



Broken Metropolis

SALE

\$10.00 ~~\$15.00~~

Broken Metropolis: Queer Tales of a City That Never Was (edited by dave ring) explores the edges of urban fantasy through queer narratives in the tradition of *Swords of the Rainbow* (Alyson Publications, 1996) and *Bending the Landscape* (Overlook Books, 1997). This collection contains ten of those edges, each one bright and gleaming, from Claire Rudy Foster's story of a scientist learning to accept not only herself but the very real impact of astrology on her love life, to Caspian Gray's tale of a young man looking for an urban legend in the halls of a hospital ward so that he can save the matriarch of his found family. Queer communities hold multitudes, and fantasy writing is a place to explore the magic of possibility. Come explore some of those possibilities in a city that never was.

Stories from: Jacob Budenz, kx carys, Meghan Cunningham, Claire Rudy Foster, Caspian Gray, V. Medina, H. Pueyo, M. Raoulee, D.M. Rice, Victoria Zelvin



Under Her White Stars

*“But in cellars and holes cries the murderous quiet.
I fly higher, over rooftops, and I search: Where are you? Where?”
Avraham Sutskever, “Unter dayne vayse shtern”*

There were many attempts to take down the witch Amarande in his subtropical convenience store kingdom, though nobody talks about him much these days.

Amarande: unapologetically powerful, unapologetically wicked, the glamorous sprawl of Miami where winter consisted of three weeks of sixty-degree weather, where stucco houses with terra cotta roofs clashed with the glassy curvature of coastal high rises, where proprietors dug islands out of the sea itself. Amarande, who lured tourists into dingy shops that offered kitsch towels for the forgetful, slushies for the thirsty, sunscreen for the cautious, eternal life for the poor wretches who didn't know any better—all for the small price of their souls. Healers, sorcerers, druids, magicians, and witches alike tried to take him down, outraged at his boldness, at his wickedness, at his ability to elude detection while drinking the lives of countless adults and children. What tourists broadcast their whereabouts before entering into a convenience store never to be found again, stopping in for an ice cream sandwich and maybe a lighter engraved with an Ibis? Many practitioners tried to kill Amarande, catch him, coerce his secrets from him, become his apprentice, test their power against his. Whispers travelled up the East Coast among magic practitioners, like cocaine from warmer climates barreling up the interstate in a black car with tinted windows. Most every practitioner with a lick of sense objected outwardly to Amarande's legendary Evil behavior, even if I knew there were some of us who nursed an envy at his effortless ability to bottle up other people's lives and lengthen his own. I listened to the rumors, fed them, propagated them for months until I finally told my fiancé I was going after him myself.

“So,” I said to him the night before I was set to go. “About this weekend. There's this witch queen down south...”

“Amarande?” Lionel said, blowing a puff of pot smoke out through the window fan in our cramped little kitchen so it wouldn't stink up our building. “Sure, babe. I was wondering when you'd bring him up to me.”

“How do *you* know about him?” I said. Lionel was about as un-witchy as they came. He worked for the National Arts Council, where he'd been that night, in fact, working an event until ten. Despite his feverish interest in the occult—as feverish as his obsession with experimental art, exotic animals, and any other oddity he devoured with frenzied persistence—he didn't have a drop of magic in him.

“The painter doing a residency with us is a druid,” Lionel said. He reclined in the only chair in the kitchen, wearing his wide, goofy smile. “And you practitioners can't keep your mouths shut.”

“Oh.”

“Are you sure this is a good idea? Babe, I heard he's, like, *really* no joke.”

“I guess you could say that,” I said. Crossed my arms. Sniffed. “I mean, I'm no joke either, Lionel.”

The truth was, I thought taking down Amarande would be *it* for me. At the time, I was feeling stagnated in my career as a witch, working mostly as a healer (a damn good one, mind you), as well as selling spells and amulets for things like magical defense and metamorphosis. It was more of a long game, a “build your business from the ground up” kind of a deal. From time

to time I went after lawless witches, capturing them in a flask or executing them, depending on the warrant that was out. Even those days, the government wouldn't do much more than offer a reward for someone like Amarande. They wouldn't go after the magic-wielding bad eggs themselves. And it made sense. If you think about it, the establishment has always been afraid of us. Back in the day, for example, New Orleans left diviners alone, making Tarot and palmistry the only money-making activities left untaxed and unregulated. They didn't even ask for permits, like the other street sellers—the government just didn't want to get involved where magic was concerned. Today, even given the increase of out-and-proud practitioners and the relative acceptance we enjoy—especially in urban centers, neoliberal universities, and... you understand—the government drags its feet on any legislation pertaining to magic. The stigma's still there. We've always governed ourselves, and in the case of criminals like Amarande, the State Department at the time offered untaxed, practically under-the-table rewards for their capture. It was lucrative as hell, and the more guys like Amarande you nabbed, the more likely you were to be contacted directly by the state instead of relying on rumors or trolling their website for jobs.

"Don't get me wrong, you're a powerful witch," Lionel said and looked at me sheepishly, blowing spit from the side of his mouth that the window fan snatched away. "If you weren't brilliant at what you did, I wouldn't... well, this would probably never have worked out."

He'd said it before. A curator himself, he'd worked with best-of-the-best artists for years, and with a somewhat snobbish charm he'd told me early on in our relationship that he could sniff out any kind of talent, artistic or otherwise—and I had it.

He continued. "I just don't know why you have to go all over the country chasing bad guys when you're such a brilliant healer. Healing plays to your, well, your *strengths* so well. It's really something to be proud of, love."

"Okay, but how can I call myself a healer if I can't purge the world of a sickness every now and again?" I said. "Lionel, he's taking people's souls and using them to stay young forever. It's healing gone wrong. This feels personal. How can I let someone like that exist in the world and not do anything about it? Anyway, couldn't we use the money?" I gestured toward the kitchen door and the rest of our one-bedroom apartment, which was beautiful—all hardwood floors and high ceilings, full of strange treasures worthy of a curio cabinet. Just not big enough for the largeness of our personalities, our penchant for collecting (read: hoarding).

"Okay," he said, and he looked down. "It's just, you know, I worry about you sometimes."

"I'll be fine! Listen," I said. "Guys like Amarande, they're all smoke and mirrors. Defense magic, trickery, elusiveness. I'll be totally safe."

Strictly speaking, I wasn't entirely sure this was true of Amarande. Call it my educated guess? Or perhaps like my lie of omission. My first mistake.

He said, "And it has to be tomorrow?"

"It's a Super Moon tomorrow. Plus, Miami is closer to the Moon's path in September, near the equinox, so my energy will be really strong down there this time of year." A water sign, I gathered most of my strength from the Moon, revered Her like a goddess.

Only then, I noticed the gears were turning in his head. "Well, listen," he said. "Sarah's having a party not far from where you're going, some tiny little cove up near Jensen Beach. Callisto, I think. Isn't that a funny name for a cove? Anyway, if this Amarande fellow isn't so dangerous, I'll come along with you for moral support and, well, bait. Then we can go to Sarah's."

“Lionel!” I said.

“What?” he said, and he giggled, crow’s feet crinkling behind the square lenses of his glasses. This was a quality in Lionel I always adored: he was a ready laugher and a shameless giggler. “Doesn’t he target regular, non-magical people? Don’t tell me you were planning on using a tourist as bait. That would’ve been kind of unethical, huh?”

And just like that, he’d painted me into a corner. I thought about coming clean, telling him I had no idea just how dangerous this “Amarande fellow” was, that he might be an absolute terror with a battle spell. But Lionel was right, of course. I needed bait, and he’d be perfect: slim, not at all athletic, a few early grays in his thin, dark curls. In other words, particularly non-threatening—and, most importantly, willing. “Lionel...”

“So, it’s settled then,” he said, giggling again. “And we can fly over to where Sarah is and join the party when you nab this Amarande character. Plus—” he winked “—you’ll have someone you’ll need to protect. It’ll be better for you when you feel like, well, like a hero.”

And it was something about that unwavering support, that “when” not “if,” something about his unshakeable faith that made me concede, against my better judgment, to let my very mortal fiancé accompany me on a mission to take down a dangerous sorcerer.

The security desk at the National Arts Council was in a large, round room with a ceiling so high that if you shouted you’d feel like you were standing at the bottom of an empty well. The floor was marble with a massive compass painted on it; in fact, the NAC shared space with other non-profits in a building that reminded me of a renovated castle, all dramatic oak doors, stony walls, and ivy. I waited for Lionel in the lobby. He had a proposal he needed to drop on his boss’s desk before we skipped town. All the doors to this echoey room were open, as well as the windows all the way up the stone walls, letting in almost-chilly September morning air. Normally I’d go up and say hi to Lionel’s co-workers—Lionel, the only guy in his office, worked with the warmest people—but that day I wanted to expedite the process of leaving by staying down here. So I stood there tapping my bare foot, having smiled tightly at the gaunt security guard enough times that I was worried I’d have to say something in the way of small talk. I exhaled with relief when my fiancé emerged from the large oak door.

“Ready?” I said.

“Sure,” he said.

“Shoes,” I said. “You’ll have to leave them. I’ll call them back to you when we get there.”

As he took his shoes off, I closed my eyes and breathed in a big gulp of crisp morning, letting invisible roots of power grow from my feet down into the earth below the floor—grounding, which I did every time I performed body-altering magic on other people. I opened my eyes, feeling gusts of wind in my belly as I bloated with power. I looked at Lionel’s feet, pictured them curling into the yellow talons of the peregrine falcon; saw the brown feathers sprouting where his thin, salty-black curls always tangled; willed the arms to spread, web, and feather. While he shrank and his stretchy gray shirt sunk into his skin, I noticed the glazed-over look of the security guard snap into focus, noticed his jaw clench. Then, he relaxed, walked out from behind the counter, grabbed Lionel’s shoes, and smiled.

In a stupor from the intoxicating magic, I slurred, “Seen some bird magic at the NAC, huh?”

With much less effort—metamorphosis is a whole lot easier on the self—I let the feathers of the peregrine falcon sprout from my own arms, legs, chest, head, and pelvis before the guard

had the chance to reply. It was sort of like getting a tooth pulled or a cavity filled; as the bones twisted and snapped and resituated, my brain suggested that it hurt excruciatingly while the magic numbed the pain like a lidocaine shot.

I launched myself toward the topmost windows, trusting Lionel to follow me as the air rushed past. We burst into the open sky.

Peregrines—the fastest birds in the world, though fastest when they were diving. We flew southward. Wind blasting past my ears, I heard Lionel’s nasally voice faintly inside my skull, a sensation similar to wearing headphones while riding a bicycle:

“I think I smell a southerly wind above us!”

It always amazed (and, if I’m being honest, frustrated) me what a natural he was at flying. I was the witch, and yet every time we took flight it occurred to me that he’d been a bird in at least one past life. Meanwhile, I was a bit clumsy, the feathers and talons never quite feeling natural, unable to give myself wholly to the experience like he was.

We rose.

“Not too high,” I shouted with my brain. The last thing I wanted was for one of us to drop clean out of the sky, fainting from the thinness of the atmosphere. This was more a concern for me than for Lionel, who was better at preventing such mishaps.

The southerly wind was just low enough to be breathable, though the air was thin enough that every so often we’d drop a couple hundred feet and gulp in thicker air like dehydrated marathoners glugging water at the nineteenth mile mark of the race.

The journey to Miami is usually five hours by wing, or so I’d heard, but in just four and a half hours we touched down in an alleyway behind the tourist-infested Lincoln Road.

In my life I have encountered few transitions as jarring as that of emerging from a Lincoln Road alley onto to Lincoln Road itself. We changed back into people and threw on our shoes (which materialized, as promised, with a snap of my fingers) in the alley—the awful stench of dumpsters baking in the sun, the oily puddles of rainwater mixing with the juices leaking from restaurant trash bags, the Palmetto bugs skittering past our feet. We rushed onto the street pinching our noses, only to immerse ourselves in the decadent, tacky glamour of the outdoor mall known as Lincoln Road—the designer boutiques and expensive essential oil perfumeries squeezed next to tourist trap t-shirt shops, the palm trees stuffed into over-gardened mulch beds. In September, the subtropical sun was still hot enough to melt your face off, but not quite hot enough to scorch the bones beneath it. After passing our third silver-painted “living statue” and nearly getting bowled over by a saggy man on roller blades wearing nothing but tiny leather shorts, Lionel and I decided we’d have an easier time stumbling accidentally-on-purpose into one of Amarande’s shops if we walked down Alton Road or Ocean Avenue. There were fewer people on those streets.

Out where the cars whipped through the palms lining the median strip, I told Lionel, “So they say Amarande’s portals open at the doors to a convenience store when somebody’s really desperate for something.”

“Great,” Lionel said. “I’m fucking starving. I mean, I’d probably sell my soul for a couple taquitos right now.”

Suddenly I was uneasy about having him with me again. What was I thinking? Though I’d adorned his wrists, ankles, and neck with an excessive amount of charmed jewelry to protect him from harmful spells, I still felt like I’d made a big mistake taking him along with me.

“Babe, you know, if this... goes well, if I get direct work from the state department or something, they’re not gonna like it if you, uh, tag along in the future. It’s not gonna be like I’m taking my house-husband on a conference-vacation. It’s—this is—Lionel, uh, I’m not so sure about you coming with me. Maybe you should meet me at Lincoln Road, get yourself a drink, wait for me there.”

I was being cagey, at this point afraid to tell him, *Hey, I’m putting us both at risk, but you especially, right now*. But the reality was I had no idea what we were in for, and I was getting cold feet about him being here.

But he was unflappable. “It’s little old me or an innocent tourist as bait. Could your conscience take it if some poor tourist died because of you? Hey, look! On the corner, across the street.”

He pointed to a particularly sketchy-looking corner store with a pink and green neon sign that just said “FLAMINGO,” its glow faded and depressing in the bright afternoon sun. Not to mention the “O” wasn’t lighting up, so it looked more like it said “FLAMING.” Plastered all over the windows were the standard beer brand signs and a red-painted poster that said “ICE.”

He said, “Let’s get some *ice*, babe.”

I put my hand on his shoulder, looked at him very seriously, before we crossed the street. “Okay, we really just need to get in there and get Amarande to show himself. Then, I open this flask and *poof*, he’s caught, no fuss, no show down. Just, babe, don’t do anything crazy, okay?”

He rolled his eyes. “Of *course*. What are you afraid I’ll do?”

While we crossed the street, I pulled in a meditative breath and whispered a minor spell to shield my aura from Amarande’s detection, and I instructed Lionel to focus on trivial things inside the shop, things that he wanted or needed. It didn’t need to be believable—Amarande wouldn’t be able to detect his true feelings with magic—but he needed to focus on something that he wanted that was inside the store.

“Hopefully they have those gross hot dogs on the rolling heat things,” Lionel said. “I always get such a kick out of them. They’re so bizarre.”

He giggled and opened the door, which ding-donged with one of those phony electronic doorbells. Lionel entered and promptly vanished.

“SHIT!” I ran in after him. “Lionel! Wait!”

But he wasn’t in the crammed convenience store. *Shit, shit, shit*. I went back outside. Who cared if I had to blow my cover? The motherfucker could be sipping on my fiancé’s soul any second. I focused, closed my eyes, reopened them with a second-sight spell. The door was booby-trapped with a *very* sophisticated portal, a transparent silver sheen over the doorway which I could see shimmering in the air with my second sight. It was what we in *the business* call a “selective portal.” Subtle, but brilliant—it was all in that fake doorbell, which, when triggered, was wired to open the portal only for non-practitioners like Lionel. Carefully, like pulling a wire from a time bomb, I focused on the *selective* element of the portal magic (which showed up as a gossamer red sigil above the door) and pulled it out. The doorbell rang. I leapt in, seizing the opportunity before it shut behind me.

Lionel was already slurping down a syrupy red slushy, and I rushed over to him, grabbing his shoulders.

“What took you so long, babe?” he said. I was so relieved I could weep. He was very much alive. I couldn’t help it. I threw my arms around him. Reminded myself of my plan: get

Amarande to show up, open the flask. It seemed we hadn't triggered any of his alarms yet. Good. But we'd have to be more careful.

"You okay?" Lionel said.

I let go of him and nodded. It was poorly lit inside the convenience store. There was one large window that wasn't covered in beer and lotto ads, but somehow the sunlight didn't quite penetrate the gloom.

Not bad, Amarande. This kind of dimensional magic wasn't easy to pull off, but now that we were inside, I was free to focus on bagging him... as soon as he decided to show up.

I grabbed a slushy cup and made like I was going to get the sickly-looking off-white "piña colada" flavor and then, with an ounce of will and a flick of the wrist, I killed the slushy machine. There was a crackling sound from behind it, like a moth caught in a bug zapper. The propellers that mixed the slushies in perpetuity slowed to a halt. When I pressed my cup against the piña colada flavor, syrup the color of dehydrated piss oozed out. As if I hadn't noticed the breaking of the machine—hadn't, in fact, caused it—I tried the red, blue, and purple flavors, which all yielded the same result in various icky hues.

I marched up to the lady at the counter and said, as bitchily as I could manage, "Your slushy machine's busted. I want to talk to the manager."

"And don't you have any hot food?" Lionel demanded from behind me. He slurped the remains of his slushy, having somehow downed most of it already.

"I'd give *anything* for an empanada," I said. "Just anything."

"Anything," Lionel repeated.

We were overdoing it, really laying it on, but what was the point of hunting down ageless witches with your fiancé if it's not even a little bit fun?

I turned to grin at Lionel, from whom I'd expected at least a quiet snicker. But he just stood there, open-mouthed, frozen except that he was trembling visibly. The quaking increased, became so violent that the empty cup fell from his grasp as his face sank into itself, grew paler, paler, the cheekbones sharpening, the jaw poking through, thinner, thinner, and he wasted away before I understood what I was witnessing. His clothes dropped to the floor, kicking up a plume of ash that used to be the love of my life.

I spun around and lunged at the woman behind the counter, smacking right into an invisible wall.

I could tell that Amarande peered at me now from inside the lady. She looked the same, except for the irises, which shined a cold silver light that caught, converted, and reflected what little light was in the tiny store.

"Give him back!" I screamed. "Give me back his soul or I'll bring this whole store to the ground."

The lady opened her mouth, but it was Amarande's deep, smooth bass humming from her vocal chords:

"I haven't got his soul. It's all filthy with your magic. The souls of witches' lovers give me indigestion. No," he said. He sounded bored. "I just poisoned him. What did you expect?"

The puppet-woman raised a sleepy finger and pointed to the empty slushy cup on the floor.

"You little do-gooder witches are so dumb," he said through the cashier's mouth.

God, the worst part was, he wasn't wrong. I'd given Lionel all that defense against harmful spells, and the idea of a good old-fashioned poison hadn't even occurred to me, and Lionel was dead, and it was all my fault, and I couldn't stand it. Without a sound, I yanked at the

air, sending the metal shelf of condoms and cigarettes from behind the woman crashing into her back. She stumbled forward, bumping against the counter, and Amarande's silver sheen in her eyes disappeared. She looked around, seeming confused. *His* voice came from all around us:

“Go ahead, little witch. You're only going to hurt her.”

I reached for my back pocket, only to find that my flask, the one I used to bottle up bad guys, had vanished. So I did what any grieving, angry witch who'd hunted down an infamous life-stealer—and had nothing to show for it but a pile of ash where my fiancé used to be—would have done: I set out to destroy Amarande's shop. Did he have more shops? Maybe. Would it be easy for him to clean up? Sure. Did that matter right then?

Bags of Cheetos and Funyuns exploded in snowstorms of orange and beige; beer bottles flew off refrigerated shelves; the goddamned slushy machine crashed against the wall behind it, obliterated; Skittles like marbles skittered across the ground. Shelves toppled, posters burst into flames. I myself didn't move a muscle. And Amarande let me do it without comment. I'm sure he was probably used to the collateral damage of failed practitioners. It probably didn't bother him. Maybe he even got a kick out of it, although he didn't laugh, didn't try to humiliate me further—I was doing a great job of that on my own.

When I finally turned, covered in sweat and crumbs, the lady behind the counter had disappeared, leaving me face-to-face with the notorious witch himself. Amarande was unreasonably tall—like, professional-basketball-player tall—thin and lanky as a daddy longlegs, with skin so pale it seemed to glow. Bald head, pale pink lips. He wore a sleeveless, silver-sequined dress tight enough to boast the outline of his absurdly large penis. A white fur stole rested across his bare shoulders. He had one hand on his hip, one perfectly plucked eyebrow raised, in a bratty pose that said, “Are you done yet?” Whether or not he'd enhanced his figure with glamour magic, I could tell why this tacky, overly stylized witch bitch had made this Art Deco city his home.

Amarande was, of course, holding my missing witch-catching flask in his right hand. In his left hand, the hand on his hip, he held a white plastic bag that said “THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU” in red letters. He tossed it at me, and it floated to my feet like a dust mote.

“In case you wanted to take your boyfriend with you. No tricks this time,” he said.

He let a touch of sincere pity pinch his brow when I bent pathetically to pick up the bag. I told myself over and over that I wouldn't let myself cry in front of him. I stuffed Lionel's clothes in the bag and as many fistfuls of his ashes as I could until it dimly occurred to me that I could collect the ashes with magic. I did so. The remaining soot on the floor swirled into the bag like a dejected, wannabe tornado that couldn't quite form. The soot that stained my hands peeled off and slid into the crinkling plastic. I didn't even process until later that my hands had been covered in the ashes of my dead partner.

“You know, little witch, we're all just doing what we can,” he said. “You came to do what you thought you had to, and I did what I had to do. It's the way things work. You'll learn.”

I barely squeaked out, “Just shut up!” I tied the bag up and tiptoed toward the door, candy and chips sticking to my shoes.

“Sorry about your boyfriend,” he called after me, not meaning it, and I opened the door to the sound of the chintzy electronic doorbell.

“Fiancé,” I choked. I turned back to spit on the floor, but the squat, middle-aged lady was behind the counter again, and the corner store was completely immaculate, if dingy as ever. The real corner store. Amarande had receded, taking his phantom store with him. I spat anyway.

Wings tore through my back; feathers shot out from my pores. It was sloppy magic, and it hurt like hell, but I didn't have any time. I knew what I had to do.

Our friend Sarah came from a long line of diviners, and it suddenly made sense why she was throwing a party all the way at this cove called Callisto instead of just doing something back up north where we lived. The cove had a perfect circle of rock with a small opening out to sea. Perfect place to look at the full Moon (Super Moon, no less, when the Moon appears largest in the sky). Sarah had said it was apparently the closest place on earth to the Moon that night. The knowing way she'd shared this information with me, the relative inconvenience of taking a road trip or a wing trip all the way down to the Florida for a Super Moon party, suddenly added up. She knew exactly what I would be up to this weekend and exactly what I'd need to do should I fail. Maybe she wasn't having a party there at all. As a falcon with a plastic bag clutched between its teeth, I got there just before she left.

The entrance to the cove was through the locker room of a public pool. I flew in and, finding the locker room empty, changed back into a person. I quickly used one of the showers to cleanse and consecrate myself, letting the water wash away any residual darkness on me from Amarande's shop. When I tried the door, it was locked—after 7 PM, a sign on the door indicated, people could leave the cove but not enter. Well, I didn't have time for that. I pushed myself against the pale orange wall, coaxed it to soften, and trudged through it like it was made of soft putty.

It was totally dark on the rocky beach at this point, and Sarah was there alone heaping sand onto a pile of burning coal, and she looked at me with my THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU bag, and she knew. Of course she knew.

"Oh, god," she said, flinging her arms around me, and I let myself cry into her blonde hair. "Listen, we're packing up the car right now. Do you want me, us, do you need us to be here with you?"

"I don't think so," I said. I didn't ask who she meant by "us." I looked at the Moon, who had just risen above the rocks of the cove. "I think this is something I've got to do myself. I've never tried to bring back the dead before."

"I know, honey," she said. She kissed my forehead and walked toward the locker rooms.

"Sarah!" I cried after her, and she turned. "Am I ready? Can I do this? What's going to happen if I'm not powerful enough? Please."

If anyone could read the stars and tell me whether I could bring Lionel to life, it was her.

"It doesn't matter whether you can or cannot, does it?" she said, and she was gone. God, no disrespect to divination or its practitioners, but sometimes that cryptic shit really got on my nerves.

I dumped the contents of the plastic bag onto the sand, letting the wind carry Lionel's ashes into the circle of still water that reflected the pearly light of the rising Moon. I knew here, now, full Moon rising, with my fury and anguish as an offering to the feminine divine, I was at the height of my power. I'd told Lionel the full Moon would be feeding me power. I hadn't known I'd need Her for this. I felt crazy, stupid, arrogant—drinking the Moon's power because I'd fucked up so royally, flown too close to the sun (and all his hotheaded aggression), when it was clearly the Moon's healing power I needed to be focusing on all along. Under Her white stars, I began my work.

Flinging my hand toward the rock-made circle, I caused Lionel's gray shirt and black shorts to hover ten feet above the flat water, rooted by magic to the circle's center, flapping in the breeze like a battle flag.

Theoretically, resurrection was all about remembering someone—the gestures, the face, the quantity of stubble, the preference for yellow roses over red, the asymmetrical arrangements of cookie dough on an oven tray to maximize the economy of space, the readiness of the laugh, oh god, his laugh. My eyes closed and his face filled the black expanse of my mind's eye: the dark stubble that would prickle against my shoulder when he'd lie with his arms wrapped around me, the wire-framed rectangles of his glasses transitioning to dark shadowy lenses in the sunlight, each wrinkle in his smile, the folds of skin under his chin when he'd look down. I remembered. I remembered. I remembered him as he was. Eyes closed, I hoped that the shirt hovering above the water was beginning to twist, to fill with his torso, his torso with the small patch of coarse black hair on his chest, those black hairs contrasting with his skin that was so pasty it seemed greenish in the dark. In my mind's eye I saw the gray sleeves fill with those vascular, skinny, used-to-lift-hand-weights-but-not-anymore arms. Remembering.

Remembering—and rewriting: we didn't go down south to confront Amarande, I whispered to the Moon, to time, to memory. We were going to Callisto the whole time. We flew over the river to the cape as birds and swam down the East Coast as dolphins—albino dolphins, no less, just for the hell of it—leaping and flipping through the choppy surf. These were the sorts of details that lent authenticity to the rewrite. We lost track of time and got here, to Callisto, just in time to catch Sarah before she left—she was alone, just as before. If my spell worked, Lionel would forget, which was essential; if he remembered what really happened, the spell would fail and he'd die, again, on the spot. Sarah wouldn't forget, but that's because diviners see all the tributaries that branch from the river of possibility; she'd have the good sense to keep it to herself. All the better to cheat time. Whether Amarande would forget was anyone's guess, but I had a feeling he wouldn't be bothering us anymore.

Sarah left Lionel and I alone, I rewrote, and let us watch the Moon, rest, admire each other, kiss. I rewrote and rewrote.

I rewrote his mouth on mine, there, in that moment. His tongue.

He pulled away. I opened my eyes and there he was, in that gray shirt and those black shorts that were three sizes too big, the belt holding them up, the oversized bronze belt buckle shaped like a sun. Lionel.

"Hi, love," he said, looking only a little disoriented.

"I want you to tell me what you remember of today," I said. "Quickly."

"What?" he said. "Of the swim? It was great, babe! Wish we'd gotten here earlier so we could've seen more of Sarah, though. We'll have to have her over next week. Or the week after."

"Think, Lionel." I placed my hands on his head. I needed to be sure. "Do you remember anything besides the swim?"

"I mean, I guess the details are kinda fuzzy, the day went by so fast. I do remember something really random that I probably dreamed this morning. An alley in the day. But that doesn't make any sense, it smelled awful and, oh man, my chest hurts, oh my god, I feel like I'm having a—oh god, oh my god..."

His eyes squeezed shut, his jaw clenched, his eyebrows pinched with pain. I pressed hard against his head and sucked air in, drinking the last of the memory.

"Ah, it's gone," he said. "That was really weird, babe. What was I saying?"

"About Sarah," I said.

“Oh, yeah. Let’s look at the calendar when we get home.”

“Yes, let’s.” I looked around for the plastic bag, the red THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU letters. I’d just toss it out without Lionel seeing it. But it was nowhere in sight, and I figured that was a good thing.

So I guess sometimes we’re not meant to chase down the baddest witches around just because we’ve got the Gift and grew up with a taste for crime novels. Sometimes, I decided, we don’t have to measure our success or our goodness by the evil we erase. Maybe sometimes we can measure it by the things we have the power to do in our own lives to balance out all the bad. If my fiancé ever learns what happened he will literally disintegrate, so I can’t talk about what is perhaps the most important event in my life with the most important person in it. But I know Amarande’s still out there, and I can offer my story to all who would hope to take him down, in hope that someone, somewhere, will do a better job than I did. And I can be here in the wings waiting to help them if they don’t, and I’m just doing what I can. I’m doing what I can to keep Lionel around as long as he’ll stay.