

MICHELLE SAGARA

— SHORT STORY —

Winter

13



WINTER

MICHELLE SAGARA

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INTRODUCTION

I have many of my early writings. They are fit to be read by anyone without a strong sense of mitigating affection, but they often show an odd interest in Christian myth — inexact, popularized, digested by the subconscious, so perhaps I should call it something else.

But themes of love, sacrifice, corruption and redemption seemed to stand out so strongly in tales of Angels, fallen or otherwise, that I was often drawn to them, and in the end, they became a part of what I write, as many things that compel me do.

Someone asked me, not long after this was published, why both characters were male. I didn't have an answer at hand, but I thought about it for days after, and I have one now. I don't know if it's a good one, on the other hand, but it is true of this story. There are resonances and echoes that come with gender conflicts that would have made this story difficult otherwise; it would have muddied it in ways that the story itself wasn't, among other things, long enough for. Female demons, for instance, are almost always sexually linked, but women-as-prey seemed likely to linger in the background should the demon in question be male and the protagonist female. I think, now, I might handle things

differently — but I don't know; at the time, I wanted the story not to be about sex or gender.

This was written for Mike Resnick, one of two stories that I owed during my first pregnancy. Some people, when pregnant, glow with health and happiness; they just seem to be more vibrant. I spent the first five months looking green and seasick; I could hardly sit at a terminal because the scrolling made me ill.

But I dreamed, vividly, while pregnant.



WINTER

Bars were the terrain through which he hunted best. This hadn't always been the case, but now, with the traffic of busy lives in the press of cities that held more people than at any other time in history, the bars were the places where misery gathered. Forced joviality mingled with smoke, tears and games of desire. He watched, wreathed in shadow, safe in his distance. There were some who gathered here who did not belong; those naive enough to think that the forced joviality represented anything real.

He liked to observe; spent days gathering information from the contours of the faces he watched. Each line, each dip of lid or brow, each quirk of lip, telegraphed information about the wearer.

He watched now, although business called. There, at the bar, a man and a woman, names unknown, faces distinctly familiar, were beginning an argument. This argument he'd seen before, countless times, among different people; in fact, he had started this one, whispering the name of a woman in the woman's ears and letting it take root in suspicion and insecurity. He caught the glint of pink light on her cheeks,

and knew that it wasn't the neon. Smiling, he cast his glance, like a net, across the room.

Because, of course, this *was* his business. He was expected, like any labourer, to produce. If he didn't, he would be recalled, and he had grown, as any man, comfortable in his job and his surroundings.

Comfortable enough that the ordinary bored him. What had once been good enough was now inferior, unacceptable. He could not be rushed beyond a certain point, and he had taken pains to make this clear: his was a work of craftsmanship yes, but it was also a work of art. None who had seen the results could argue this.

Well, no, perhaps one could. But that was long ago, and the criticism, barely remembered, had lost its sting.

He shook his head to clear it of darkness and anger. This was not the time. The chair in which he sat became confining; like a creature that knows no cage, he stood and began to walk across the floor, searching in silence — just one of the many.

* * *

He found his quarry with little difficulty, but he expected no less; he had been watching the man for three months. He knew where he worked, where he lived, and who he occasionally went home with; he knew what he ate, what he preferred to drink, the style of clothing that best suited him, and the amount of money that he made at his job. He knew his phone number, his credit card numbers, his license plate number, all the numbers that made his modern life.

He even knew, in the haze of smoke and dimmed light, the lines that his face would take when a stranger, unknown and perhaps unwelcome, joined him at his customary seat.

He was wrong.

“I wondered when you’d get around to introducing yourself.” The young man stood, pushing his chair back noiselessly. He held out a hand. “I believe you know my name already, but in case you don’t, I’m Michael Brandt.”

This was not expected. Michael Brandt, standing at full height, was tall; his eyes, dark and shadowed, were at a level with his visitor’s. He was pale, but winter did that to the skin, and this winter had been particularly harsh.

“Pleased to meet you, Mr. Brandt. I’m Aazian.” Aazian reached out then, and took Michael’s hand firmly in his own. Shook it, with just the right firmness, at just the right length. Felt a warmth and a pulse that was so clear, it dwarfed all visual impressions.

“Aazian.” Michael nodded quietly. “I don’t suppose you’re interested in a drink?”

Aazian inclined his head, staring. He caught the attention of the waitress with a flick of his fingers in the crowded room. She came, he ordered. His companion grimaced oddly, but did not demur. They looked at each other, silently letting the noise of the bar’s multiple conversations and arguments fill the air. Only when the drinks arrived did they attempt to resume a conversation.

“Do you like snow?” Michael said softly, gazing across the surface of amber liquid as if it were an ocean. He lifted his glass and looked through it at his companion.

“Snow?” What he had been certain of was gone; Aazian raised a brow in surprise before he realized he had let surprise show. He felt a quickening of beat — his own — and realized that he had, by accident, chosen a better victim than he could have imagined. “Why do you ask?”

“Why don’t you answer?” Michael set the drink down on the table, without touching it.

“Snow is... snow. I neither like or dislike it.”

“Then if you don’t mind, I think it best to dispense with pretence. Let’s go for a walk.” He stood again, and the motion drew his companion to his feet, as if one was steel and the other magnet.

* * *

The snow drifted down in thick flakes; it was not bitterly cold, but it was not warm either. Michael Brandt, covered head to toe in wool and leather and other winter items, seemed lodged against the background of ice and night; if he was cold, it didn’t show.

Aazian wore a coat, but no hat, no scarf; these were confining. He did not actually wear boots, but no one noticed this; he was careful when he chose to be. But he cast no shadow in the street lights.

“So, Aazian,” Michael said, his tone casual, his eyes intent, “what do you do for a living?”

It drew a smile from Aazian; the light flickered off his teeth. It was a quaint question and a clumsy opening. He felt better for it, but oddly disappointed as well. “For a living? I shape souls, Michael Brandt.” As he said this, he let his voice be. All illusion, all pretence — as Michael had requested — were put aside.

Nothing could fail to hear the voice that Aazian spoke with. Michael heard it. But his reaction was, again, different from the expected. He chuckled almost bitterly. “Figures.” He shoved his hands into his pockets and slowed his stride, turning his cheeks to catch snowflakes and let them melt, like tears, down the side of his face. Under the conic glow of the lamps, he looked almost beatific.

Aazian snarled. It was not a noise he was given to making.

Michael stepped back for a moment, and then shook his

head. "I'm not laughing at you," he said mildly. "Tell me about your work."

"And what," Aazian replied, equally mild. "Will you give me for my explanation?"

"Is there a price?"

"Of course."

Michael shrugged. "What do you want?"

Aazian mimed a shrug; it was an exaggeration of motion and silence. "Your soul."

Michael laughed. "*My* soul?" But his laughter died quickly in the chill of Aazian's remote expression. "You've been following me," he said at last.

"Yes."

"Is it just for this?"

Michael Brandt was perhaps the most irritating human that Aazian had ever met. "Yes."

"Oh." Then, "I thought you were some sort of serial killer or something."

"I have no interest in your body, Michael Brandt; it dies, decays, and becomes nothing." Then he stopped. "If you thought I was 'some sort of serial killer', why did you volunteer to walk with me, here, in isolation?"

Michael Brandt kicked at an imaginary stone. He shrugged. "Maybe you don't feel all that dangerous." He looked away. "Or maybe I knew what you were." And at this, his eyes came back to rest within Aazian's. They were sharp; it was hard to tell in the light whether Michael's cheeks were flushed with cold or some other reaction.

Aazian did not refute the words. Instead, he shrugged, a shadow of Michael's movement. "Very well, you knew. It has happened before." This was not exactly the truth, but it was as much of the truth as Aazian was willing to share. "What is your price?"

Michael smiled, his lips pale, his eyes unblinking. “Just like that? No song, no dance, no special effects?”

“If you want special effects, you can make that part of your bargain.” But it was said wryly. In spite of himself, Aazian was amused.

“And if I say that I don’t want to sell my soul?”

Aazian shrugged. “Then I find someone else.”

But Michael’s expression told him that they both knew it was a lie. Another devil could utter those words and mean them; Aazian could not. He had chosen. And he had chosen well, he was certain of it. This play of words, this strange, fey expression — they were of a piece with both reticence and challenge. Michael Brandt would fall.

“How can I sell my soul?” Michael asked quietly.

“Why or how?”

“How?”

“It has something to do with choice and permanence; to be honest, I’m not clear at all on the mechanics of the actual bargain. But basically, it’s like any human relationship; you gain something you want, and I gain something I want.”

“You gain it forever.”

“I gain it,” Aazian replied, almost by rote, “for as long as I live. As do you.” He held out a hand; the snow that fell against it did not melt.

“What if I ask you for something that you can’t give me?”

“Then I don’t get your soul. You don’t have to be tricky with words; in spite of general human wisdom, a devil and a lawyer are not the same creature. What you mean, you know, and the moment I agree to the challenge, I will know it as exactly as you do. Or more so; humans lie to themselves in ways that devils cannot.”

“The challenge?”

Aazian’s eyes narrowed. “To me, Michael Brandt,” he

replied, relenting. “This *is* a challenge. It is a work of art, of planning, of understanding. I did not choose you because you would ask me for money, women, men, or fame.”

“If I asked for world peace? A perfect place?”

Aazian snorted. “Do I look like God?” His smiled, and his grin was almost feral.

“I don’t know. What does God look like?”

The humour fled Aazian’s face in a moment. It was gone; there was a starkness and then a distance that he placed firmly between them. “Not even for your soul, little mortal, would I answer that question.” Then he shook himself, as if remembering the game. But when he spoke, it was as if part of the heart had left him. “I cannot grant world peace unless the population of the world was willing to sell its collective soul to me. Which will not happen.”

“I didn’t think so, but I felt I had to ask.”

“Conscience is such a petty thing.”

“I imagine a lot of people would agree with you.”

Michael fell silent for a moment, and then he began to walk again.

Aazian fell in step, smoothly and perfectly blending the sound of their feet into one harmonic noise. “What do you want, Michael Brandt? I sense this is all a game, and I bore easily.”

“I imagine at your age, you do.” He shrugged. “But that’s easy; at *my* age, I do. All right.”

“Yes?”

“I want to be loved.”

This was hardly a new request. Aazian could feel the disappointment like the taste of metal in his mouth. But he had chosen, and he had spent much time pondering; he had left little time for the work itself — the drawing of the contract. He had an artist’s leeway, but he still had to answer

to a higher authority. He held out his hand, palm up. Michael laid his hand, palm down, across the devil's. There was a momentary burst of pain; fire travelled up Michael's arm and lit past his shoulder into the core of his chest.

Before it was gone, before it had died, Michael Brandt took the last step and said two more words, each felt, each true. "By you."

Aazian froze in the Making, and the disappointment vanished; the heat of the words and the strangeness of the request burned it away like morning fog in the coming sun. He wanted to look at his hand, at his palm, but Michael's hand was tight and not easily evaded. "Clever," Aazian said at last.

"If you fail, I go where I go." Michael shrugged. "If you succeed, I go where you go." His expression was wistful apprehension; he looked much younger than his thirty-odd years.

"If I succeed," Aazian replied, "you go to Hell."

"If you succeed," Michael said, not to be frightened or put off, "why would I want heaven?"

Then, only then, did Aazian laugh bitterly. "Because," he replied, and he returned Michael's grip with a ferocity of his own, "only in Heaven can you gaze upon the face of God."

* * *

It was a clever bargain, really; Aazian wondered, in the darkness of Michael's sleep and the warmth of Michael's breath, if it was rather too clever for a devil of his distinction. Because he could see, clearly, how Michael hoped to gain eternity in the safety of hell. If Aazian succeeded.

And if he failed — he could allow for the possibility, given the unnatural request — then Michael's life would be, before that point, the pampered domain of a devil trying desperately to enshroud a soul.

He curled his fingers in Michael's hair; Michael stirred, whispered a word or two, and drifted away again. *There is a risk.* Like an edge, it glimmered in darkness, taunting Aazian with its unnatural complexity. *Risk.* But he did not clearly remember what the danger was when the dawn broke over the windowsill in a spill of coloured light.

* * *

He knew, of course, the moment when the bargain was recorded. It did not happen immediately; there were other devils doing more primitive work, and they worked quickly. Of course, they tended to take those that would no doubt work their own way down to Hell, but that was all that was expected of them. Sloppy.

Aazian's Makings always required special attention, and each request was tended to by the Lord of Hell himself. So when Lucifer rose through the floors of Michael's three bedroom apartment, Aazian was only mildly surprised. Michael was cooking — for some reason, Michael liked this sorry human preoccupation enough to refuse any aid — and the smell of eggs and bacon filled the air. On Sunday, eggs and bacon. During the week, oatmeal, bran or granola.

“Aazian.”

Aazian bowed, as low as the floor would allow. “Lord.”

“I have seen the Making, and I do not approve.”

“Lord.”

“Break it.”

Aazian rose swiftly; were he human, his cheeks would be flushed with the first hint of real anger beneath his fear. “Break it? When I have spent months following only this quarry and no others? Break it?”

“Even so.” Lucifer's light was blinding. “You play a game that you do not understand, and I will not have it played. Break the Making; there is no risk to you.”

Aazian bowed his head again, as if in defeat. And then he raised it, and his eyes were shining. "There is the loss of pride, Lord. And pride is greater in Hell than anything." It was a chancy thing to say; it could have gone either way.

"Is it?" The Lord of Hell said softly. Before Aazian could move, Lucifer's hand shot out; he gripped his servitor's throat between his perfect fingers. "Remember that pride is greater, Aazian, and perhaps I will let you continue."

Lucifer disappeared then, in a flash of light and beauty. But the marks on Aazian's throat remained there.

"Aazian? Were you talking to someone?"

"No one you know," Aazian said, turning away from the empty room.

* * *

He did not understand what love was. He could, of course, be sexual — that he understood well. He could manipulate, could emote in a certain way, could even react. But he knew, from his Making, that that was *not* what Michael Brandt would be content with. It was not romance he wanted, although he was a romantic. It was not sex, although he was sensual. It was not gestures, although the gestures gave him pleasure.

Michael tried to explain it, of course. He even seemed eager to do so — eager to lose soul, lose what he was in eternity. But he could only tell Aazian what it wasn't; what it was was elusive.

Still, they talked. They always talked. Michael loved to talk. He also liked to listen, which Aazian found unusual in a human who possessed the right kinks to sell a soul. They walked in the winter, and then they walked into the slush and mud of early spring. Michael worked; this, Aazian had offered to prevent, but Michael derived some sort of pleasure from the tedium of his daily existence.

After a while, Aazian understood this; he, too, took a certain pleasure and pride in his work — but at the beginning it was hard to understand.

Spring passed into Summer and Summer into Autumn; the seasons turned in time the way the seasons do. Winter returned, and with it the chill of long evening, the huddle of cold people seeking warmth. There was Christmas, but this indignity Aazian would not suffer.

“If Christmas is a time of love and giving,” he asked Michael, “why are there more suicides on Christmas day than there are on any others?”

“You already understand it,” Michael said.

“Yes,” Aazian replied, his eyes on the darkness, on the people that walked to and fro beneath the uncurtained window. He turned to Michael, drew him into his arms. “But I wanted to know if you do. You do. And yet you play at it as if it were real.”

“Aazian.” Michael’s voice was edged. “I don’t care if you don’t come home with me. But I don’t want to talk about this anymore.”

“Why?”

“Because.” Michael pulled away, angry. “Sometimes people need pretences.”

“I know this, Michael. I see it everywhere. Over a pretence, many have given their souls.” He touched the back of Michael’s shoulder almost gently. “But not you. And if you don’t want pretence, why don’t you despise those who do?”

“No point,” Michael replied tersely. “Just drop it, okay?” He was tense; shaking. Then, slowly, his back smoothed and straightened, his breathing returned to normal. “Besides, you won’t win any brownie points by celebrating Christmas, will you?”

“Pretence costs me nothing,” Aazian replied. “But if you wish, I’ll wait for you here.”

“Wait, then.” But Michael turned to stare at him. “It’s part of love sometimes, this pretence. We go home, it makes my parents happy. We pretend that we’re glad to see each other, that everything’s perfect for just the day.”

“But you’ve lied to your parents.”

“Have we? We’ve also given them something to treasure. Sometimes it’s not the big sacrifice that defines love, it’s the little ones.”

“But if they love you, Michael, why would they want you to make those sacrifices?”

Michael shook his head. He walked out of the living room and came back wearing his coat. “Aazian, love is a human concept. Or at least my understanding of it is. Try to remember that.”

“I do. Every day. Your concept of love is not mine.”

Michael’s eyes widened. “What is your concept of love?”

It was Aazian’s turn to look away. “Go, Michael. Your family is waiting.”

* * *

It was frustrating. Aazian struggled with it daily, this lack of understanding, this lack of *power*. Michael left him at the beginning of each day, and during the solitude and the quiet, Aazian would walk through the streets, sometimes choosing to be seen, others to be invisible. He watched people feed birds, walk dogs, hold hands, and die along the concrete thoroughfares. He did not interfere.

But he looked at their souls as if they, prisms, were the only glimpse he was ever to have of the light. No, not the only glimpse. In Hell he had four near perfect gems, souls of very little darkness. He had taken them all, one by one, carefully preserving their colour and their sheen. He had bound

them with Makings and spells, teased them into his eternity. They were his art.

Yet none of them, so foreign to his own nature, perplexed him as Michael did. None of them — perhaps because of their milieu — had ever thought to ask of him what Michael asked. The near-impossible. What was this human love, this human sufferance? How was he to offer it fully if he couldn't understand it?

Yes, it frustrated Aazian.

It continued to frustrate him. Years turned in time; he could see their quiet march across Michael's face. He helped Michael as he could, listened to him, tried to teach him to look at the shadows in each man and woman to use them to the best advantage. He held him, guarded him, existed at his whim. Five years. Ten.

And then, during the eleventh year, he began to feel restless and uncomfortable. The life he led, hidden and secret, was no longer enough for him. He didn't know why, nor could he trace the progress of this new irritability, although he tried for months to believe that it was only frustration and uncertainty. A Maker knows when his contract has been fulfilled, and Michael still maintained a steady, safe distance.

Michael maintained a distance.

These four words marked a point of turning. Michael maintained his distance. But surely it wasn't Michael? For not in Michael's hands did the resolution of their bargain lay. It was *Aazian* who had to learn to love Michael. Human love. Human...

* * *

When Michael returned from work, Aazian was waiting for him. But he was not waiting as he usually did, and when Michael came through the door, he offered him no warmth,

no greeting. Instead, he stood in the pooled shadow by the lamp that still remained off. The patina of mortal lover was gone; the devil remained, the demon. In the vague light there was a glint of feral teeth, a glitter of whiteless eye, that spoke of ancient anger.

“Aazian?” Michael’s voice was soft. “Is there something wrong?”

“Only this,” Aazian said, rising. “You do not love *me*.” He could not keep the accusation out of his voice; he didn’t try. But Michael was almost demonic in his unpredictability.

Instead of denying Aazian’s words, instead of decrying them as no part of their bargain, he became still, tense; almost breathless. “No,” he said at last.

“Michael, I have come to understand your desire in my Making. It’s hard and I’ve learned much; I don’t know if there’s anything left for humanity to teach me. I will use this to my advantage when I have answered to my Lord.” He did not move; his eyes, all black, were intent. “But this bargain of ours cannot be fulfilled by me alone. *That* is the part that I did not understand.”

Michael’s breath came out in a strange sigh, as if forced all at once from his body. “Is that what it was all about?” He asked. Aazian knew, by the queer distant look on his face, that the question was asked not of him, but of the past. “I thought it was because he didn’t love me. Was it because I couldn’t love him?”

“No,” Aazian said, but quietly; the anger had fled as it often did in Michael’s presence. “You couldn’t love each other. Love is not something that can be done by one.” He looked away, then, into the streets. Looked at the threaded ribbon of human souls as they walked, as they beckoned. “And I cannot continue.”

“Can’t?”

“Won’t.”

Michael swallowed. His lips trembled with words; Aazian feared they might remain unsaid. “No.” His eyes hit the floor, as if weighted there, but he began to talk. “If I love you,” his voice was a whisper, “I give you my soul. I don’t own myself anymore.”

“Yes,” Aazian said. “That is the choice you make.” He paused before continuing. “You love your parents, and they own enough of you that you’re willing to lie to them.”

“I can’t lie to you,” Michael replied, although he still would not give Aazian a glimpse of his eyes. And then Michael laughed, almost wild, and looked up; his eyes were red. This was as close as he ever came to tears. “I told him that,” he said, defiant. “That I wouldn’t give him my soul. This is an irony that even he would have appreciated.” He shook himself, shedding the stiffness, the unnatural containment, with which he had wrapped himself, and walked over to Aazian. “Don’t give up yet. I’ll try. All right?” He touched the contours of Aazian’s face as if they were a foreign texture. “But I know as much about it as you do. Be patient?”

Aazian felt a curious tightness settle around him, a mixture of relief and of terror. Relief won; he drew Michael tightly into his arms. “I think,” he said, against the curl of Michael’s hair, “that you know less than I.”

* * *

But Aazian met Michael’s family, which was a matter of shock to both of his parents, of disgrace to his brother, and of relief to his sister. All this, when Michael never once mentioned his soul or the exact nature of his lover’s foreign country. But Aazian understood the fear and prejudice well, and because it was almost familiar — a reminder of the void

and the fires — he dwelt comfortably with it and did not fight it.

He met Michael's friends, and was surprised to find that they were few, if close. They accepted him with barely veiled curiosity, mild envy, and great happiness for Michael. This alloy of emotion was also comfortable.

And they survived Michael's fear — which was perhaps the hardest part of all.

* * *

The seasons turned in time, and when the last Winter arrived, Aazian knew it. It shadowed Michael's face with the cold of its long fingers. Aazian, of course, did not age — but he kept up the appearance; for some reason, Michael preferred it. Michael was not very old, but the thing that killed him had no regard for age or love or dignity. Aazian had no further power over Michael's life, and had he the ability to make Michael healthy again, he wasn't certain what he would have done. He did not want Michael Brandt to die. But only upon Michael's death would the soul be his. And it *would* be his.

Aazian did not lie to Michael, and Michael did not ask it of him. They greeted death with the dignity that they could, and if Michael cried or raged or pleaded, it was a private matter, a momentary pain, that Aazian would never take advantage of. While Michael slept, Aazian watched him; when he woke, Aazian spoke with him. Towards the end, he did what he could to ease pain and comfort.

"I think," Michael whispered, late one night in the hospital ward, "you won. What will I look like in Hell?" He laughed, but his breath was a wheeze that ended with a shuddering cough.

"In Hell?" Aazian replied quietly. "No, Michael — I think you've won." He held Michael's hand between his own; both

were cold. "I will not take you to Hell. You asked me what love meant to me, as a devil, and I would not answer you. Hush now, and let me tell you. Love is what we felt for God and the Heavens."

"Then why did you leave it?" Michael asked, blissfully unaware of the enormity of what had been said.

"Pride, Michael, and love for the Bright Lord. Lucifer." He lifted Michael's hand, curled his fingers up, and kissed them one by one. "But I love you enough to wish you to see what my love was once given to. Go where you will go." He rose.

"Where are you going?"

"To Hell, Michael. You will die soon — and I cannot be here to see it. My nature would not allow me to let you go."

* * *

Michael Brandt died five days later, in a stupor of pain and loneliness. He understood what Aazian had given him, but he took no comfort from it while alive. And dead?

Dead, with the gates of Heaven open and the light and brilliance washing a sky that no mortal eyes will ever see, he wept. He wandered along a path that held only the peaceful and the beatific, and he took no comfort from them. At last, he met the keeper of the gates themselves, and the keeper took one look at him and drew back.

"You do not belong here," he said, his voice grave and final.

"No?" Michael asked. "How do I get where I belong?"

"Jump."

It was a funny thing to be told, but the word was a command of sorts, and Michael took to air and darkness as he leapt into the unknown. No; not the unknown. He was going home.

When he came at last to Hell, Aazian's name was on his

lips. He saw the darkness, felt the fire, heard the sounds of pain that only a soul stripped of flesh can utter; he cried out Aazian's name that much louder. To be heard. To be felt.

On the plateau of a plane that made no sense, had no meaning, Aazian found his soul, his Michael. They had no words to offer, no questions to ask. Michael ran the last few feet to Aazian's embrace, and they clung together, a blemish on the landscape of Hell.

* * *

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michelle writes as both Michelle Sagara and Michelle West; she is also published as Michelle Sagara West (although the Sundered books were originally published under the name Michelle Sagara).

She lives in Toronto with her long-suffering husband and her two children, and to her regret has no dogs.

Reading is one of her life-long passions, and she is paid for her opinions about what she's read by the venerable *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. No matter how many book shelves she buys, there is Never Enough Shelf space. Ever.

Although she doesn't have a newsletter, if you subscribe to her blog, you will get everything that's posted there—book news, cover reveals, random answers to questions, etc.

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Grave

OTHER SHORT STORIES

The first six stories released are connected to the Essalieyan Universe of the novels I write for DAW as Michelle West. Since those are my most asked-for short stories, those are the ones I wanted to make available first. The rest of the stories will be released in chronological order from the date of their first appearance, which are listed in brackets beside the titles, along with the anthology in which they first appeared. All of the stories have introductions (which will probably come through in the samples if you've already read the stories but want to read those.)

In the Essalieyan universe:

1. Echoes (2001, *Assassin Fantastic*)
2. Huntbrother (2004, *Sirius, the Dog Star*)
3. The Black Ospreys (2005, *Women of War*)
4. The Weapon (2005, *Shadow of Evil*)
5. Warlord (1998, *Battle Magic*)
6. The Memory of Stone (2002, *30th Anniversary DAW Fantasy*)



7. Birthnight (1992, *Christmas Bestiary*)
8. Gifted (1992, *Aladdin, Master of the Lamp*)
9. Shadow of a Change (1993, *Dinosaur Fantastic*)
10. For Love of God (1993, *Alternate Warriors*)
11. Hunger (1993, *Christmas Ghosts*)
12. Four Attempts at a Letter (1994, *By Any Other Fame*)
13. Winter (1994, *Deals with the Devil*)
14. What She Won't Remember (1994, *Alternate Outlaws*)
15. The Hidden Grove (1995, *Witch Fantastic*)
16. Ghostwood (1995, *Enchanted Forests*)
17. When a Child Cries (1996, *Phantoms of the Night*)
18. The Sword in the Stone (1997, *Alternate Tyrants*)
19. Turn of the Card (1997, *Tarot Fantastic*)
20. The Law of Man (1997, *Elf Fantastic*)
21. Flight (1997, *Return of the Dinosaurs*)
22. The Vision of Men (1997, *The Fortune Teller*)
23. By the Work, One Knows (1997, *Zodiac Fantastic*)
24. Under the Skin (1997, *Elf Magic*)
25. The Dead that Sow (1997, *Wizard Fantastic*)
26. Kin (1998, *Olympus*)
27. Step on the Crack (1998, *Black Cats and Broken Mirrors*)
28. Diamonds (1998, *Alien Pets*)
29. Sunrise (1999, *A Dangerous Magic*)
30. Elegy (1999, *Moon Shots*)
31. Return of the King (1999, *Merlin*)
32. Work in Progress (1999, *Alien Abductions*)
33. Water Baby (1999, *Earth, Air, Fire and Water*)
34. Faces Made of Clay (2000, *Mardi Gras Madness*)
35. Sacrifice (2000, *Spell Fantastic*)
36. Shelter (2000, *Perchance to Dream*)
37. Pas de Deux (2000, *Guardian Angels*)

38. Déjà Vu (2001, *Single White Vampire Seeks Same*)
39. To Speak With Angels (2001, *Villains Victorious*)
40. Lady of the Lake (2001, *Out of Avalon*)
41. Truth (2001, *The Mutant Files*)
42. The Last Flight (2001, *Creature Fantastic*)
43. The Knight of the Hydan Athe (2002, *Knight Fantastic*)
44. Legacy (2002, *Familiars*)
45. The Nightingale (2002, *Once Upon a Galaxy*)
46. A Quiet Justice (2002, *Vengeance Fantastic*)
47. The Augustine Painters (2002, *Apprentice Fantastic*)
48. How to Kill an Immortal (2002, *The Bakka Anthology*)
49. Fat Girl (2002, *Oceans of the Mind VI*, ezine)
50. Diary (2003, *The Sorcerer's Academy*)
51. Dime Store Rings (2004, *The Magic Shop*)
52. To The Gods Their Due (2004, *Conqueror Fantastic*)
53. The Stolen Child (2004, *Faerie Tales*)
54. The Rose Garden (2004, *Little Red Riding Hood in the Big Bad City*)
55. The Colors of Augustine (2004, *Summoned to Destiny*)
56. Unicorn Hunt (2005, *Maiden, Mother Crone*)
57. The Snow Queen (2005, *Magic Tails*; with Debbie Ohi)
58. Shahira (2006, *Children of Magic*)
59. Choice* (1997, *Sword of Ice: Friends of Valdemar*)
60. Winter Death* (2003, *The Sun in Glory: Friends of Valdemar*)
61. Childhood's End (1998, *Tad William's Mirror World*)

*Set in Mercedes Lackey's Valdemar, as the anthology titles suggest

