

## In Calabria

**Peter S. Beagle**

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Fans of *The Last Unicorn* will recognize Peter S. Beagle's signature style immediately in his new novel, *In Calabria*. Touching gently on themes of faith, mythology, and poetry, *In Calabria* is a modern fairy tale that shows what happens when true magic meets modern technology.

Claudio Bianchi has, for lack of a better phrase, put himself out to pasture. Although healthy and only forty-seven, he has no passion aside from farming and poetry. Beagle takes a close third-person perspective and spins Bianchi's story slowly and deliberately. The lovely use of metaphor, allusions, and imagery make the details of *In Calabria* shine like opals in a riverbed.

The pregnant unicorn, of course, is the novel's fantasy element. Bianchi sees her one night in his melon patch, "moving with notable care around the fragile arbors, never touching the vines, but nibbling what weeds it could find on the cold ground." Bianchi thinks the unicorn may be a vision or an omen, but when she reappears, visibly pregnant, Bianchi prepares to cross the divide between fantasy and reality. His poetry blooms, along with a strong connection to a woman from his village—despite his desire to be left alone, he can't hide from the unicorn's strange blessing.

Although Beagle's characteristically dry humor brings a few chuckles, *In Calabria* leans more towards magical realism than high fantasy. Some passages evoke prose poetry, with paragraph-long, labyrinthine sentences. The action is slow, with plenty of exposition and backstory between scenes. This builds anticipation, though the suspense can be killing, too. What will happen when the secret of the unicorn makes it to the paparazzi's ears? Is the world still welcoming to magical creatures? Beagle returns to familiar, welcome territory and invites readers to get lost for a while.

CLAIRE RUDY FOSTER (March/April 2017)

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