



The Line Between

Peter S. Beagle

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Featuring the Hugo and Nebula award-winning original novelette from the world of *The Last Unicorn*, "Two Hearts."

The long-awaited sequel to the popular classic *The Last Unicorn* is the centerpiece of this powerful collection of new tales from a fantasy master. As longtime fans have come to expect, the stories are written with a grace and style similar to fantasy's most original voices, such as J. R. R. Tolkien, Fritz Leiber, and Kurt Vonnegut. Traditional themes are typically infused with modern sensibilities—reincarnated lovers and waning kings rub shoulders with heroic waifs; Schmendrick the Magician returns to adventure, as does the ghost of an off-Broadway actor and a dream-stealing shapeshifter; and Gordon, the delightfully charming "self-made cat," appears for the first time in print, taking his place alongside Stuart Little as a new favorite of the young at heart. This wide-ranging compilation contains sly humor and a resounding depth that will charm fans of literary fantasy.

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The Line Between Details

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From Reader Review *The Line Between* for online ebook

Richard says

The Line Between by Peter S. Beagle, Tachyon Publications, 2006

One pattern I've noticed in the writers I tend to come back to again and again—their “voices” tend to be consistent but their subject matter tends to vary. Sure, writers are people—most of them—and they have interests like anyone else, and those motifs tend to repeat. But with the really good writers, they're going to repeat in ways that make you forget or even never realize that this is what they're doing. And the subject matter, at least in broad strokes, is going to range more from A-Z than A-B. You'll find that range evident in *The Line Between*.

We start off with “Gordon the Self-Made Cat,” a charming(I know, but it is) fable about a mouse who takes a look at the world and decides that being a mouse in a world full of cats, well, kind of sucks. So he decides to become a cat. How? By going to cat school, of course. Yes, the premise is completely ridiculous, but Beagle will have you buying in to it as long as the story lasts, which is just long enough. And when the ending threatens to land hard on a “be true to your nature” platitude, Beagle does a touch-and-go in a different direction.

Next comes one of Beagle's best known stories from the early part of his re-emergence as a powerhouse in the fantasy field, “Two Hearts.” I wouldn't call it a sequel to *The Last Unicorn*, even though we do get reacquainted with Prince (now King) Lir, Schmendrick the Magician, and the indomitable Molly Grue. It's more of a coda, from a time when the now aged Lir is called upon to fight a monstrous griffin because he's the king and, ultimately, the welfare of the kingdom and its people depends on him. Shades of the Celtic kings of legend who, when faced with bad luck or the ill-will of the gods, were personally sacrificed in order to save their kingdoms and their people. There's a good bit about proper roles and accepting responsibility, but I think it's really about saying good-bye. Winner of the Nebula and Hugo awards, and it's hard to think of any story that deserved it more.

“Four Fables”: “The Fable of the Moth,” “The Fable of the Tyrannosaurus Rex,” “The Fable of the Ostrich,” and “The Fable of the Octopus.” These are strictly from Aesop, silly and fun but with a bit of a sting in the tail.

The fables bring us through what I think of as the book's transition, at least from the explicit fairy-tale section to the contemporary fantasy section, even if the stories that follow next are not all set in the modern world, or even necessarily in this world, but there's a tone change from the first section of the book. It's not that now Beagle is being serious when he wasn't before—he was being serious all along. Now that becomes just a little more obvious.

“El Regalo.” Translation-“The Gift.” A young man named Marvyn is born with magical powers, which means his older sister, Angie, has an even more troublesome younger brother than usual. I mean, how do you keep a lid on a guy who can make garbage bags dance? Though it soon turns out that Angie and Marvyn both have bigger worries. Power like Marvyn has always attracts attention, and that attention is not always friendly. Even so, a big sis is going to look out for her younger brother. Even if he is a pain in the ass.

“Quarry.” This is a story set in the universe of *The Innkeeper's Song*, about how Soukryan met his shapeshifting fox companion. It's also a tight adventure story of escapes from impossible odds and and

exploration of the strictures of honor. Or possibly how to escape from the strictures of honor, since it can often be a trap as well as a guiding principle. The story is also a character study. And an illustration of a world-class imagination at play...if "play" is the right word, because the Hunters and the Goro from that universe are two of the scariest sorts of creatures you would never, ever, want to meet.

"Salt Wine." Two sailors go into the wine business when a merrow gives one of them the secret of making the peculiar beverage of the title. I don't think it's giving away too much to say that the salt wine has a bit of a side-effect, since the real story is how the two different men deal with that knowledge. And how certain prices are too high, even when you think someone else is paying them.

"Mr. Sigerson." Anyone who reads the introduction will know, even if they somehow manage to miss the clues, that the Mr. Sigerson of the title is really Sherlock Holmes, taking a position as a violinist in the orchestra of an extremely obscure European duchy during some of the time he was absent and presumed dead in England. Naturally, a mystery develops. The character of Mr. Sigerson is presented in contrast to Floresh Takesti, the concertmaster, who becomes a rather reluctant Watson to Sigerson, even though his only real interest is in preserving the struggling orchestra. We see Mr. Sigerson from Takesti's perspective, and it's a safe bet that he sees the Great Detective a little differently than he sees himself.

"A Dance For Emilia." Since the fantastic element to this story doesn't show up until relatively late, I'm not going to say much about that. What I will say is that Beagle's world-building is on full display here and in full force. He recreates a specific time and place with great depth. You could say in this instance it is because it is a time and place from his own formative years, but you can't really say the same thing about, say, the universe of *The Innkeeper's Song* or *The Last Unicorn*, where he does the same thing. You never get the sense that you're reading about a character in a Peter Beagle story. It's always about real people, and if they're only real on the page, they are very real there indeed. The plot, such that it is, involves two people mourning the death of a friend, and what the depth of that unrelenting mourning causes to happen. Anyone who knows their folklore won't need a spoiler, and anyone who doesn't...well, you're not going to get one. It's not about the fantastic element anyway—the story was a fantasy long before that technicality showed itself.

Fine, you ask, and how can that be so, when the reader can point to no fantastic element in the majority of its pages, and only appearing near the end? Fair enough, but let me ask you a question—do you spend your time during an entire magic trick waiting with mad fascination for the bunny to appear? No, because you know that this is only the end of the trick, not the trick itself. Likewise you don't need taxonomy to know that Beagle is writing fantasy, you simply need recognition of what's already there, what's always there. At heart everything in the world is fantastic, all you have to do is know how to see it. Peter Beagle does, and in *The Line Between*, he shows it to us.

Jessica says

What can I say about Peter S. Beagle? He is a writer that never fails to surprise me, because, I don't know why, but whenever I start reading one of his stories, I never expect to like it as much as I end up liking it. It happened with many of the stories in this book. He has a way with words that is only his and it's magical and that's all I'm going to say about it.

I'm going to start with *Two Hearts* because it was the reason I bought this book. *Two Hearts* is the sequel to

The Last Unicorn and I plunged into it with reckless abandon, obviously wanting to return to that world. It didn't disappoint. In fact, when it was over, I didn't know what to do with myself; it touched me in ways not a lot of stories do and I was an emotional... well, not wreck, but let's just say I couldn't do anything for a while but hold the book in my arms while getting flooded by emotions that went beyond words. Two Hearts was achingly beautiful and funny and deeply sad all at the same, and how many stories can say that for themselves?

As for the rest of the stories...

Gordon, the self-made cat: incredibly fun story about a mouse who decides that he can be anything he wants and what he wants is to be a cat so he goes to Cat School to achieve his dreams. I want to read this story to my nephews so bad.

Four Fables: I can only speak highly about the last of this four fables -the first three, I didn't like-. So, *The Fable of the Octopus*, the fourth one, is one of the best short stories I have ever read. It's a deep, philosophical, witty, ironic, and funny story about the search of an Octopus for God. So good, I tell you.

El Regalo: great story about a an older sister and an annoying little brother who turns out to be a witch. Really funny, yet scary at the same time.

Quarry: this was the only story I didn't particularly like (besides the first 3 fables of the *Four Fables*). It is apparently about how two of the characters from *The Innkeeper's Song* met and maybe it is because I have yet to read that book, but I wasn't too engaged by the story. But, even so, the emotional depth Beagle achieves in some scenes moved me and I couldn't help but applaud him for his skill (and imagination).

Salt Wine: one of the stories that when I started reading it, for the first couple of paragraphs I wasn't too sure about it. It's written in first person and the way the narrator talked was a little annoying but then he started talking about mermaids and mermen, and I was caught up in his tale before I even realized it. And it turned out to be one of my favorite stories in this book.

Mr. Sigerson: ah, a Sherlock Holmes tale. Thoroughly entertaining and witty. I enjoyed it very much and it actually surprised me. Beagle did a good job with this one.

And the last one, *A Dance for Emilia*: the most autobiographical thing he was ever written, as Beagle puts it, born out of mourning for his closest friend, who died back in 1994. And as such, one of the most touching, even heart-wrenching stories of this collection. What can I say? How can a story born out of such sad and personal circumstances be anything but great in the hands of a man like Peter S. Beagle?

Something else to add: another thing I really love about his collection of stories are the little explanations he gives before each one about how it came to be. It adds a lot to the reading experience and it is always wonderful when a writer share the stories behind their stories.

All in all, amazing read, amazing stories, genius writer. Go read them, now.

Justyn Rampa says

This was actually the first collection of Peter S. Beagle stories published, but I'm reading it after the two that

preceded it. A pretty solid collection with some clear standouts for me and some stories that I struggled with reading.

Gordon, the Self-Made Cat - An incredibly charming story that could easily be the basis for a longer children's novel or a Pixar film!

Two Hearts - The crown jewel of the collection in my opinion. This is the follow-up novella to "The Last Unicorn". Incredibly moving, well written...brought tears to my eyes. At one point he talked of writing more featuring the new main character which I would LOVE to read, but this is also enough.

Four Fables - PSB tried his hands at fables and they were well written and even thought-provoking at times. Not his strongest in the collection but I can appreciate wanting to take a chance with a different type of storytelling.

El Regalo - So this started out as kind of lame for me, but then everything changed and it may actually be one of my favorites in the collection! Very unexpectedly awesome!

Quarry - The origin story of a relationship between two friends that is more explored in "Innkeeper's Song", another collection of PSB short fiction although it is all tied to a specific location. Very much enjoyed this story although I didn't know the characters.

Salt Wine - Kind of a slog for me. Interesting to read simply because of PSB's intro notes where he talks a little bit about his process and when he is compelled to write because he hears the voice of a character telling him a story. Interesting but it felt a little too moralistic for my tastes.

Mr. Sigerson - This was PSB's Sherlock Holmes tale and I appreciate the perspective he took with telling a Sherlock tale. Enjoyable but again, a bit of a slog for me.

A Dance for Emilia - Perhaps his most personal story. I was very impressed at how grounded in real emotions he can make absurd fantasy. An incredibly moving story that you just need to read without knowing anything about it.

Jay Z says

In this collection, we have a mouse who decides to be a cat; four fables about a moth, a T-rex, an octopus, and an ostrich; a return to the worlds of the Last Unicorn and the Inn Keeper's Song; and a young pair of siblings discovering their magical abilities.

It's hard to pinpoint what exactly makes Peter Beagle so special other than oh, everything. He's a beautiful writer, his plots are tight, his characters make perfect sense. His ideas are simple, quirky, random, hilarious, and poignant. I don't know how he combines all of those things into one but he does, almost every time. He also does first person narratives better than anyone else I've ever read. Reading a Peter Beagle story is like inhabiting a perfectly crafted little spell, and everything he writes makes me happy in my bones.

Michele says

Running the gamut from traditional fantasy to Sherlock Holmes to a modern-day brujo (age eight) to the enduring -- even dangerous -- power of love and friendship, this is a superb collection of stories from a master storyteller. They're the clearest proof anyone could want of what a gifted writer can do with even the simplest of ingredients, be it a cat or a love letter, a runaway apprentice or a mermaid, a shapeshifter or a T. Rex.

Jeffrey E says

I really enjoyed this book of short stories. Was there any doubt? Even the "silly" story that was included was well crafted. The man knows how to write.

?? ?????? says

4.5

I love El Regalo. I love stories about family and siblings. All we have now is anything but that. Garbage unreal teenage love and supernatural romance... I'm an older sister with a little brother who drives me nuts, so I could relate to the story on a spiritual level. What was between Angie and Marvyn was... real. And lovely. The beginning reminded me of "Song of the Sea". It was good.

Joy says

Short stories old and new by a classic author who just doesn't write enough. If you young folk have only seen The Last Unicorn in its cartoon form you really need to read the book.

Beagle acknowledges he is "on the books as being a fantasist" but feels that "one of the few really nice things about growing old is that a whole lot of stuff stops mattering...categories among them."

There is a nice sequel to "The Last Unicorn." "Four Fables" are fabulously funny and the preface made me laugh. Fables..."tend to suggest a dark - even cynical - view of the human condition, but then it has always seemed to me that fables and fabulists mostly do that. Aesop was lynched, after all, according to Herodotus."

Finally this contains my favorite Beagle short story, "A Dance for Emilia." Perhaps its because I'm a cat person, but for a cat to be possessed by the spirit of a departed love, for one last dance is touching, as is the ending which appeals to my Buddhist heart.

Christopher says

Peter Beagle's writing is magic put to language, his novels are spell books that enchant the reader, laying dweomers over our vision until we see the world, if not as it is, then as it should be, as a child sees it. Even

his works set in another world are really reflections of the simple sorceries possible in this one, given the right mood and willingness to play along. And if that mood isn't upon you, his charm takes you along anyway until your mood cooperates with the fairy-tales he presents.

Within this collection are stories involving ghosts and unicorns and all sorts of beings drawn from those tales that most delight. He revisits the world of *The Last Unicorn* to show a King acting heroically one last time while a little girl just begins. He comes back to the world of the *Inn Keeper's Song*, relating how the main characters met. Then he visits many other new nooks, crannies and caves full of whimsical characters, at times frightening, but always wonderful. And through it all, the wonder of the cast of imaginative beasts is matched by the simple expressiveness of his prose.

No fan of fantasy should be unfamiliar with Peter Beagle, and this collection deserves a place on their bookshelves as much as any.

David says

Peter S. Beagle is the best first-person narrator I have ever read. Doesn't matter *what* he writes about. This guy simply has it mastered. One cannot help but be drawn under the skin of his speakers. Five of the eight stories in this collection are told in the voice of their unerringly observant protagonists, and I remember each one of them as if they had read their own stories live: Sooz, the plucky waif whose courage stirs King Lir to his last adventure; Soukyan, the thief haunted by his past and the hunters he cannot shake; Ben Hazeltine, the honest sea swabbie who never minced his words; Floresh Takesti, the concertmaster and conductor of a small orchestra who finds himself playing Dr. Watson to the insufferable Mr. Holmes; and Jake Holtz, the struggling actor whose friendship helps his best friend to live his dream beyond death.

Beagle has made his mark on American literature as being the consummate fantasist on this side of the pond. He's been around too. My old mildewy copies of J.R.R. Tolkien's signature works (given sadly away to Goodwill) contained prefaces by Mr. Beagle. He also wrote the screenplay for the first *Lord of the Rings* movie, by Bakshi. And of course, there's his beloved novel *The Last Unicorn*.

Not surprisingly, the best two short stories in *The Line Between* take place in his most famous fantasy settings: the realms of *The Last Unicorn* and of *The Innkeeper's Song*, his personal favorite among his novels.

I won't give away much more about "Two Hearts" than I knew on leaving the library after checking it out. And all that is contained in Beagle's preface:

Friends, family, and fans have all asked me, over the years, to write a sequel to *The Last Unicorn*. To each in turn I have responded with some variant of the following: "It can't be done. *The Last Unicorn* is a one-shot, meant from the beginning as a kind of spoof/tribute to the classic European fairytale, an homage to such beloved influences of mine as James Stephens, Lord Dunsany, T. H. White and James Thurber. Writing it was a nightmarish, seemingly endless labor, and when it was done I vowed never to attempt such a balancing act again. So thank you for asking, but no."

It wasn't a hard vow to keep: there were other book I wanted to write, and I have always had a real horror of repeating myself. Besides, like everyone else (and quite against my own personal

wishes), I grew older. *The Last Unicorn* is a young man's work, and I am not quite him anymore in so many different ways.

Yet here I am, writing an introduction for a sequel to *The Last Unicorn*.

I blame Connor Cochran entirely for the existence of "Two Hearts." He proposed it as a bonus gift for the first 3,000 buyers of the audiobook of *The Last Unicorn*, and wheedled me into going along by assuring me that I needn't bring back a single one of the original cast---only the world of the novel, nothing more. So, of course, I presented him with four of the major characters, and references to a couple of others, and had an astonishingly fine time doing it. The trouble now, of course, is that I can't abandon Sooz, my young narrator. I'm going to have to bring her back and see where she wants to go... which will be, as I already know, into the real full-novel sequel to *The Last Unicorn*. Which I never wanted to write. *Bozhe moy*, as my Russian uncles used to say. *Heaven help me....*

It won't ruin anything to reveal that Schmendrick and Molly are half of the old crew. So now you know three, and you might guess the fourth. This little story is very powerful, and I'm thinking I'll have to re-read *TLU* just to revisit that world all over again. But don't wait for Beagle to write the sequel novel. You'll want to read this little gem now.

I never read *The Innkeeper's Song*, but I'm afraid I'll have to add it to my list after having read "Quarry." A theme in Beagle's prefaces, which he tacks before each story in this collection, is that he is often compelled to revisit his characters to see where they have gone since, or to see from whence they've come. He describes them metaphysically, like they are separate entities with minds of their own, very much like John Fowles does even within his own stories. For "Quarry," Beagle tells us that he had always wanted to know how the two main characters of *The Innkeeper's Song* met, and so this story was born.

"Quarry" is a gripping tale of two men on the run. The characters we meet are as mysterious as they are powerful. Most intriguing are the shapeshifting fox who befriends Soukyan (he remains nameless even throughout the novel!) and the Goro warrior who must kill him for stealing his dream. The climax is one of best-scripted battles I have ever read. In it, you can particularly see Beagle's formidable talents as a screenwriter.

Not all the stories in this collection are of the same caliber, but that's not a fair criticism. An author is hardly the same person between sunrises, and much less between stories. The "Four Fables" are forgettable. "Gordon, the Self-Made Cat" is cute. "El Regalo" is awkward. But on balance, this is an excellent collection, and worthy of many a bookshelf.

Ambertronic says

This is a collection of his work that contains a short story sequel to Peter S. Beagle's *The Last Unicorn* called *Two Hearts*. It takes place several years after the first book, and it is very fitting where Schmendric the Magician and his companion Molly Grue end up (no, it's not what you think! That's the beauty of Peter S. Beagle!). Another good one is "Salt Wine", which is quite tragic. One of those "I told you this was a bad idea" stories.

The stories contained within are a sweet mix of new and reprinted stories. It would be inaccurate to call the collection an emotional roller coaster, because that implies lots of dips, turns, drops, and screaming. There is none of that in *The Line Between*. However the emotional range the stories takes you through is wide and pleasant.

If you read this book you will smile, you might choke up with emotion, and you may even find your forehead wrinkling with a "wtf?" kind of expression. Either way, you will enjoy it!

Meredith Enos says

i'm so disappointed by this collection. almost all the stories seem like pitches for novels, as in, "hey, you like this story? give me some money and i'll write a whole book!" maybe i'm jaded, but beagle introduces each story and they mostly all go something like, "once i started this story, i knew i would have to make a full-length work about it at some point." a couple of good stand-alone pieces, like "Salt Wine," but the rest were rather too easy and too reliant on other, previously written works.

Margaret says

I love Beagle's elegant writing and wonderful characters, and I wasn't disappointed here. I was a little worried about "Two Hearts", which takes place after *The Last Unicorn* (which I love), but I thought Beagle did justice to the book and its characters, along with introducing a new and engaging character, the young girl Sooz, who narrates the story. I also especially liked "El Regalo" (which Beagle plans to follow up with a novel), about a young witch and his sister, and "Salt Wine", a haunting story of sailors, mermen, and fate.

Kalin says

Another excellent collection. I have no clue why I've put off reading Beagle's short work for so long.

Some highlights:

~ I've always felt there's something liminal about Beagle's writing, elusive and ineffable, and all those other words that teeter on the brink of language. Here, he tells it explicitly:

When my children were still small enough to be suckered (that's the two youngest, not their older sister; she was *never* that small), I could keep them occupied in the car for some while by telling them that if they turned their heads fast enough they could look in their own ears. (What, you never bought yourself a single blessed moment of sanity by risking *your* children's cervical vertebrae, eyesight, digestion, or emotional wellbeing?— *Hypocrite lecteur,—man semblable,—monfrere!* I want to see a note from your mother.)

In a very real sense, that's what I've been doing all my life—trying to turn my head in time to glimpse that creature, that color, that melody, that metamorphosis, that human situation to be found living just around the farthest corner of my vision. Ever since I was a small, shy, overweight boy—a boy who could most often be found curled up under the stairs of his Bronx

apartment building, telling himself stories—I've been used to *almost* hearing voices, *almost* catching sight of Donne's "things invisible to see." Indeed, my favorite among my own novels, *The Innkeeper's Song*, had its birth on an island off Seattle, with me well-snuggled into the sweet spot between sleep and waking, when a rough, sour growl announced itself in my head, saying distinctly, "My name is Karsh. I am not a bad man."

There it is: that invisible boundary between conscious and not, between reality and fantasy, between here (whatever "here" is) and there (whatever "there" might be), between the seen and the seen's true nature. A line neither one thing nor ever quite the other, but now and eternally between.

As a writer, *the line between* is where I have always lived. It is my personal tightrope of choice, the one I most naturally walk, clutching only a small and somewhat silly-looking parasol of logic for a counterbalance. At times this precarious high-wire act exhausts and exasperates me, to the point where I feel that I'd give almost anything to step off the line, once and for all, and settle down to stories that, whatever their matter or milieu, don't always insist on *balancing* so. But this is what I do. Clearly. In life and art I have never been able to laugh without being intensely aware of tears, or to shine a light on horror without also illuminating beauty.

Incidentally, 20 April is Beagle's birthday (at least according to Wikipedia; part of me stubbornly refuses to believe that). Thank you for all these years of illuminating our lives, even in the deepest dark, Peter!

~ "Gordon the Self-Made Cat" is such a yummy ;) story, working both as a parable and as a straightforward romp. Dig in:

In the really important classes, like Running and Pouncing, Climbing, Stalking, and Waiting For The Prey To Forget You're Still There; and in matters of feline manners such as Washing, Tail Etiquette, The Elegant Yawn, Sleeping in Undignified Positions, and Making Sure You Get Enough Food Without Looking Greedy (101 *and* 102)—in all of these Gordon and the blue Persian were first, and the rest nowhere. Besides that, both could meow in five different dialects: Persian, Abyssinian, Siamese, Burmese (which almost no cat who isn't Burmese ever learns), and basic tiger.

~ Of Beagle's many voices, Sooz's from "Two Hearts" remains a favorite, ever since I was trying to hear it in Bulgarian for our ?????stika 2007 almanac. Part of me wishes to meet Sooz again: the 17-year-old Sooz who walks out of her village, ready to whistle. Part of me is aware it may never happen.

But we can wait, both Sooz and I.

~ Actually, I like all of Beagle's child characters. Listen to Angie from "El Regalo":

Somewhere near the bottom of the container she finally managed to stuff what she'd just glimpsed deep in the part of her mind she called her "forgettery." As she'd once said to her friend Melissa, "There's such a thing as too much information, and it is not going to get me. I am never going to know more than I want to know about stuff. Look at the President."

~ As I said in my reflections on *In Calabria*, Beagle has a rare penchant for describing the Other/the Otherness. It's chilling, it's disturbing, but it also liberates us from the confines of the anthropocentric. Which is a major power of fantasy.

Here is a relatively muffled example from "Quarry":

Where was I? Yes, I remember—groping blindly in the shadow on the chance of dragging one or the other of them back into the moonlight of this world. My arms vanished to the wrists, the forearms, past the elbows, into ... into the flame of the stars? Into the eternal, unimaginable cold of the gulfs between them? I do not know to this day; for that, you must study my scarred old flesh and form your own opinion. What I know is that my hands closed on something they could not feel, and in turn I hauled them back, though I could not connect them, even in my mind, with a human body, mine or anyone else's. I screamed all the time, of course, but the pain had nothing to do with me—it was far too terrible, too *grand*, to belong to one person alone. I felt almost guilty keeping it for myself.

(The last sentence also demonstrates the wry humor that prevents the Other from becoming *too* disturbing, completely inapplicable to our human condition.)

~ Ah! This book is crawling with my countrymen!

Here's the one in "Mr. Sigerson":

The Greater Bornitz Municipal Orchestra has always been weak in the lower strings, for some reason—it is very nearly a tradition with us. That year we boasted, remarkably, four cellists, two of them rather wispy young women who peeped around their instruments with an anxious and diffident air. The third, however, was a burly Russo-Bulgarian named Volodya Andrichev: blue-eyed, blue-chinned, wild-haired, the approximate size of a church door (and I mean an Orthodox church here), possessed of—or by—an attack that should by rights have set fire to his score. He ate music, if you understand me; he approached all composition as consumption, from Liszt and Rossini, at which he was splendid, to Schumann, whom he invariably left in shreds, no matter how I attempted to minimize his presence, or to conceal it outright. Nevertheless, I honored his passion and vivacity; and besides, I liked the man. He had the snuffling, shambling charm of the black bears that still wander our oak forests as though not entirely sure what they are doing here, but content enough nonetheless. I quite miss him, as much time as it's been.

(The other is in "A Dance for Emilia".)

Lara Mi says

“She loved him too. That's why she let him go.”

The Line Between is a collection of short stories by the author of **The Last Unicorn**. It is very rare for me to show any interest in short story novels. My sole purpose for reading this particular collection was the inclusion of **Two Hearts** - A sequel to **The Last Unicorn**. The short stories found in this book cover quite a large range of genres that it is hard to give this a proper rating. Overall, though, I am sad to say that most stories were rather underwhelming. I will just put down a few words for each story:

Two Hearts

Although not the first story in this book, it was the first I read – for obvious reasons. There is always a nervous feeling attached to reading a sequel to an all time favourite – especially one that was written more than three decades after the first. This sequel, however, did not disappoint. I loved meeting the old characters again as well as the new. The author points out that he might continue this story with an actual novel and actually ends this short story with quite the cliffhanger. While I was far from happy about the cliffhanger – if he does indeed write a full novel to continue this tale I will most certainly read it.

Gorden, the Self-made Cat

This story is fun in a silly way. It made me think of stories such as **Stuart Little**. And that is almost a problem; while I see nothing *wrong* with this type of story, I simply could not care for it either. Gorden is a mouse who decides to become a cat. In order of doing so, he becomes a student at the cat school where he comes out on the top of every class. It was short, it was fast and had a good message about being able to become whatever you set your mind on becoming. But still, I just could not care for it.

Four Fables

These were quite literally four fables – all unrelated to one another. They were all somewhat fun but also could not really hold my attention. Although, the last one, **The Fable of the Octopus**, was both beautiful and touching. There was just something special about the friendship between the octopus and the fisherman. I also loved the moral of **The Fable of the Ostrich**: *Stupidity always wins, as long as it's stupid enough.*

El Regalo

Much like with **Two Hearts**, the author teases with the possibility of a full novel about these characters. Angie is a teenage girl who just cannot get along with her younger brother. One day she discovers that a lot of the mischief he's been up to comes from the fact that he is a witch – yes, a male witch. I had to smile when the author threw in a comment about **Harry Potter**. Angie and her brother, Marvyn, are also likeable characters and I can see myself reading a full novel about them. But as this is more of a short teaser story, there is not much time to really get into the story and grow attached to the characters.

Quarry

I confess – I skipped this story. Mainly because it is a prequel to one of the authors other works that I just might read some day. I thought I would save this one until that day.

Salt Wine

This is where the book started to drag.

Oh my goodness – this story was *so* boring. A young man saves a merrow from a shark and finds himself rewarded with a recipe to brew salt wine. The salt wine soon gains immense popularity and helps the young man rise to fortune. Of course, there is a catch. In a few rare cases, the salt wine can turn a human into a merrow or a mermaid. In general, there was nothing in this tale that caught me off guard or even remotely surprised. The symptoms of the salt wine also strongly reminded me of drug consume – but hey, perhaps that

was intended.

Mr Sigerson

This tale served as homage to Sherlock Holmes and was sadly equally boring to **Salt Wine**. Although the plot was utterly boring, the characters were rather intriguing. I have yet to read the actual **Sherlock Holmes** series but if Sherlock Holmes' personality is anything like shown in this tale, I am almost certain to like them.

A Dance for Emilia

As unlikely as it is for me to say so: I would have liked this story a good deal more if it would not have had any fantasy or a talking cat. These two elements, which are usually among my favourite, were so out of place. An actor reflects over his life after hearing about the death of his close friend. I quite like stories of people looking back into their childhood. They often have an air of nostalgia and melancholy around them. It took a while to grip me but I really started feeling for the characters and their losses. This realistic setting simply did not seem right for the dancing and talking cat that was introduced in the last quarter of the story. It just killed the emotional value of this story for me.

My opinion about all these short stories is as mixed as their genres. I would not have picked this up if it had not been for **The Last Unicorn's** sequel. I question whether I will read them again – although none of them were bad by any means! It is certainly worth a read if you are curious enough to find out what became of Schmendrick and Molly.
