

## Hex

**Sarah Blackman**

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*Hex is playful and self-reflective, mixing contemporary culture with folklore.*

“Once there were two girls and one of them was me,” writes Sarah Blackman in her debut novel, *Hex*. By turns fabulous and factual, *Hex* spirals through a dazzling cycle of interconnected fairy-tale tropes centered on the girlhood of Alice Luttrell.

Alice is not exactly a princess, but she finds magic everywhere. This isn’t the whimsy of a child, however. Alice encounters snake queens, oracles, and talking animals. She accepts these creatures without turning a hair. The mountains around Alice’s tiny coal-mining town are packed with witches and dwarves—less frightening than adulthood. “We grew up,” Alice says. “Time can’t really be stopped; only paused, vibrating along its edges like a bee trapped in a glass jar.”

“The moon is a ball that was thrown up against the sky a long time ago,” Alice is told; maybe it was, she thinks, and maybe not. She proves to be a perfectly precocious narrator, eager to sniff out the tiny tales attached to each person, place, and thing that crosses her path. She travels through the unmarked map of her life, trying to make sense of the changes happening inside her and around her that grow as high and prickly as a bramble hedge. Blackman notes Alice’s discoveries, carefully gilding the filigree of a world that is both imaginary and immediate.

*Hex* is playful and self-reflective, mixing contemporary culture with folklore, with shades of Snow White, Rapunzel, and the Snow Queen coming sometimes in a single sentence. Elsewhere, the Frog Prince butts up against Alice In Wonderland, and a miasma of images delight and distract. Though its dense symbolism can be disorienting, the novel’s literary craft is mostly strong and engaging, and the its quiriness will appeal to fans of Karen Russell, Aimee Bender, and Jeffrey Eugenides.

An unabashedly fantastical tale, *Hex* is a pleasure.

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