



## We Never Talk about My Brother

*Peter S. Beagle*

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Modern parables of love, death, and transformation are peppered with melancholy in this extraordinary collection of contemporary fantasy. Each short story cultivates a whimsical sense of imagination and reveals a mature, darker voice than previously experienced from this legendary author.

In one tale the Angel of Death enjoys newfound celebrity while moonlighting as an anchorman on the network news, while in another the shortsighted ruler of a gentle realm betrays himself in dreaming of a "manageable war." Further storylines include an American librarian who discovers that, much to his surprise and sadness, he is the last living Frenchman, and rivals in a supernatural battle who decide to forgo pistols at dawn, choosing instead to duel with dramatic recitations of terrible poetry.

Featuring several previously unpublished stories alongside a bevy of recently released works, this haunting compilation is appealing to both genre readers and mainstream literature lovers.

Includes "By Moonlight," Locus Award-winner for Best Novelette.

## We Never Talk about My Brother Details

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## From Reader Review We Never Talk about My Brother for online ebook

### Jagrid says

A wonderful, wonderful collection of stories. Beagle's best.

**Uncle Chaim and Aunt Rifke and the Angel** is a lovely, sad, happy story told through the eyes of a ten year old boy. One day, as he's sitting in the studio watching his Uncle Chaim paint, an angel arrives and informs Chaim that she's to be his muse and he will from that day on paint only her.

What follows is a harrowing tale as Chaim becomes obsessed, drawing further and further away from the world until only the angel matters.

*If blackness is the absence of light, then those were the blackest eyes I'll ever see, because there was no light in those eyes, and no smallest possibility of light ever. You couldn't call them sad: sad at least knows what joy is, and grieves at being exiled from joy. However old he really was, those eyes were a thousand years past sad.*

**We Never Talk About My Brother**, the story which this collection takes its name from, feels very short and seems to be over before it really begins.

The brother in question is sort of the angel of death. If he says someone died, they die. But not right at that moment, they are *already* dead, a week ago. It's an interesting premise, but I thought it could have been a bit longer.

*He kind of whispered, "You got run over." Hadn't been as close as I was, I'd never have heard him.*

*"You got run over." Like that - like it had already happened, you see? Exactly - like he was reading the news. You got it.*

*Okay. Now. This is what's important. This is where you're going to start wondering whether you should have maybe sat just a little closer to the door. See, what happened to Donnie, didn't happen then - it had already happened a week before.*

**The Tale of Junko and Sayuri** is a very sad story of a young man that falls in love with a shape-shifter. A story of how they both come to know their true nature.

*Not even for the sake of at last learning my own being, my own soul. That can go undiscovered forever, and welcome, and I will remain Sayuri, your wife, no more and no less. And I will tend three graves, and pray at the shrine, and live as I can with what I have done. That is how it will be.*

**King Pelles the Sure** is a short almost-fairytale of a king that rules a kingdom that has never known anything other than peace and prosperity. King Pelles, however, wants to be remembered for glory in battle and all that. However, he'd much rather it be a short, manageable war.

*"Well, if that is what a war is, so be it. Consider our choices, Vizier, and make your recommendation." He added then, rather quickly, "But do arrange for a gracious war, if you possibly can. Something... something a little tidy. With songs in it, you know."*

### **The Last and Only, Or, Mr. Moscowitz Becomes French**

A story of, well, Mr. Moscowitz turning French. Slowly, over the course of years, he becomes more and more French, until he can no longer even speak English and he and his wife finally move to France. But he can't be happy there, either, for he finds that he is the only true Frenchman alive.

*Mr. Moscowitz smiled, almost wistfully, and the President grew afraid. He had a sudden vision of Mr. Moscowitz banishing him and every other soul in France with a single word, a single gesture; and in that moment's vision it seemed to him that they all went away like clouds, leaving Mr. Moscowitz to dance by himself in cobwebbed Paris on Bastille day.*

### **Spook**

Another one of Beagle's Joe Farrell stories. Farrell moves into a new house with Julie, only to find out that it's haunted and the ghost thinks he's the one who killed him.

Obviously, the only solution is a duel to the death. The weapons? Bad poetry.

*Plop, flop  
Plop*

**The Stickball Witch** is a truly wonderful story about Beagle playing stickball when he was eleven. One of the best short stories I've read by him.

*Stewie Hauser - always the second guy to do or say anything, said he double-dared me. So there it was. You couldn't walk away from a double-dare, even from a dumbshit like Stewie. I mean, you could, but the rest of your life wouldn't ever be worth living after that. I knew that then. Not believed. Knew.*

### **The Unicorn Tapestries**

A nice series of poems based on the unicorn tapestries. Not amazing, but nice.

**Chandail** is a story set in Beagle's Innkeeper's Song universe. I didn't care much for that book, but I am

constantly surprised at how he manages to tell some of his best stories in that world.

This is a story told by one of the characters in that novel, of her encounter with a mysterious, torturous sea creature.

*Depending on where you drink and with whom, you can hear that the First Chandail fashioned a world before this one of ours: gloriously beautiful, by all accounts, but crafted all of water, which was no problem until the Second Chandail made the sun. More wondrous yet, that must have been for a while, what with the new, new light bending and shattering so dazzlingly through those endless droplets - a rainbow creation, surely. Except, of course, that it melted away, by and by, and sank back into empty dark until the world we know came to be.*

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### **Stacey says**

Had to mark this anthology, though I've only (so far) read the stories that previously debuted in Strange Roads, a chapbook collaboration published with artist Lisa Snellings. The two stories: Uncle Chaim and Aunt Rifke and the Angel is an amazing story of compulsion and compassion. The story Spook, about a very unusual duel, fought for the prize of a home, made me giggle with glee. HIGHLY recommended just for those two stories.

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### **Ben Babcock says**

I have never read anything else by Peter S. Beagle.

Just want to make that clear, since I know that in some corners of the fantasyscape, he is a Big Deal. He's Known. Renowned, even. So this little collection of short stories of his was probably met with squeals of glee from fans the world over when it was published (back in 2009, because I am 6 years behind on my to-read list these days). I was not one of those people.

But I might be, some day.

*We Never Talk About My Brother* starts off on a very good note: it has a foreword by Charles de Lint. He talks about how Beagle is one of the first writers he, as a reader, was aware of who wrote fantasy set in our world. Of course, that is now one of de Lint's major claims to fame, so he knows what he's talking about. And he was totally right. I might even go so far as to say that, clause for clause, Beagle is actually more of a wordsmith than de Lint.

I don't really want to wade into the false dichotomy of literary versus genre fiction. But Beagle verily shatters the notion of such a dichotomy; he is a *literary fantasy* writer, and if your brain explodes at such a notion, then read not this book. Each story is crafted with the skill of Margaret Atwood or Alice Munro. Beagle writes about people like us, or like people we might know, who happen to have experiences a little

out of the ordinary. (Another loaded term I could throw out there, if I cared to, might be *magical realism*—but I don't care to do that. No, sir, I do not.)

I have, in the past, done that thing where one goes through each story in the anthology and reviews it separately. It is a sensible though naive approach to reviewing anthologies, and it would certainly be easy to accomplish for one with nine stories in it. Yet this approach ignores the fact that some stories are disproportionately better than others—and I mean that from an entirely subjective sense; a story might speak to me here even if another thinks it is awful.

So let me highlight the ones I really, really liked.

The titular “We Never Talk About My Brother,” which is the second tale, is fantastic. Beagle takes a brilliant central idea and *unspools* it layer by layer until he reaches the core nugget that makes it not just fantasy but somewhat unsettling, verging upon but not quite breaching that tenuous veil between fantasy and horror. This is a story of psychological warfare on a Biblical level.

Likewise, “The Stickball Witch,” has a similar first-person perspective with a moral at the end that left me both entertained and thoughtful. It reminded me quite a bit of an episode of *Recess*—I don't think this was intentional on Beagle's part, but sometimes the best associations aren't.

I was actually surprised by how much I liked “By Moonlight,” even though it hews closer to many of the standard tropes about faeries. This is probably thanks to Beagle's great style; he's a consummate teller of stories by storytellers.

I think all the stories here are good in one way or another, though I didn't particularly *like* “The Last and Only, or, Mr. Moscowitz Becomes French,” and because poetry is not my thing, “The Unicorn Tapestries” left me pretty numb. I suspect there are plenty who will call these their favourites, though.

I'm at a loss to draw deeper comparisons between the stories or talk subtext here. I would like to read more of Beagle's work before I try that. That's probably the main takeaway from this review: enjoyed the book, will read more. Hopefully it won't take me six years this time.

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## **Standback says**

A superb collection of Beagle stories, showcasing his imagination and his immense versatility.

While few of these stories are absolute must-reads, each one of them is excellent, fresh, and intriguing - each in its own way. There's an urban Jewish fantasy, a metaphysical duel in sibling rivalry, an Eastern-flavored legend, and a surrealistic tale of an average librarian mysteriously becoming French. Each is excellent. Highly recommended.

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## **le-trombone says**

Another terrific collection of short stories from Peter Beagle.

“Uncle Chaim and Aunt Rifke and the Angel” – art and the philosophy of art, a discussion that takes a turn when an angel arrives and insists that its portrait be painted.

“We Never Talk About My Brother” – the true relationship between the anchorman and the news.

“The Tale of Junko and Sayuri” – the commoner who serves in his lord's castle marries a shape-changer who sees his ambition.

“King Pelles the Sure” – “Once there was a king who dreamed of war.” King Pelles's motives are literally childish, and the results are as bad as expected, but the ending goes beyond what you might think. An excellent anti-war story.

“The Last and Only, or, Mr. Moscowitz Becomes French” – Mr Moscowitz's transformation makes him more French than anyone else.

“Spook” – a Joe Farrell story. Farrell has moved into a haunted house. The ghost wants him out. They decide to duel for it. The choice of weapons is ... let's just say that this story *needs* to be read aloud.

“The Stickball Witch” – 1940/1950s childhood of stickball, and Mrs. Poliakov, whose yard the ball fell in. Terrific description of stickball (and lapta, for that matter).

“By Moonlight” – A thief on the run encounters a man who spent seven years in Faerie.

“The Unicorn Tapestries” – Poem sequence on the Unicorn Tapestries (which hang in The Cloisters in Fort Tryon Park, Manhattan).

“Chandail” – Lal (of The Innkeeper's Song) tells a story of her time with a Chandail, a sea creature that shows you images based on your memories. Not all of Lal-alone's memories are pleasant.

There isn't a story here that doesn't satisfy, and more than half of them take twists that you won't be expecting (and which I'm not giving away in the short summaries). Beagle's writing is so good that his grocery list must be poetry, and the stories he tells just hold and won't let me go as I read them.

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### **Sarah says**

I loved this. It's been sitting around for years, library booksale purchase. I'd been avoiding it because it had a "Science Fiction" sticker on the spine from the library. It was not what I term science fiction. It was more like fantasy, or twilight zon-ish stories. Normal life, with one weird thing going on. It was a short story collection, set in various times and places. I think only one was actually set in a totally fantasy world. But angels, ghosts and fairies exist in this author's world. They were all thoughtful, nuanced, and fun stories. Looked for more of his work at the library last night -- and was disappointed.

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## **Micha says**

As a fan of Mr. Beagle's work since childhood, I am most definitely a biased reader of his words. However, I think of all the works of his I've read, THIS is the one that holds its own the strongest and passes Mr. Beagle into the realm of not just a good author or an exceptional fantasy writer, but as a truly talented, SUPERB author.

I once wrote a paper about him as being one of the truly good American authors we had to survive in the literary world, a paper which I am certain my teachers scoffed at as I was very new and without a voice yet, but I wrote it and after xx amount of years I can finally come back to it and show my teachers without any doubt THIS novel and say "See, no doubt now, I told you. That's the stuff I meant all those years ago." The stories in this novel are something to be savored. It is just the book you want for the fireside, that rainy afternoon in a cafe, or on the train - which is now five hours late and your sister is not happy and your tummy is long past rumbling. It is the novel you were waiting for to take for wisdom on a journey, or at a crossroads... or possibly just in the station for afar too long past when your train SHOULD have arrived. But wherever you are going, this book is a valuable and worthy companion to take along with you.

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## **Laura says**

Inside the cover of Peter S. Beagle's short story collection *We Never Talk About My Brother*, there are various quotes praising his other works and his writing in general. The review by Booklist caught my eye:

"Perhaps Beagle is incapable of genuinely dark fantasy, but...."

Although Booklist goes on to give the book (*The Line Between*) a good review, this sentence nagged at me while I was reading "*We Never Talk*". The impression it left was that Booklist believes that dark fantasy=good fantasy and the darker it is, the better. This annoyed me and really made me stop and think. Yes, most of my favorite fantasy has at least a tiny dark shadow (even *The Wizard of Oz* has the Wicked Witch), but I certainly don't equate darkness with quality. One of my favorite Neil Gaiman stories is "Chivalry" and it is full of light. In any case, annoyance aside, Peter S. Beagle is capable of writing dark fantasy, but his stories are usually about personal darkness, as opposed to the darkness of a dystopian fantasy, or a world overrun with vampires and other nasty creatures. I imagine Beagle's stories as dark around the edges, like slightly burned cookies.

Now that I've got that off my chest, on to the book itself. The book contains 10 short stories, most published previously and the majority between 2007-2009. Like most short story collections, some stories appealed to me more than others. I think that is almost unavoidable when the writer is good and can create a range of different characters and situations. Beagle is not a "one note" writer: each story is different and most people will like some more than others.

My personal favorite is the title story, which made the book a worthwhile read all by itself. Whichever is your favorite, I don't think you'll be disappointed in the book as a whole.

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## **Helix says**

Oh, this is such a literary oasis, precious beyond description. I have never heard nor read Beagle's works

before, I must confess, but I absolutely adored his intricacies, his witticisms, his wisdom. It is entirely appropriate that one of the stories contained in this book was titled The Unicorn Tapestries--based on actual tapestries by the same name--because that perfectly describes the entire feel of the book (and it really should have been the title, although maybe it's just too similar to The Last Unicorn, and I do love the titular story). For all his dreamy writing, Beagle's story felt so wonderfully grounded, felt so real, as real as the air we breathe or the blue sky. He turned fantasy into reality and it was magnificent, not only a grand adventure but also a reflection on what life--and dreams--actually is. Everything is subtly intricate, embroidered with the greatest care and concern. There is not a "bad" story here. Every story shines in its own way and offers their own quiet wisdom.

It felt a bit sad to leave his stories because they were such wonderful places to live in. I'd definitely recommend this one.

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### **Christine says**

*"But it is a curious thing, how certain horrors are so vastly horrible to think about that they simply do not take hold on your imagination at the time, but go almost unnoticed - sooner or later to wake you screaming, surely, but not now."*

Given my previous reads by Peter S. Beagle (most notably The Last Unicorn), I was expecting this to be a more fantasy-heavy compilation, but the stories included here are quite mixed and show a wide range of types and genres. I liked all of the stories and really enjoyed a number of them. This is a very worthwhile collection for Peter S. Beagle fans and newcomers alike.

Related Reads:

The Line Between [Short Stories] (Beagle)

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### **Natalie says**

I may get slapped for this opener...

**I read this short story collection before I read The Last Unicorn.**

**I think I should let you all know that The Last Unicorn did not blow me away *at all*.**

I know, I know. I'm a terrible human being.

**I did, however, adore We Never Talk about My Brother.**

It has managed to sneak its way into my top five favorite short story collections of all time (admittedly that is not actually a real thing - my top five lists usually have about thirty).

What I love most about a well written short story collection is just that - *it's well written*. If you are going to do a whole story in a few to a few dozen pages, every sentence - no, every *word* - needs to be immaculate. And that was done in *almost* every story in this collection.

I'm gonna break it down.

There may or may not be **SPOILERS** involved.

You may want to grab a cup of coffee or tea or whiskey (different strokes...). The first three stories were my favorites.

### **Uncle Chaim and Aunt Rifke and the Angel**

Anyone who has ever sought creative perfection knows what a muse is. She/he/it is your ticket to that masterpiece - that painting, that poem, that symphony, that sculpture, that book. Uncle Chaim is no different. His muse? Well, his muse *is* a bit different. This isn't a neon haired Treasure Troll (oh wait - that's at the local bingo hall); his muse is an *ANGEL*. Here is the problem: How do you capture the essence of an angel? How do you ever capture this perfection on canvas?

This story is told by a young boy, the nephew of Chaim. This adds innocence to a story that may appear equally innocent at the start but is actually a little chilling. I truly don't want to give anything away. Just know that what may sound a little boring is most definitely NOT boring.

**Sneak Peek Spoiler: A *Rabbi* gets involved.**

### **We Never Talk About My Brother**

I love this title because it instantly gets your mind whirring. Why? Why don't they ever talk about this brother? Did he disgrace the family name? Did he *die*?

Unfortunately, I can't squeak a darn thing in this one without spoiling it completely. I will just say that it is nothing close to what you are thinking it is.

**Sneak Peek Spoiler: If you think *YOU'VE* experienced sibling rivalry...**

### **The Tale of Junko and Sayuri**

Here is how this tale begins:

*In Japan, very, very, long ago, when almost anybody you met on the road might turn out to be a god or a demon, there was a young man named Junko.*

Well, this alone sucked me right in. I am a complete sucker for a true "tale." I want a story that involves morals, lessons to be learned. I don't even need a happy ending. I want the things that only exist in an imagination and then in a book or in a movie. This was quite possibly my favorite in the whole collection.

**Sneak Peek Spoiler: One Word - Shapeshifting.**

And it was here, after this fantastic "tale", that the collection stopped wowing me. Don't get me wrong; I still admire the work and think it is fantastic as a whole collection. The rest just didn't leave me breathless in the way the first thing did.

### **King Pelles the Sure**

First line:

*Once there was a king who dreamed of war. His name was Pelles.*

This is a short tale about a king who has never been through war. War follows. And the unraveling of a kingdom and a king follow that. There is a lesson in this as well, but it had more of a fairytale feeling to me than the previous story. Short and sweet.

### **The Last and Only, or, Mr. Moscowitz Becomes French**

I expect a lot from a story with this cool of a title. Unfortunately, I almost *disliked* this story. This had a lot to do with my great dislike for Mr. Moscowitz himself. It isn't really fair that I hate the story, as I wasn't tricked into disliking him. He really *is* an unlikeable character. It was still well written and a bit funny in an unfunny way.

Just trust me.

### **Spook**

It's happened to us all. We get into intense ~~rap~~ poetry battles with ghosts.

What do you mean it hasn't happened to you?

### **The Stickball Witch**

This was the weakest of the bunch for me. A group of young boys. A game of ~~baseball~~ stickball. A old woman neighbor who may or may not be a witch. You've heard some version of it before.

### **By Moonlight**

A campfire tale told to a highwayman by a former Reverend. Another tale - Beagle truly does these so well. This one involves a tale (of Faeries - Oberon and Titania - and the said Reverend) within a tale. I loved the way this one played out.

### **The Unicorn Tapestries**

From Beagle's introduction to this poem, I learned that the Unicorn Tapestries are an actual thing, and the poem is written around them. I would be absolutely fascinated to see these in real life.

Here is a photo:

Seriously...**how awesome/amazing/fantastical is THAT?**

I thought this poem was better than the whole The Last Unicorn (yeah yeah...go ahead with your booing and hissing).

### **Chandail**

I'm a little foggy on this one. To be fair (to myself), I *did* read this almost three months ago. I do recall that a Chandail is a sea creature. Ah, here is the perfect description of one:

*Ugly, yes, marvelously horrific; yet if you look at them long enough, sometimes something happens to your sight, and you can actually see them becoming beautiful right before you, so beautiful that your eyes and mind hurt together, trying to take in such splendor. And yet they remain exactly what they are: dankly reeking multi-legged monsters, like some grotesque cross between a jellyfish and a centipede.*

Now if THAT doesn't give you the willies...

But seriously, this is another tale within a tale. As I've mentioned, Beagle is a master of the tale within the tale. Maybe I would have thought more of "the book of which shall not be named again because I value my life" if it had been such a tale within a tale.

A *mostly* superb, *almost* perfect collection.

**4 Stars**

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### **Onewooga says**

I LOVE Peter S. Beagle's work. The only thing that keeps this book from a five star rating is a combination of the fact that I'm not a huge short story fan, and two, there are a few stories in here that I didn't like as well, so the book seems a little uneven. That being said, the first two stories are marvelous. So marvelous that I read the first story to my husband, whether he liked it or not (he liked it). A definite good read.

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### **Cristina says**

Very well written... Interesting, wise, poetic... personal... original... surprising...

Uncle Chaim and Aunt Rifke and the Angel - can angels be possessed - apparently they can  
We Never Talk About My Brother - what is the most extreme kind of change? When things have always been that way... A twist on the Antichrist idea.

The Tale of Junko and Sayuri - love story, sad, Asian flavor

King Pelles the Sure - allegory, fairy tale, sad again...

The Last and Only, or, Mr. Moscowitz Becomes French - humorous

Spook - genius! Duel with bad poetry. Pure genius! (Poetry as currency is also mentioned in "By Moonlight")

The Stickball Witch - people are not what they seem... d'oh... Reminded me of "To kill a mockingbird"  
By Moonlight - Shakespearean...

The Unicorn Tapestries - I liked this the least of the stories... maybe because I find it too sad to hunt a unicorn...

Chandail - excellent, humane, well-written, wise - "Wisdom is uncertainty. Wisdom is confusion"

"Fish are quite naive, and lack humor. The same could be said for gods, I have often thought."

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### **Sonatajessica says**

"The Last Unicorn" is a very special book and movie to me, I know, not the most unique choice as I know

many people love the story, but for me it goes deep. A lot of my love for it has to do with the writing. Beagle's writing is spectacular that I was fully aware of, as a matter of fact I have a quote from TLU tattooed on my skin. But I had no idea how versatile his style is, this collection proves that. The beautiful and melancholically poetic voice I was used to here but also so many other voices, he can also be funny and more modern, more traditional in descriptive fantasy form, and each style fits uniquely into its story.

That is definitely what stood out for me, Beagle's writing and anyone who appreciates well written stories should make a little stop here. The plots of the stories is where Beagle and me do not always see eye to eye and I ended up liking the ones with more realistic setting much more than those with the typical Fantasy fare. Because contradictory to what my love TLU might suggest, that one is the exception, most of the time I don't care much for traditional Fantasy and usually don't gravitate towards such books. Though, I have to say, that even though the stories about faeries, chandails and Japanese shapeshift mythology were not my favorites, the writing of Beagle (again!) made them still very pleasant experiences. Also, I sometimes was not sold on the concept of a story in the first few pages, it might have sounded like something that was not up my alley and while it never turned me into a deep fantasy lover I always came out rather liking every story in the end, not loving but liking, and that is due to his writing. Yes, it is all about his writing.

I have to say though, very surprisingly his poetry did not impress me.

My top 3:

- 3) "Spook"
- 2) "We Never Talk about my Brother"
- 1) "The Stickball Witch"

Here I usually mention one story to skip and while I really did not love all of these stories, I would actually not advise to skip any of them.

3.5\*

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### **Kalin says**

Another strong collection, and another proof that in true fantasy, nothing you've experienced so far can prepare you for what is waiting round the corner, past the next bend of the road.

~ How does one make art? Let "Uncle Chaim and Aunt Rifke and the Angel" illuminate us:

The blue angel was indeed waiting when Uncle Chaim arrived in the studio early the next morning. She had even made coffee in his ancient glass percolator, and was offended when he informed her that it was as thin as rain and tasted like used dishwater. "Where I come from, no one ever *makes* coffee," she returned fire. "We command it."

"That's what's wrong with this crap," Uncle Chaim answered her. "Coffee's like art, you don't order coffee around."

~ Well ....

Well.

~ From "The Tale of Junko and Sayuri":

"(...) But we must always remember that all barbarians believe themselves to be civilized, and dealing with such people while keeping the dangerous truth from them requires a subtlety that few possess. You are not one of them, Junko-san."

Is it only the Japanese? Or is it diplomacy as a whole?

(Ironically, harrowingly, the great revelation at the end of this story is perhaps about what happens when we possess *too much* subtlety. Enough to fool our own souls.)

~ Beagle is having fun in "The Last and Only, Or, Mr. Moscowitz becomes French":

Within a week of the trial, Mr. Moscowitz was a national celebrity, which meant that as many people knew his name as knew the name of the actor who played the dashing Gilles de Rais in a new television serial, and not quite as many as recognized the eleven-year-old Racine girl with a forty-inch bust, who sang Christian techno-rap.

The President shook his hand, and gave him a souvenir fountain pen and a flag lapel, and said that he regarded Mr. Moscowitz's transformation as the ultimate expression of the American dream, for it surely proved to the world that any American could become whatever he wanted enough to be, even if what he wanted to be was a snail-eating French wimp.

(Any bets on which President was that?)

Once, on a talk show, he said, taking great care with his English grammar, "The United States is like a very large dog which has not been—*qu'est-ce que c'est le mot?*—housebroken. It is well enough in its place, but its place is not on the couch. Or in the Mideast, or in Africa, or in a restaurant kitchen."

~ ... and even more fun in "Spook" and its duel with the worst poetry ever written in English. I itch to quote something but I don't know where to begin.

(Though, after spending a couple of years on a couple of Bulgarian self-publishing sites, I wasn't that shaken. Heck, I've even contributed some ....)

~ And then, to compensate, Peter gives us "The Unicorn Tapestries":

Oh, in the morning, when we came  
out to go walking, and saw him blaze  
up from the field like a shout of praise,  
shining and shining and shining,  
too bright, too living, to have a name.  
Pepée started barking and running in circles, and I—  
Oh, then I did cry.

All in the morning, there he lay,  
collared and kept with a silver chain,  
red with the pomegranates' sugary rain,  
shining and shining and shining,  
with a fence like a ribbon to make him stay.  
His horn was all sunset and spindrift, all rainbow and rose—  
Pepée licked his nose.

All in the morning, feeling his breath  
play in my hair as he stamped and blew,  
just for a moment I knew what he knew,  
shining and shining and shining—  
that nothing could hold him, not even death;  
that no collars, no chains, no fences, as strong as they seem,  
can hold a dream.

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I am breathless.

### **Deborah says**

This one just left me breathless. A collection of perfect little stories, all in different realities and all in different voices: from a nasty tv news anchor who may be the angel of death to a shapeshifting wife in Samurai Japan to a glorious retelling of Titania and the mortal man she falls in love with, there is simply nothing in here that doesn't just floor me.

As usual, Peter is amazing. Highly, highly reced.

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### **Margaret says**

I'm not much of a short story fan usually, but Peter Beagle is an exception to that tendency. I look forward to a new short story collection of his just as much as I would to a new novel, and I wasn't disappointed in this one. It's perhaps not quite as strong as *The Line Between* (which has the wonderful followup to *The Last Unicorn*, "Two Hearts"), but it's excellent all the same.

One of the things I love about Beagle is his ability to write fluently in vastly different narrative voices, which

is especially apparent and impressive in a story collection. Just to take the first two stories (which were probably my favorites) as examples: "Uncle Chaim and Aunt Rifke and the Angel" is narrated by a young Jewish boy in New York, while the next story, "We Never Talk About My Brother", has a much older, rather backwoods kind of narrator. Both narrators are equally compelling and have a voice that pulls me into the story quickly, as Beagle's narrators generally do.

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### **Marissa says**

It's cheating, a bit, for me to count this towards my pages read in 2017, since many of these stories were reprinted in *Mirror Kingdoms: The Best of Peter S. Beagle*, and I didn't reread them when I picked up this book.

Look, Beagle is probably the master of this form; I don't think that's up for debate. But *Mirror Kingdoms* is the better collection of stories, and the overlap is so great that my only recommendation is to pick that one up and leave this one alone.

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### **Diane says**

This book, which includes eight short stories and a poem, is really one of the best story collections that I've ever read. There is really not a dull or drab story in the bunch. Every story in this collection is fantastical, beautiful and marvelous. The writing is superb, the settings are colorful and varied, and the characters come alive.

Before now, the only other book that I had read by this author was *The Last Unicorn*, which I loved. Now, having read this, I declare myself a fan of Peter S. Beagle, and I will be looking to read more of his work.

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### **Amanda says**

The stories in this collection are inventive, engaging, and always striving to tell us something about our own hearts. The *Unicorn Tapestry* poem wasn't very good, and the story *Spook* was meh (maybe I think Beagle should steer clear of poetry regardless of whether it's meant to be good or bad). The others I sped through rather quickly and enjoyed.

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