycastle

Rachael Callahan is a lifetime reader and writer. In first grade, she was bitten by the writing bug, writing her first song questioning life, the universe, and everything. Her love for writing only grew when, in the third grade, she got to try writing stories with a 20-page story about a person who shapeshifts into a bat.

Now, she has nine complete stories. She has a five-part series written for adults, a trilogy, and a stand-alone. The stand-alone novel is currently her favorite written child. It's called *Unsung Lullaby*, and it's about the people who clean up the messes that happen when the fantasy world collides with the human world.

She writes typically late at night or during school breaks. When she is writing at night, she tends to fall asleep while writing. When she is lucky enough to dedicate a whole day to writing, she starts right after

breakfast and continues until she falls asleep. Her tendency to write until she falls asleep may well contribute to her motivation for her writing. Rachael gains her inspiration from vivid moments within dreams that blossom into entire stories from the seed the sandman planted. As a teacher and a toddler mom, Rachael doesn't get much time to herself, so when she isn't writing during her free time, she likes to sleep and re-watch old favorites like *Supernatural* and *Criminal Minds*.

Rachael, like many, has learned from her writing. She has learned that writing creates a space for the voiceless to have a voice and agency in their characters' lives and, through that, their own lives.

The tip that Rachael gives to new writers has been heard before. However, Rachael provides a roadmap of what to do with what you are reading. Rachael suggests, "Read. Readers make the best

writers. Read lots of different things and pay attention to the way they make you feel. What makes you feel excited? What bores you? How does the writer evoke those things? Then write what makes you feel something. If you feel something, your readers will too."

Rachael's family is proud of her writing, though they view it as a hobby rather than a blossoming career. Her family, especially her husband, however, support her decision to write.

Rachael's dreams have taken the scenic route. Her childhood dream was to be a writer. If that didn't work, she wanted her fallback to be a veterinarian who writes books. In the end, she became a teacher who writes books.

Rachael can be found on [Facebook](#) and has other social media that she will be adding in time.

# Ask Ani

By Ani Cox

## What are good ways to add magic into a mundane story?

This is going to be specific to the story you're telling. If the character has magic, then taking a page from *Harry Potter* would work. There is a world of magic right at their fingertips, but they don't realize it unless they happen to be a part of it, and they do what is necessary to keep this magic out of sight. Other stories give their characters a mission that includes magic. There is a manga called *Witch Hat Atelier* by Kamome Shirahama that includes magic, and people are led to believe that you have to be born with the ability to perform magic. The main character finds out that magic is just like any other skill and that with practice and the proper tools, anyone can use it. This character is shoved into this world quickly and must play catch up.



## What are some examples of this?

Some titles that we'd see magic being incorporated into the mundane include *Harry Potter* by J.K. Rowling, *Mortal Instruments* by Cassandra Clare, *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* by Susanna Clarke, *American Gods* by Neil Gaiman, *The Borrowers* by Mary Norton, and *The Giver* by Lois Lowry. There are far more than this, but this is a good mix that shows that the magic doesn't have to be big and that sometimes the magic ends up being grand.



# Purdy and Dork

By Ani Cox

May 1<sup>st</sup>,

Things have been calm lately. Chester hasn't been able to go out lately because they are cracking down on illegal aliens. If you ask me, aliens shouldn't have to register when they come to Earth. Some of them don't have a home to go to, and we just expect them to live out of their spaceships, hoping they can find a fuel dock. It gets worse when you think about how we destroyed their homes; we owe them a home to go to.

Purdy and I have been taking turns hiding him for the time being. He said he's going to get registered, but he's waiting because he says they will accept a higher volume of individuals when elections start up. Something about them campaigning and trying to look good. Apparently, they do releases from the detention center around then, too. Chester thinks his brother might be there, too.

I feel like I'm useless sometimes. I know that it's not up to me to make things happen, but Chester is my

friend, and it hurts thinking that I can't help him as much as I'd like to. Maybe some day in the future I will be able to do something about it. Being a teenager makes everything feel impossible. Chester seems to have a lot of faith in us though.

In class, we were discussing how they used to put people through this. They wouldn't allow people in the country without a certain type of documentation, and some were running for their lives. I'm glad that now things are different, at least in this universe. We became more lenient with the rules but still maintain our structure of nations.

I heard one universe went extreme and cancelled nations entirely, and people just come and go as they please to different places, while another universe went the other direction, and now there is little to no travel from one country to another, and that includes trade. I think they said something about everything they don't naturally have access to is manmade now or stolen by pirates and sold at a ridiculous amount on an underground market.

I'm frustrated with Chester having to struggle to be here, but I guess it could be worse...

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# Multisensory Writing Tips

By Chaz Beebe

Often, we find ourselves unmotivated or struggling to get words on the page so that we can finish the editing needed on that first draft. It's not that we do not know that the tasks are needed, but often, there is no positive feeling by doing this. Why is that? Are we truly made to torture ourselves, either through actually doing the work itself or beating ourselves up for not being able to do it?

The simple answer is that, in the current situation, you are not being driven to succeed. The brain is not fully grasping the effect that the accomplishment can give. The brain, especially in this technological world where multimedia experiences are always at our fingertips, craves multisensory experiences, which is proven to provide the dopamine that your brain craves, so non-multisensory writing can be a hard bargain to sell to your brain.

Here are some ideas to make your writing multisensory:

- Sticky notes (tactile/kinesthetic)
  - Write the ideas that you know so far in your story, even if they are not fully formed or have plot holes. One for each idea.
  - Stick on your wall or a whiteboard with the scenes in the order of the plot as you see it currently.
  - Allow yourself to see the layout and help your mind to focus on the parts you need and the order of the plot.
  - Allows an easy way to rearrange the plot as needed.
- Change fonts (visual)
  - Changing to a different font than what you usually read or write can be motivating to write and help you catch errors when editing.
- Deadlines on a Calendar (tactile/kinesthetic & auditory)
  - Writing small deadlines, so you receive quicker celebrations and don't start to feel like it is a weight of pressure to get a bigger project done is both.
  - Create a deadline that is motivating and urgent.
    - Pretend you are part of a team of doctors who need information to help a dying patient. Your writing is the patient's only hope.
  - Give yourself a reward for each deadline met
    - Doesn't need to be big or filled with sugar.
    - Putting stickers on a calendar for a daily goal or a self-made rewards chart for each goal you want to meet can be very rewarding, even as adults.
- Music (auditory)
  - Can motivate to write, and energize the writing.
  - Could be more like a white noise to keep you writing.
  - Make a habit that writing happens when you hear a certain song, so it can remind and motivate you to do it.
- Read Aloud (auditory)
  - Listening to your writing in a text-to-speech program, which can be found on most document programs now.
  - Often found within the document source or free programs are available online
    - Try a favorite of mine: <https://www.naturalreaders.com/>

[online/](#). It is not perfect, but the voices sound more natural, and it has free features.

- Hearing while reading what you have already written allows you to catch mistakes that your eyes may skip over.
- Having someone else record reading it, or recording it yourself.
  - Make sure to listen to the recording to catch the errors, instead of attempting to fix them on your own.
- Verbalize Positivity (auditory)
  - Speak positive mantras into your mirrored reflection daily.
  - Record audio or video of you speaking your mantras with a smile on your face.
    - Have friends and family make

audio or video recordings for you.

- Play them back when needing a positivity boost.
- Routine Sensory Experiences (mixture)
  - It has been proven that auditory or olfactory routines can help set up for success
    - Light a scented candle, burn essence, or essential oils
    - Play a specific type of music (like classical music or movie soundtracks)

Remember that not every trick will work for you, but adding these to your arsenal of tools can give you a jumping place for what to do to help you. Explore, try, and change the ideas here to make them work for you or even get creative and make new ones.

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# Magic Ingredients of the Mundane World: The Inside Look of Magical Realism

By Mary O'Donnell

Children see magic in the world in every step they take. There are fairies in the forest, Santa comes down the chimney on Christmas Eve, and there are monsters under the bed. Magic is unquestionably real for them. As adults, responsibilities and life experiences make us take less notice of the magic all around us. All that fairy dust and imaginary friends become background noise, and, sadly enough, for some, disappear altogether.

For writers, however, we never lose that sense of magic and wonder, and we do the best we can to use our pens and word processors to preserve the magic we see in the world. Writers of the magical realism genre create stories with the perspective of “what if the childlike belief in magic was never lost, but instead became so commonplace that it became the mundane and everyday experience?” Magical realism is a genre that has gained popularity over the years and is a beautiful blend of the mundane and the majestic. The major element of

magical realism is that it is only to our own perspective that the magical elements in the story are extraordinary. To the world and the characters within the story, the magic is such a part of everyday life that no particular attention is paid to why or how the magic exists. Magic has become like our modern day technology – nothing otherworldly or strange about a faster and more efficient computer or household appliance.

Magical realism is easy to confuse with fantasy, the most well-known genre that makes great use of magic within its plots and settings. However, fantasy likes to focus on the magic within its world building and show off how the magic has shaped the society the writer has created. Magical realism brings magic into the real world and then uses it as a catalyst for the human and societal drama that is going on. The magic is not the focus; it is more like an added layer on a painting to sharpen the image that the eyes are supposed to focus on, not distract from it. A

wonderful example of magical realism is *Beloved* by Toni Morrison. *Beloved* is a story that takes place in the segregated South, about a black woman who is haunted by her dead child who returns from the grave. The focus is not placed on the fact that there is a ghost or why it exists but more on the connection between the mother and the daughter and the devastating effects of slavery.

Ghosts aren't the only creatures that can be found in magical realism. When writing magical realism, the author can incorporate myths and mythological creatures by bringing them into the real world and making them commonplace. Mermaids that run a spa for weary travelers – within that world, mermaids are commonplace, so the author wouldn't bother explaining why or how they are there because they are not the focus of the story. The other characters don't even question it or notice that there is anything weird about mermaids running a spa.

One element that helps

bring magical realism to life is consistency. If certain creatures or magic are commonplace, there shouldn't be undue emphasis on their existence unless it has helped the overall character development and furthers the plot.

Another aspect of the real world that magical realism plays with is time. Time in magical realism may not work in the same way. For example, in *The Time Traveler's Wife* by Audrey Niffenegger, the story is told throughout the lifetime of a time traveler who blips in and out of different timelines in what seems like random order. The only thing that is consistent is that he always comes back to wherever his wife is.

Time can be manipulated

in another way, by being something tangible or something to be defeated. Time could also just run more slowly or more quickly without any real explanation but that is consistent in that author's world. There could be a story where time passes differently in certain places because of magic, such as the lines of subways magically make time speed up so everyone can get around the city faster. No one is surprised or comments on this; it is commonplace, as if subways were always able to do this. As long as the author is consistent with how the magic is reacted to and treated in their world, there are endless possibilities to bring magic into the mundane.

Magical realism brings

magic to the mundane and everyday and is a fun and exciting genre. The readers are like sleuths trying to pick out what magical elements the author has in their everyday modern world. So for any authors thinking of trying their hand at magical realism, think about the ways the real world could be changed by magic, and then add them into your world in a way that is so natural that the readers feel as if that world had always been that way. When the mythological creatures living in the everyday world are not treated with any more fanfare than the average Joe on the street, a truly unique story will unfold wrapped in magic, but upheld by the human experience.



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# Old Friend

By Iren Adams

Elijah stopped his chopper with one last rev of the engine drowned by the raging storm. The street was still dark. Scott's coffee shop was the only place with its lights on. The warm light spilled from the large windows on the freshly paved sidewalk. It would be another hour until the first touches of the sun would awaken the city, and its inhabitants would fill the streets.

A car parked next to a switched-off lamppost. A woman in her thirties jumped out and waved at Elijah. He smiled and nodded. Without uttering a single word, Miranda dashed towards her book shop before the rain could soak her clothes.

Elijah climbed off his bike. His feet slurped in boots filled with rainwater as he took the steps down to his tattoo parlor. Under the relative cover of the sign, Elijah didn't even reach into his pocket to find his keys. Instead, he grabbed the knob and muttered something under his breath.

As lightning tore through the sky, the door swung open to reveal a small parlor. Elijah stepped through and took off his dripping jacket. One of the tattoos on his arm shone under his hoodie, making his jacket fly across the room. With another tattoo lighting up, his clothes dried in an instant. He ran his hand through his hair and threw a look over the parlor.

Something felt off.

There was nothing out of place. Everything was exactly as he left it the day before, but he knew the feeling well that gnawed on his bones. Anyone else would dismiss it. A faulty response of the subconscious to a non-existent threat. But Elijah knew better. He had faced countless creatures that lurked in the shadows and strolled

in the light of day.

Elijah sniffed the air. There was no smell of sulfur that he expected from a demonic presence. His fingers brushed the rough bricks of the wall of the basement, but the ward was still intact.

Elijah sighed and pulled his hand away from the wall. As he crossed the shop, a deep frown creasing his brow, another tattoo lit on his wrist. A soft light filled the small parlor that held a leather couch and a few armchairs around a glass table. At the far end, a counter with an old computer on top and a binder with his old works for people yet unsure what they wanted to get.

Elijah stopped next to a large mirror and pulled his hoodie away from his neck. The protector spell was still etched into his skin without any visible change.

He threw another glance around. There was no sign of intrusion.

"Witches wreaking havoc again," Elijah muttered.

This was the third time this month he had noticed the unusual presence.

His tattoo parlor was nestled between two shops owned by a witch and a warlock. Students and business owners from all over the city were willing to take an extra hour from their day to get their coffee from Scott's shop. They would say it tasted better, but Scott just liked to add an uplifting mood spell into every beverage he sold. Miranda's shop wasn't any less extraordinary. No matter what book one wanted, she had it. A new book from a famous author? She always had it a week before anyone else in the city. First edition of *The Lord of the Rings*? She would bring it in a second. It was even more remarkable when one noticed there were only a couple of

bookshelves in the shop.

Elijah knew they were runaway witches, and he had helped them install their shops anyway. After all, anyone could have an ongoing feud with the Council. But he had to talk to them. Their rituals were getting out of hand.

With a sigh, Elijah walked to the counter. He didn't even have time to turn on the computer when a knock on the door made him lift his head and look at the clock. He still had an hour before his first appointment, which meant it could only be one person.

Elijah crossed the room and opened the door to a smiling young man with two steaming cups of coffee in his hands.

"Scott," Elijah muttered and forced a smile on his lips.

"I made a fresh batch and wanted to share the first sip to honor the Gods," Scott said, offering Elijah one of the two cups. "I'm also trying a new recipe. I've added some nutmeg and a spell to fight sleepiness." He passed by Elijah with his ever-present smile and dropped on the couch with a shudder. "It's so cold in here."

Elijah didn't answer. He walked behind the counter, putting his cup down without even tasting the coffee.

"Aren't you going to drink it?"

"Later," Elijah said without lifting his head from his computer.

"Are you sure?"

Elijah humphed in answer and opened his agenda. Most of his clients were warlocks and witches seeking protective spells woven into their skin, but some were ordinary humans.

"Did you cast a spell or something?" Scott asked before Elijah did so much as read the date. He shot a frown at Scott, who chuckled and sipped his coffee. "So long without doing a spell properly and you forget the effects that other witches and warlocks would notice?"

Elijah's heart skipped a beat, and he remembered the feeling he had earlier. He had checked for a sign of a demon slipping into this world through a tear in the dimensions and gave up as soon as the wards showed no sign of intrusion.

"I thought you did a ritual yesterday—" he started.

"You might have felt the ritual if you could see through the fabric that constructs our world, but I've only heard of one warlock being able to do that. An ordinary warlock, like any of us, wouldn't notice anything after a whole night." Scott put his cup down and turned to Elijah. He kept reciting facts as if reading from a manual. It may have made his teachers happy, but it set Elijah on edge. "The ingredients needed for a spell are not enough for the magical process to be completed. Some source of energy is required. That's why the magic of old was performed around pyres, during orgies, or with a ceremonial sacrifice. Since then, the cost-efficiency of a spell has been studied by countless witches and warlocks, and the spells were perfected. Only a few remain that would require such an amount of energy that they would need an external source. But most spells just leave the space unusually cold for a short while, an effect barely noticeable to an ordinary warlock."

Scott wouldn't be able to feel Elijah's magic drawn from his tattoos. The coffee-brewing warlock didn't even know it existed when Elijah first showed him what he could do with carefully drawn swirls of ink under the skin.

The remnants of a spell Scott felt weren't his. With the presence Elijah had registered when he walked into the parlor, it could only mean one thing.

Someone else was there with them.

Elijah forced a smile on his lips and walked

from behind the counter, careful to put his body between Scott and the back of the parlor. It didn't matter if the kid was too clingy and sometimes irritating, Elijah had grown fond of him.

"Would you excuse me? I have a client coming in a few minutes."

Scott's eyes fired up. His cheeks turned red, but he nodded. As he started towards the door, Elijah's shoulders relaxed a little. Not for long. The young man stopped and turned back to Elijah.

"I know you are a secretive man who likes his own space. But I was wondering." He took a deep breath and lifted his blue eyes to Elijah. "Is there a chance you would want to come to a meeting with other witches and warlocks from the area this evening?"

"I don't think so—" Elijah started.

"Come on, it will be fun."

A creak of a board made the hair on Elijah's back stand. He closed the distance to the door and opened it for Scott.

"Why do I get the feeling you are trying to throw me out?"

Elijah sighed. The kid was perceptive when least needed. "I'll try to be there, but I can't make any promises. I have a few clients late into the evening."

The air turned heavy when Scott muttered in defeat, "Next time, right?"

"Sure," Elijah said with a forced smile.

As soon as Scott started up the stairs that took him onto the main street and to his shop, Elijah closed the door. He rolled his shoulders. With each step he took, he pulled on the energy around him. He could almost taste the pleasure as his muscles filled with the magic he had denied himself for so long. It was exhilarating. For a moment, Elijah couldn't remember why he had closed the bond between him and the breath

of the world.

As he stepped to the back door, he felt like his former self. From the time before he went into hiding. Every tattoo on his body was burning with light, visible through the thick fabric of his clothing. He didn't have to open the door. The spells snaking up and down his body did it for him. The door opened with a bang and even the shadows retreated from his presence.

Elijah's gaze found the intruder in a second.

A man sat on a stool, studying the premade drawings of tattoos spread over the steel table. He lifted his head and turned towards Elijah with a twinkle in his eyes.

A scar ran across his face all the way from his right eye and down to the left corner of his lips. Elijah knew that scar. After all, he was the one who had given it to him.

"Samuel," Elijah whispered.

"I thought you would never notice my presence." The man looked Elijah up and down. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath before nodding. "Not as powerful as I remember you, but I guess three centuries on the run can do that to you. I'm not sure I'm fond of all these theatrics, though."

"How did you find me?" Elijah asked through clenched teeth.

Samuel jumped down from the stool and stepped closer to Elijah. "Do you have to ask?"

"Tell me!"

"You grew careless."

Elijah cursed himself for using his magic for everyday things. He was opening doors and drying his clothes with magic now.

"The Council didn't choose me to capture you without a reason. If you think that what you've done today is what led me to you, you are wrong."

"When?"

Samuel didn't answer. He walked around the

room, picking up the tattoo machine and turning it in his hands.

“Samuel, answer me!” Elijah’s voice boomed through the shop.

“I know how you act. I know you better than anyone.”

“When?”

Samuel sighed. “Three decades ago.”

Elijah frowned.

“You started with one simple spell. You heated a cup of water for your tea. You thought you had fooled everyone, but not me. When no one came, you used another one. And then another one. Until the day came that you thought you’d outsmarted everyone with your new type of magic. You were so convinced that you started using it for ordinary things.”

Elijah cursed.

“And here we are.” A smile on Samuel’s lips made the scar dance. “We face each other again after so much time.”

“You know what the Council will do to me if you bring me to them.”

Samuel sighed.

Elijah looked down at his hands with his tattoos still glowing. “After so much time, I thought they would let it go.”

“Is that your idea of a joke?” Samuel chuckled. “Let it go? You killed the matriarch!”

“She wanted to sacrifice me.”

“Those are the rules.”

“Then screw the rules!” Elijah cried and rolled his hands into fists. “In what world would it be okay to kill a child only because they have a mark from some old prophecy?”

“Some old prophecy? It foretold you killing the matriarch before taking the battle to the Gods!”

“I killed her only because she wanted to cut my neck open and spill my blood to appease those Gods you venerate.”

Samuel sighed. “I didn’t come here to argue.”

“Then do tell me why you came here.”

“Gods, I’ve sacrificed so much for this. I’ve denied myself so many things so that when this day came, it would be *me* here. So I could look at you again. So I could warn you.”

“Warn me?”

“I’m not the only warlock who has some knowledge in his old bones. Others are hunting you, even if it’s not their role. Your magic, even if nothing compared to what the Council had witnessed, is still unique and very powerful.” Samuel ran his hand through his hair and looked straight at Elijah. “I came to tell you that you have to disappear again.”

Elijah stumbled away until his back met the wall. A deep frown creased his brow. Samuel stepped closer, putting his hand on Elijah’s shoulder.

“Elijah...”

“You’ve hunted me like an animal all these years. You’ve chased me to the end of the world and back. You’ve made a monster out of me. A villain of your story.” A muscle jumped up and down his jaw as he lifted his gaze to Samuel. “You were my friend. My only friend! I trusted you with my life.”

“I never betrayed your trust.”

Elijah felt the heat of the flames wrapping his arms.

Samuel looked down. With a wince, he stepped back. “I shouldn’t have trusted the Council when they said a stupid spell would bind your powers. It was supposed to be unnoticeable, but even Scott could sense it.”

Elijah darted towards Samuel, who rolled away and came up on the other side. He grasped his amulet and chanted the first words of a spell. Elijah was faster. He grabbed Samuel by the throat with his burning hands.

“Come now.” Samuel chuckled. “I didn’t think you were into that.”

Elijah snarled and threw him across the room. Samuel landed on his feet but slid over the floor until his back met the wall with a thud. The air was knocked out of his lungs. Elijah didn’t wait for Samuel to catch his breath. He darted towards him with his fist rolled and blazing.

“Stop!” Samuel cried, lifting his hands in the air.

Elijah didn’t. Samuel had to duck and step away.

“Hit me if you want to,” Samuel said and stopped. “But I do have to talk to you.”

Elijah’s gaze met with Samuel’s. It was filled with sorrow.

Elijah hesitated. But only for an instant.

Anger pumped through his veins. Elijah wanted Samuel to pay for all those years he spent in hiding. He pulled his hand away, ready to throw another punch.

Samuel didn’t duck this time.

With a cry on his lips, Elijah’s fist connected with the wall a hair’s breadth from Samuel’s head. Pulverized dust from the bricks swirled between them.

Samuel didn’t even flinch.

“Are you done?” he asked.

Elijah was breathing fast. He pulled his hand away from the scorched mark on the wall, and a few bricks fell to the ground.

“What could you possibly need from me? What else could I offer you that you haven’t taken already?”

Samuel pressed his lips. “Knowledge.”

Elijah closed his eyes and faced the ceiling.

“The world is tearing itself apart. The magic is dying. There are more and more demons who slip from the realm of Gods into ours through the tears in the dimensions. I have to know if there is a way to stop it.”

“Of course, there is,” Elijah said. He chuckled to himself and shook his head. “You must have brought this to the Council if you finally decided to talk to me when you knew where I was for so long. Those fossils don’t care about anything else but protecting traditions that give them power.”

“Busted,” Samuel said with another smile. “So, what do we need to do?”

Elijah chuckled. “We? I’m a fugitive. You are my hunter.”

“There is no one else who would do anything about it.”

Elijah took a deep breath. The fire dancing on his skin calmed and disappeared.

“The world isn’t dying,” he said in a calm voice. “There is just a new normal. Which is a problem for those you call Gods, who find themselves with a lack of support. No one believes in them any longer. People worship technology now. Progress. The machines that make their lives easier. There is no longer real magic.”

“I can do all the spells just fine.”

“What we do isn’t real magic.” Elijah walked to the back of the room and sat down at one of the stools. He lifted his head and met Samuel’s confused gaze. “Do you really think that because we can do a few tricks and bend the rules of nature that it means we can do magic?”

Samuel frowned.

“Magic is when two kids kiss each other for the first time and they feel like the world has stopped moving for a second. It’s when a musician’s song and melody make your heart ache and bring tears to your eyes. That’s what the real magic was all about. And it’s disappearing. Now, it’s all greed and power.”

“There is still some of it left. I’ve seen it.”

“It’s glowing embers of what once was a blazing fire.” Elijah sighed. “There isn’t much

that could be done about it. The world changed. It's for us to adapt."

"What about the demons then? Will they become a new normal too?"

"No, of course not. The so-called Gods feel the change. Without the magic to feed them, they are dying. This is their last attempt to reclaim their power."

"You keep insinuating that they are not, in fact, Gods," Samuel said.

"Their power resides in the breath of the world. They feed on magic as all witches and warlocks do." Elijah smiled. "Immortality is just another curse."

Samuel stumbled back. "To stop them and their hordes of demons...we will have to kill them."

"Careful. That's blasphemy." Elijah chuckled. "The Council might hunt you too now."

A knock on the entrance door echoed through the parlor. Elijah looked at Samuel. Any mirth was gone from his features.

"The Council no longer trusts me to hunt you alone."

Elijah cursed. "How much time do I have?"

"Not much." Samuel shrugged and waved his hand. A portal opened next to him. A flowering meadow on the other side brought the scent of wildflowers and herbs to their noses. "But since when was that of any consequence?"

"How can I be sure I can trust you?"

"You can't." Samuel's smile didn't reach his eyes this time. "But I was always on your side."

Bangs and cries echoed through the parlor. Samuel glanced towards the entrance and back at Elijah.

"Punch me."

"Why?"

"Because they will want to know why I let you go."

Elijah took a deep breath. His fist connected with Samuel's face with a sickening crunch. Samuel coughed and spat blood.

"I'm sorry," Elijah muttered.

"It had to be done." He patted Elijah's arm. When they heard the door break down, Samuel pushed Elijah towards the portal. "Now go. I'll find you when this calms down, and we will save the world and all that."

With one last nod, Elijah stepped into the meadow.

~

"Explain to me how he managed to escape?"

"I already did," Samuel said with a sigh, pressing his nose with a bloody paper towel.

"Then do it again!" Scott cried with a scowl dancing on his face.

"He shot a fireball at me, and I ducked. When I faced him again, he had already opened a portal. As I grabbed him, he punched me," Samuel said, pulling away from the counter. He dropped the towel into the basket and stepped towards Scott. The boy held his ground even if Samuel towered over him, but fear danced in his eyes. "Let's make something clear," he said. "You ever try questioning me again, and I'll destroy you."

"You wouldn't hurt me."

"Of course not. I wouldn't even touch you. I would kick you off this team, that's all. And then, I would make sure the Council would expel you." Samuel leaned back at the counter. "You would be an outcast. Even worse than a runaway witch."

Miranda sighed. "Let it go, Samuel. He's still young. He still believes."

Samuel turned to Miranda, who looked right back at him with her black eyes like a starless night. A crooked smile blossomed on her lips. The only thing impossible to hide with a charm. It had kept her features hidden from anyone who

knew her in the past.

She was the only one that had stayed on this team for so long. She had never questioned Samuel. She had always followed his orders even when they went against her better judgment. He always thought it was because she grew up with them and wanted to bring Elijah down. But it wasn't that.

The realization hit Samuel harder than the brick wall did a few moments ago.

She knew.

Samuel frowned with a silent question in his eyes, and Miranda offered him the slightest of nods.

"All I'm saying is we could have captured Elijah tonight. I had a ritual ready," Scott muttered, breaking the silent conversation between the two.

Miranda offered Samuel one last smile before turning to Scott. "You couldn't even drug him with your laced coffee. He would have killed you. There would be nothing left of you but a scorched mark," she said, pointing at the one left by Elijah's fist. "Even Samuel couldn't best him."

"What now, then?" Scott asked. "We give up?"

"We will only give up when we catch him," Samuel said. "Miranda, you should try following him through the portal. I think it was somewhere in Norway. Even if I doubt that he stayed put wherever he went, we must be sure."

Miranda nodded. The two men observed her chant a few words and another portal opened. With a wave and a crooked smile, she

disappeared through it.

Samuel sighed and crossed the entrance before grabbing the knob of the door. "You and I will be going to see the Council and report."

"Do we have to?"

"Scared of them, aren't you? And here not a moment ago, you were telling me you wanted to confront the most powerful warlock of all times, a man devoured by madness."

Scott didn't answer and only looked at his feet.

Samuel sighed. "Don't worry. I'll do the talking. Just follow my lead."

Scott nodded and walked through the door that Samuel had opened for him. It no longer gave towards the street, but into a room with a round table in the middle and a few men and women gathered around it.

Samuel looked around the tattoo parlor. He grabbed his amulet and chanted a few words. With a spark from Elijah's computer, a fire burst out on the counter. In a few seconds, the room was submerged in flames.

"We'll see each other soon, old friend," Samuel muttered. "Maybe next time we won't see each other as enemies."

He stepped through, and the door closed behind him. The flames sprang towards it, devouring everything on its way.

The fire had spread to the coffee shop and the book shop when the first sirens of the firefighters echoed through the neighborhood. When they managed to calm the fire, there was nothing left of the three shops but cinders and ash.

Iren Adams is a small-business owner by day and a writer by night. She has a blog at [irenadams.ink](http://irenadams.ink), which is still in its early days but will host book reviews and writing tips. With her high-fantasy books filled with magic, dragons, and all-powerful gods already published on Amazon (*The Age of Change*, *The Magician*, and *The Daughter of the Pirate King*), Iren is working on a young-adult fantasy series.

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# This Little Light

By Deana Rose Wilson

Sunny took another sip of her chamomile tea in an attempt to keep her drooping eyes open and her chin off her chest as the supervisor droned on. It was the same safety speech every Wednesday morning: seatbelts on the transports, helmets at construction sites, professionalism at all times. Next to her, Rose held up a folded newspaper in front of her face and rolled her eyes, mouthing along with Mr. Birk, word for word.

Until his tone changed, becoming hard and full of warning. “I’m sure we don’t want a repeat of last Friday’s fiasco on Park Avenue and 33<sup>rd</sup> Street. Again.”

Sunny sat up straighter, sneaking a glance over to the crew who ran the most dangerous intersection in New York City. Kelly looked harried, her green-tinted hair poking into the air, she’d run her fingers through it so many times. But Roux just looked mad. His eyes stared holes into the supervisor for calling them out. Beside him, his life partner, Berylann, who was part of Sunny’s team, ran a nervous hand up and down his arm, trying to placate him. Xanthe just sat back in her chair, arms crossed, stone-faced, eyes hard.

Mr. Birk ignored them, continuing his lecture. “Discipline. And timing. It’s all about discipline and timing, my friends.” He crossed his arms over his chest. “Management is watching me, waiting for me to make a mistake. And I’m not afraid to tell you that the ball of a dung beetle, if not constantly pushed against on a hill, will roll down that hill. And I am not afraid to push you.”

“Did we just get called shit?” Rose buzzed in

her ear.

“I think so,” Sunny whispered back.

Mr. Birk paused, seemingly finished with his lecture, and groups around the room started to stand, murmuring in dissent. He put up his hand for silence, and they slowly sank back to their seats, muttering to themselves.

“One more thing,” the supervisor said, his eyes surveying the room. “There’s a rumor that last week’s ‘shine’ sighting came from my department. I’m sure you all know that with the recent infractions against the Ministry, giving in to the temptation to ‘shine’ – although not illegal – is not recommended at this time. As city employees, you are expected to uphold stricter standards of professionalism. I am hoping that none of you will disappoint me.” He clapped his hands and plastered a fake smile on his lips. “Now then, let’s all get to work!”

Sunny pulled Rose out of her chair and nearly dragged her to the transport, ignoring co-workers intent on protesting Mr. Birk’s last piece of advice. They had the longest commute to their post, and Wednesday meetings nearly always made them late to replace Sienna’s team. Even though it was not their fault, Sunny always attempted to be considerate of the team that worked the graveyard shift, just as Sienna always strove to bring her team in on time.

Rose yanked back on her arm when they got to the transport platform.

“We have to wait for Beryl anyway.”

Sunny didn’t hide her sigh of exasperation. She wheeled to glare back to the meeting room, her arms folded across her chest. Berylann was still trying to calm an angry Roux. She would put

her hand on his arm and say something, and he would shake her off, his tone growing louder and louder in the quickly emptying room.

“I see someone else didn’t like my Uncle’s directive.”

Sunny nearly jumped out of her skin. *When had Mr. Birk’s weaselly nephew snuck up on them?*

“Steele,” Rose greeted him. “How goes the battle?”

“He can’t tell us if we can ‘shine’ or not. Like he said, it’s not illegal. Yet.” The scrawny youth pushed up the glasses on his long nose. “But if we don’t make an effort, it will be soon enough.”

Sunny’s mouth twisted into a wry smile. She couldn’t help but jibe him. “You still planning your *coup d’état*?”

“Just you wait.” Steele hiked up his pants, a determined glint in his eyes. “I’ll show them. I’ve got something big in the works. You’ll see soon enough.” He glanced at her sidelong. “Are you still working Alan and First?”

“Probably for the rest of my life.” Sunny turned her gaze back to Roux and Beryl. Their argument appeared to be finally wrapping up. Steele was harmless. A little strange, but harmless. But he’d also developed a crush on her, and she certainly wasn’t going to encourage him by acting interested. She pulled her faux fur-trimmed coat tighter over her flared mini-skirt.

“You wait and see, Sunny. It’ll be something to remember.”

Beryl had finally joined them and Sunny seized the opportunity to make her escape by snatching her comrades’ hands.

“Can’t wait, Steele,” she called as she pushed her co-workers through the transport doors. “Gotta go! We’re late for our shift!”

“Just blame my Uncle!” Steele called as the doors hissed shut.

Rose giggled, sidling up to Sunny on the bench seat.

“We always do.” She jutted her chin at the platform, which was quickly receding into a blur as they entered the dimly lit, underground tunnels. “Do you think he’s serious?”

“Steele’s an ignoramus.” There were more important matters to discuss. “Did you get Roux calmed down?”

Beryl shrugged, her lips pouting and her brow furrowed. “Kelly and Xanthe said they’d try to reason with him. But they were pretty upset themselves. Old Birk better watch himself before he has to look for a new team.”

Sunny just scoffed. “More like the opposite. You know there are hundreds of our type lined up, just waiting for one of us to quit or be fired. What other job can we get paid, with benefits, and still be allowed to ‘shine’ on the job?”

“If you want to call it that,” Beryl muttered. “‘Shining’ on cue isn’t really ‘shining.’ A ‘shine’ should be a joyful thing. It’s our nature to ‘shine.’ Not to direct traffic.”

“She’s got a point,” Rose chimed in, scooting closer to Beryl now. Rose was like that; always switching sides. “We used to be such a happy people. Carefree. This goes against our nature.”

Sunny just sighed and closed her eyes, scrunching down in the bench-seat, pretending to sleep. It was an old argument. She was third-generation traffic control. She’d never known anything but control and discipline. She’d been trained for this job by her mother, who proudly worked the graveyard at Broadway and West 96<sup>th</sup>.

An ache pinched her heart for a second. It had been so long since she’d seen her mother. Working opposite shifts, every day, from 7 to 7, did not give them the opportunity to see each other. *Ever*. Unless one of them traded shifts with another team – or traded into a new team –

it would probably be several more years before she saw her mother. She wrinkled her nose and squared her shoulders. But at least she had work. And good work. Her little sister had rebelled against the hours of training and discipline. She worked the red-light district now. Her cousin didn't work at all. She frowned. Although there were times she thought perhaps her cousin was the happiest of them all. She was certainly a free spirit, letting her light 'shine' wherever she went. The Ministry had nearly assigned the flighty Viridian her own clean-up crew.

~

Rose's elbow nudging Sunny woke her from a dream of flight and fancy. She wiped her eyes, surprised that she'd slept deeply enough to dream. And such a sweet dream. She'd been flying through the air, hand in hand with an unknown partner. It didn't matter who the partner was. It was the flight that had lifted her spirits. She didn't want to wake up, didn't want to trudge to work; she didn't want to let the feeling go. She tucked her memories around the dream, deciding she would pull on the fragments of it to get her through the dreariness of the day.

She followed Beryl and Rose out of the transport and down the long tunnel that led to their post. Then it was a tight, single-file trudge up the spiraling staircase.

"Why couldn't they make this staircase less cramped?" Beryl complained for the hundred-and-twentieth time. "Or install an elevator?"

"That's what happens when you let tight-ass trolls design things," Rose answered for the hundred-and-twentieth time. "And you let money-grubbing goblins control the funds. No room for fun. And no upgrades."

Sunny humphed. She wanted to chime in for the hundredth time that at least it kept their figures slim. But the dream had made her edgy, dissatisfied. And, in a rare occurrence, she

agreed with Beryl when the girl griped, "It would be so much easier if we could just *fly*."

But they couldn't fly and, despite the redundancy of the exercise day after day, they were all three puffing for air by the time they reached the top of the stairs. The tunnel that led to the control room was not a straight jaunt either, but required a small climb up an archway, then back down the other side. And all of it in a dimly lit corridor with no windows. If any of them had been claustrophobic, they would have had a meltdown long ago.

The corridor opened into a narrow room with a ladder staircase up to two other landings. One small portal window let watery sunlight filter in from the overcast breaking dawn, lighting the spartan, black metal of the room. Sunny stood on her tiptoes and glanced out to the street below them. Even this early, the traffic was heavy. *Drones on their way to work*. The uneasy feeling of dissatisfaction that she seldom felt squeezed her intestines again. *Drones. Just like them*.

Sienna's team member, Jade, opened the control room door to Beryl's knock. She checked a monitor, nodded shortly, and slid out of her small space, easing by Beryl as the green-haired girl took her place.

"Safety meeting?" Jade asked, already knowing the answer. Her jaw worked, chewing her mouthful of gum. Like Beryl, her hair had a distinctive green cast. Sunny had always been relieved to be a Yellow and not be cursed with wild-colored hair. Not that she judged others by their hair color. She wasn't *that* uptight.

"Every Wednesday like clockwork," Sienna said, hopping down the steps that led to the Red control post. Rose had already taken over for her; Sunny could see the crimson glow coming from the room. "Old Birk have anything new to say?"

"SSDD. And they're putting a restriction on

after-hours ‘shining.’ ”

“Pssh,” Sienna scoffed. “They can’t do that. It’s not illegal to ‘shine.’ They’ll have the whole pack of us up in arms if they try.” She reached up and pulled the hair tie from her mane, letting her auburn curls cascade down her back. “As long as we aren’t obvious, that is. In fact, Jade, Saffron, and I were going to do the Festival of Lights this morning before it gets too bright.”

Jade nodded, raising her arms above her head to stretch her back. “Christmas is the best season for a ‘shine.’ And a good ‘shine’ always helps me sleep.”

Sunny pursed her lips. *To each his own.*

“I’d better get to my post before Saff comes looking for me,” she said, effectively ending any further discussion on Christmas lights and ‘shining.’ They were able to ‘shine’ all day at work; she couldn’t fathom why they would want to do it after work, too. *Go home, get a good night’s sleep, and recharge for the next day.*

“Bet your pants I was about to come looking for you,” Saffron said, already out of her chair and grabbing her purse. “Not much night left to party in as it is.”

Sunny didn’t bother to answer the reproach. Saff had left her post; it was up to her to take over. And not a second too soon. She scooted into the small control room, glancing up at the digital timer on the wall that flashed an angry, red one-second warning. Throwing off her coat, she set her wings free and rose into the air, shining in brilliant gold and dandelion yellow sparkles. She counted along with the timer – now green to indicate it was her time to “go” – and smiled with bliss to be able to release her pent-up magic.

Unfortunately, it was over all too soon. The timer clicked back to red, and she fluttered to the floor. Above her, she could hear Rose lift in flight on cue. The Reds and Greens had longer

flight durations. After all, she was just a warning light. Once she’d wished to be born a Red – not a Green, not with that outlandish hair – but you were born what you were born and that was the role you fulfilled. Unless you wanted to be like Viridian, ‘shining’ wherever and creating havoc. But not everyone had inherited a dragon’s hoard and could afford to pay the associated ‘shine’ fines without working every day.

She turned a small circle, making sure all was in order in her room, that Saff hadn’t left anything behind. Like the ladder room beyond her door, the room was sparse and dark, consisting only of the digital timer on the black metal wall, an office chair in case she got tired of standing, a small portal window encased in the fire exit door, and a yellow linen storage bin for her personal items. She picked up her discarded coat from the floor and folded it into the bin. It was best not to have items in the way while she was working, for safety reasons. *Safety. Discipline. Timing. Not flights of fantasy.* Her stomach roiled and pinched again.

Rose touched down on the ceiling above her head and called down to them, “What are we feeling today? Hip-hop? Pop? Classical?”

Sunny peeked out the tiny window. Lines of automobiles were jammed together in the streets below them, carrying their human occupants to work. Or to the store. Or to play. Who knew with humans. They were unpredictable creatures. Not neat and orderly like fairies.

“It’s pretty congested today. Shall we try the Blue Danube experiment?”

“Again?” Beryl groaned from beneath her. Her green-haired co-worker was not a fan of classical music. And, with the mood she was in today, they’d probably be listening to anti-establishment rock bands by the end of the day like Seethe Against the Tool or Emerald Afternoon.

But the song was a long-standing joke for them, and Sunny smiled when the low, melodic tones of the horns, followed by the higher chirps of the wind instruments, rolled through her control box. They had tried for years to get the honking of the car horns on the streets below them to sound in time to the woodwind portion of the waltz. Sunny waved her arms like a conductor as she rose into the air again when it was her turn, spinning and dancing in a circle to the rhythmic melody. She smiled as a *beep, beep* below her actually hit its cue and clapped her hands when another *honk, honk* answered in time.

“Gods, they might actually get it today,” Beryl yelled, her voice breathy with excitement despite her earlier protest.

Sunny laughed when, just then, a loud blaring truck horn sounded, drowning out the orchestra and cacophony of vehicles below.

“Or not,” Rose called down, giggling. “Stupid humans.”

Sunny shook her head, agreeing. What other animals on this Earth could be responsible for so much noise, pollution, and destruction? But, as she twirled in place to the second movement of the waltz, she had to admit that they had also created some beautiful things.

“There are gems amid the trash,” her mother always said. “If they could see the magic around them, maybe they’d be more enlightened. But they’re blinded by their needs and desires, their own selfishness.”

Sunny snorted. The Ministry worked hard to make sure the humans didn’t see the magical creatures around them. The trolls in the subways, the gnomes in the city parks, the pixies in LED lights or that powered cell phones – all remained hidden and camouflaged to the human eye. And if a human did happen to spy something they shouldn’t – like Viridian’s midnight charades –

the Ministry stepped in with their glawackus monsters and changed their memories. Wendigos became tornados. Will-o-wisps were explained away by science. *Like organic decay would glow and move*. She huffed again.

“So, Sienna’s suggestion?” Rose asked. Sunny could hear her settle in the chair above her. Being a Red could be tiring. The timing had to be so perfect. And the ‘shines’ were definitely longer. Or at least they felt longer to the humans. “How do you all feel about going on a ‘shine’ tonight amid the Christmas lights? It’s not very often we get to be out in the open like that.”

“I’m in!” Beryl squealed. Sunny had no doubt she was doing a pirouette mid-air. “Maybe it will relax Roux. Christmas colors are the best!”

Sunny sighed, wrapping her arms around herself as she paced the bare metal floor. She was always tired at the end of a workday. And their commute back to the Hive was longer than any other fairy’s. A good night’s sleep was the best thing for another workday. Not playing with the human’s traditional festival decorations.

“Sunny?” Rose asked.

“I’ll think about it,” she answered.

“Come on, Sunny!” Beryl chided. “Let your wings flap for a change. You’re so uptight!”

Sunny shrugged. Maybe it was true. She rarely went out. Her life consisted of work, an hour at home watching Korean dramas to wind down (she secretly thought that her mother had named her after the character Kim Sun in a popular television series), and sleep. She paced her small control room, the remnants of her flight dream gnawing at her, making her anxious. Maybe she did need to spend some time recreational ‘shining’ to ease some tension.

“Let me decide when we get off,” she said, voicing her thoughts aloud. “Let’s see how tired I am.”

An angry buzzing sounded from the countdown clock, and she sailed into the air again, pacing in mid-air, her yellow glow bright with agitation. Birk would have lectured her, saying it caused unnecessary flickering in the light when they didn't stay mid-center.

"Screw Birk and his endless rules," she muttered.

The countdown clock droned again, and she fluttered down to tap on the glass. *High-strung stink bugs*. The pixies inside hummed angrily, beating back on the opaque divider. The little creatures could be as ferocious as they were free. She smirked. *Dynamite really does come in small packages*.

"You always say that," Rose hollered from above. "And then you're always too tired. You know, a flight around town does wonders for recharging your inner spark. Think of it as a human's car battery. You have to drive it for longer periods of times to charge it up. Just starting it and stopping it – like we do here? It's hard on –"

The impact that rocked their stoplight knocked Sunny off her feet. She landed on her hands and knees – *Oooff!* – scrambling against the wall that had become the floor.

"Car accident!" Beryl screamed. "Abandon ship!"

"Is everyone okay?" Rose asked over Sunny's simultaneous yelp of: "But why? We were in perfect sync!"

"Maybe the North/South crew messed up?" Beryl asked.

"Hah. As if," Mari snapped, pushing through the safety door that divided Sunny's compartment from the outdoors. The North/South crew worked the light next to them every day, but Sunny's crew hardly ever saw them since they came on at different times. The blonde fairy glanced around. "Is everyone okay

over here?"

"Yeah." Beryl fluttered up from her control room. "But should you be out in the light of day? Someone might see."

"No one's paying any attention to us," Paddy, the Green for the North/South team, said, pushing in behind Marigold. He was followed closely by Carmine, but he managed to thrust a hand out the open door. "Take a look."

With six bodies in the tight control room, Sunny had a hard time pushing past everyone to look out the open door. But when she did, her breath hitched. Rose pushed her from behind, and she stepped out of the stoplight, hovering in the air. Paddy was right. No one would be paying any attention to them.

A dragon, its red and white scales glittering in the sunlight, swirled and dove through the air. Electricity sparked around it, pouring from its mouth in hot, white flashes. It didn't appear to be causing any damage by itself, but the distraction it had created had resulted in a head-on collision, three fender-benders, and the car that had run into their light pole, knocking it askew.

Sunny turned and gestured at her co-workers to come out.

"Come on! It's safer out here than it is in there! One more hit and the whole thing could fall!"

Beryl followed Rose out of the light, and the North/South crew filed out behind them. The drone in Sunny wanted to upbraid them and chase them back to their own stoplight; the wildness that was the fairy in her knew that it didn't matter. No one was watching them. No one. And if anyone was paying attention to the lights, they would just assume that the crash had knocked them out.

The dragon wheeled toward them, and they fluttered back, suddenly alarmed. But a familiar figure waved at them from behind the creature's

fur-tipped ears.

“Sunny!” Steele yelled. He detached from the dragon’s head and glided down to them. He waved an encompassing hand at the dragon, which had gone back to circling the sky, floating lazily away. “What do you think of my *coup d’état*? Do you think I got the Ministry’s attention?”

“I think you’re a damn fool,” Sunny said. “Look at the destruction you’ve caused! You’re as bad as a human!”

She soared up into the air, her wings beating furiously. She was aware that she was probably ‘shining’ like a miniature sun, but the Ministry would arrive soon enough with their glawackus and change the humans’ memories. She couldn’t believe Steele’s audacity. And to think he’d probably done it to impress her. Or to rebel against his Uncle. He was too immature to actually be acting out against society or the repressive government. But now that government would punish him. If he was lucky, they’d let him off with a warning and probation. If he wasn’t, they’d take his wings. And with it, his ability to ‘shine.’ Without the ability to recharge internally, he’d likely wither away.

She shivered and wrapped her arms around herself, chilled at the thought. Then she slowly rotated in a circle. She was high in the sky, higher than she’d ever soared before. Maybe not as high as New York’s landmark skyscrapers, but she was high enough that the winter air bit into her bare skin and threatened to damage her delicate wings.

“Sunny?” Rose called from several feet below her. “Come down. You’re too high. You’ll freeze.”

Sunny curled her wings around her body like a cloak, protecting them and her limbs. She plummeted, soaring past Rose with a rush of air. When she saw the roofs of First Avenue’s brick

townhouses and apartment buildings begin to loom closer, she snapped her wings open, letting them fill with air to bring her to a hurtling stop. She squealed with delight, her heart beating faster than it had in years.

Rose looped the loop around her before hovering next to her to take her hand. Beryl joined her on the other side.

“Well, I think this qualifies as a day off,” Sunny said, surveying the damage below them. Traffic had begun to line up down both streets, horns blaring. The smells of gasoline and burning rubber drifted up from wrecked cars, turning the air acrid. The stoplight teetered dangerously from its pole. Dangerously enough that Sunny reasoned HQ would side with her when she told them why they had left their post. Despite the destruction below them and the aggravation – and yes, worry – she felt for Steele, she felt light inside. Lighter than she had in years. Maybe Rose was right. Maybe she had been suppressing her natural urge to ‘shine,’ thinking that work satisfied that need enough.

“I would say so,” Rose agreed. “So? Bryant Park or Rockefeller?”

“Central Park?” Beryl suggested.

Elation made Sunny’s voice husky. “All of the above. Everywhere.”

Rose lifted an eyebrow. “Are you sure you’re up for that? How long has it been since you’ve speed flown?”

Sunny flashed her a mischievous smile. She felt so alive; she could do anything today.

“Try me.”

~

Leslie Roberts tapped her cell phone, scrolling for news of yesterday’s accident on Alan Street and First Avenue. The accident that had put her beat-up sedan in the shop and forced her to ride the subway. Still, it would be worth it if the news reported the accident accurately. But

news of yet another traffic accident in New York City didn't make the front page, and she had to thumb through page after page. In fact, it was buried on page four of the *Roads and Traffic* section. She nearly threw her phone when she found it.

*"Loose Santa Sleigh Inflatable Causes Eight Car Pile Up on Alan Street"* the headline read.

She'd known they would hide the truth, of course. It's not like the papers could print the truth. Or that people would report it. But she'd seen the dragon. And even the fairies floating around it. When the satyrs and nymphs had brought the misty panther creature that erased memories, she'd pretended to stare into its eyes. But her rose-hued glasses had protected her once again. And this time, she had pictures.

She hit her "Gallery" button, her heart thumping with anticipation. There they were. The red and white dragon, surrounded by red, yellow, and green fairy lights. If she put her thumb and pointer finger on the picture and spread them apart to blow it up, she could just make out the hazy shape of the yellow fairy and her delicate wings. She swiped to the next picture, a close up of the being's angry face. The green one had almost caught her snapping pictures. If she magnified the picture enough, she could see the fairy's green spiky hair, the amusement on her tiny face.

Her screen flickered and her heart sank. *No. No, not again.* The picture sputtered again, then suddenly it was gone, flipping back to her homepage. She hit her palm against the side of her phone, muttering under her breath now. The phone vibrated angrily. She tabbed the "Gallery" icon again, flipping through the pictures.

They had all changed. The red and white dragon was now a red and white inflatable sleigh, a fat Santa smiling like a maniac at its helm. Red, yellow, and green Christmas lights

tangled around the sleigh's runners. She swiped to the next. A close-up of the yellow light. She smacked her phone again. It vibrated, louder and longer this time, and the picture disappeared entirely. She squeaked, swiping quickly to the next picture. A green Christmas bulb. She thought, if she squinted, she could make out a silhouette of the fairy's spiky hair in the glow of the light. Then that picture was gone too. The squeal that escaped her mouth was part anger, part horror, and evoked a raised eyebrow from the man across the aisle from her. Infuriated, she beat her hand against the phone repeatedly.

"No, no, no!" she cried when her third phone in two months gave one final buzz and flipped off permanently. She smacked it against the subway bench before finally chucking it on the floor in rage. The man across the aisle was staring at her like she was crazy, so she stood up, stamped on the phone for show, and started for the door. Her stop was coming up anyway.

She pointed with her chin back at the phone as she edged past him. *May as well cement the perception that I'm nuts.*

"Damned brownies," she whispered to him as way of explanation.

~

Rhys Jones glanced up at the disturbed woman who had chucked her cell phone on the floor as she pushed by, then quickly averted his eyes. He was too new to New York City to judge. His eyes fell on the phone, cracked on the floor. With a few new parts, he could repair it and peddle it on the street. He waited until the woman had gotten off at her stop before reaching for the phone.

His hand stopped an inch from the device when it vibrated on the floor. He watched in wonder as a tiny white spark flew up from the phone circled once, then soared away.

"Cell phones have souls?" he breathed,

cupping his hand around the now dark item. He stared at the phone reverently for a minute before sliding it into his pocket. He shook his head. He must have imagined it. He was an engineering student. Science over theology; technology over faith. Still, fairy stories from his old Nam swirled in his head. The girl had accused brownies of destroying her phone. *Brownies didn't fly.*

*Pixies, maybe?* Or, as his Nam would claim: *Bwbachod.* He glanced around to make sure no one was watching, then pulled the flask from his pocket. He didn't have any cream to offer. *But Nam always said "Bwbachod hate teetotalers."* He took a quick swig from the flask, then, as inconspicuously as possible, spilled a bit out for the pixie. Like the viridian lights of the UFO he'd seen a few days ago, it was better not to take chances.

Deana Wilson is a self-proclaimed weaver of fantasy. One of the youngest of a family of eight children living in a Montana town so small it boasted only a bar and a post office, she soon discovered books and writing as an outlet for her creative nature.

She earned her bachelor's degree from SNHU, majoring in creative writing, and minoring in screenwriting and history. Published works include her experimental short story, "Fragmented," featured in the 4/24/2017 issue of *The Penmen Review*; "The Art of Courage," published in the *Dragons Within: Protecting Her Own* anthology; and "Treason of Asphodel," featured in *Fractured Realities: A Write of Passion Anthology*. With the help of a houseful of cats and kids, she is completing her high fantasy trilogy and learning Korean via dramas and K-pop.

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