

# The Talon

Volume 1

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# *The Stories*

# Indian Paintbrush

*Jessica B. Cornell*

The Indian Paintbrush grows in Oklahoma in the early spring. It pops up on the side of the road in between cigarette butts and Styrofoam cups. A weed that litters the highway and the field behind my childhood home. We used to tie them into makeshift flower crowns and force stray dogs to participate in backyard wedding ceremonies. Sometimes, my daddy brought them inside for my momma and stuck them in a coffee cup to surprise her.

Momma grew up in San Rafael, California near the ocean, until her own mother took her to visit her grandma in Arizona for the summer and never came back. Her grandma passed from leukemia a few years later and Momma was willed to a children's home where she learned to sew and grow her own food. She went to beauty school after aging out because there was nothing else to do. She took a part time job bagging groceries at a run-down store north of town where she met Daddy.

Daddy was a bit of a stoner who smoked just enough weed to temper any true ambition. He tried to woo Momma by playing the only three chords he knew on a pawnshop guitar. Momma was, of course, too smart for all of this and went to Florida with her former foster parents later that summer. Daddy, who, despite already having a girlfriend, was devastated. He wrote letters to Momma every day asking her to come back. She left her foster family again and made it back on almost no money by drafting behind semi-trucks in a tiny Pontiac. Poor and green, they got married in a church next to a set of railroad tracks with only two people in attendance--a large breasted woman they called Boom Boom and Uncle Stick, who was later diagnosed with schizophrenia after trying to steal the town mural. My parents are soul mates.

"I don't believe in soul mates," you said.

"Why?" I asked.

“The idea that there is one perfect half to anybody is absurd. People should just find someone who is compatible and work on it.”

I did not, at that moment, think that I would be sitting in couples’ therapy two years later trying to find common ground with a person so fundamentally different from myself. At times, I wonder how there even came to be a second date. And yet, there I was, sitting on a tiny loveseat next to you in a windowless office watching the spiral screensaver flash across Joanie’s computer. Our therapist, Joanie, was a physically compact person who made compact observations. I am still convinced that she had a crush on you.

“So, this story about your parents. This is really important to you?” Joanie said.

“Yes, but it’s the principle, not the story,” I said.

“And when you received negative feedback, how did it make you feel?”

Jesus, it’s always how it made you feel. Well Joanie, I felt like I’d taken a turn in the wrong direction, kept heading to the wrong destination, and now here we are having a conversation about a story I use as an icebreaker on first dates.

“It made me feel sad,” I said.

“You’re always sad,” you said.

“I’m not always sad.”

“Well, you’re not ever happy.

I think-“

Joanie interrupted us by holding up a shiny baton with ribbons scotch taped to the end.

“It’s not your turn,” she said. “We are going to have to bring the feelings stick back out.”

“I’m sorry. I interrupted,” you said.

Joanie handed me her sad little cheer camp creation and smiled. She smiled the way people do when they are delivering bad news, but still trying to be cheerful. I looked at the stick and wondered if it would be appropriate to twirl it in your face when she looked at the clock and started clucking her tongue.

“It looks like we’re out of time,” she said.

We drove back home in silence while you nodded along to NPR. I thought maybe I would make a feelings stick and beat myself to death with it, but was sidetracked by the Indian Paintbrush on the side of the road.

The next day, I didn’t get out of bed. I called in to work and told them I had the flu. I watched you get dressed from underneath a pillow. You got dressed the way you spoke, the way you ate, the way you did anything--in perfect steps, each done the same way every morning even on the weekends when you worked from home. You were wearing a navy blue suit that day with a tie I bought for you.

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You always wanted to be the guy in the suit. When you were little, your mom would take you to work with her every now and again and you would sit in her coworker Michael's office. Your dad had taken off by then. Your mom said he never tried to make contact, and you pretended he was nothing to you. Michael took your mom out sometimes and when he did, he brought GI Joes for you. Clean and meticulous, he taught you to tie a tie and snuck cigarettes to you when your mom wasn't paying attention.

When you turned seventeen, you read in the paper that Michael had killed himself by carbon monoxide poisoning in his garage on Christmas Eve. He'd written that he was gay in his suicide note. The same year you learned your dad had been mailing child support payments to the state regularly, and they had finally tracked down your mother to give her the lump sum. Your mother told me that this was the year you grew your hard shell exterior.

You kissed me on the forehead before you left. I lay there for a few hours thinking about how much I hated our apartment. A lofted one bedroom with strange edges so that the furniture never quite looked right. Our bedroom windows faced right into another set of windows, so we could never open the blinds. The only thing I liked was how close it was to a little Iranian

bodega where I could get cheap cigarettes made in Latvia.

I felt like there was a cookie cutter pressing my heart. Every so often, I would breathe hard enough to feel my chest expand and my heart would press against the metal edges.

I thought, at midafternoon, it would help to bake something. I went downstairs to pour and measure until my brain was numb. I put a pan of brownies in the oven and left them. I lay down on the couch and watched the breeze from the air conditioning move the shutters on the sliding glass door while I drifted off. The smoke alarm woke me. I jumped up to turn off the oven and pulled down the door. Smoke rolled out and I grabbed a towel to pull the brownies out. The heat went through the towel and burned my thumb. I dropped the brownies on the top of the stove and turned to put water on my hand. The smoke alarm wailed while the brownies continued to char in the pan. I kicked the oven door closed with my foot and opened the sliding glass door to air out the house. The smoke alarm went off, but the ringing in my ears did not. I put on oven mitts, set the pan outside the sliding glass door, and closed it.

You came home around seven that evening. I heard your footsteps behind me. We had plans to go to supper with some of your

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friends. Still in my robe, I sat cross-legged in the bathroom sink with my face hovering close to the mirror. My hair was in rollers and I was carefully trying to make the eyeliner on my left eye match the right one. My mouth was open and had begun fogging up the glass, so I sat back a little to admire my work. You were just in your shirt and tie, shoes already put back into the closet. You stood behind me and put your hands on my shoulders. I leaned back in a halfway trust fall and you stepped forward to catch my back with your chest. You sat your chin on my shoulder and rested it there. We made eye contact in the mirror.

"You look pretty," you said.

"I'm not done yet," I said.

"I know. You look pretty even half done."

I smiled wryly and my ears began pounding. My cookie cutter heart clenched. You leaned closer and wrapped your arms around me, covering mine.

"Nobody here is making any demands of you," you said.

"I know."

"Then please tell me what's wrong. Is it--"

"It's not about work."

"Then tell me what's going on. I don't know what to do. Have you been taking your medication?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I don't like it. It makes me feel cloudy."

"Joanie said that's normal at first. If you just stop taking it, you do things like this."

"I'm not doing anything. I'm just exhausted."

"You slept most of the day."

"I know, but I think I just needed rest."

"You need to take your medicine."

"Please don't patronize me."

You moved my back into an upright position and stepped away from the sink. You held the knot of your tie and jerked your head backwards to loosen it.

"I'm not patronizing you," you said. "We've been doing this for months now. I'm exhausted, too."

You disappeared from my view in the mirror and I heard you go downstairs. A few moments later, you came back with a spatula. I started removing the rollers from my hair.

"What is that for?" I asked.

"It's the feelings stick."

"You've got to be kidding me."

"We don't know how to communicate without it."

"I am talking to you right now. I don't need a feelings stick to do it."

"Joanie says--"

"I honestly wish you would just start fucking Joanie."

"Stop it. You have to take this seriously. This isn't just about you."

"No. It's about that fucking

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stick and how I need it to have feelings.”

“Joanie thinks we need to use it to communicate. So we both get the chance to say what we want without interruption.”

“Say whatever you want. I don’t care.”

You sat on our bed, staring at the spatula in your hand. I removed the rest of the rollers and stood in front of you. You were crying. I took the spatula from your hand and held it.

“I feel like I don’t know what’s wrong with me,” I said.

“I’m tired all the time, but I can’t sleep. I get headaches all the time. I don’t want to take the medicine, because I don’t like the way it makes me feel.”

You smiled when I handed the spatula to you.

“I know I work all the time, but I thought when all our hard work was over we could just relax. I don’t want to come home and see you haven’t moved all day,” you said.

“It was just today.”

“It’s more than just today. If you aren’t going to try, then this will never work.”

“I’m sorry I don’t meet your rigid standards.”

“Don’t do that. You know what you’re doing and it isn’t fair.”

We went on like this for over an hour. We gave up the spatula and faced off without it. We insulted each other and hugged each other

and when it was over, we were sitting side by side in the walk in closet.

“I know it isn’t me, but I just need to hear you say it,” you said.

I didn’t know if you were what made me lay in bed all day or if it was me. I didn’t know why I couldn’t take the medicine, except that I didn’t want to be the weaker of us. I didn’t want you to come home and see that I hadn’t moved all day, either.

“It isn’t you,” I said.

You nodded and left me in the closet. I heard you on the phone, canceling the night’s plans.

...

You left that night and as soon as I saw you pull away, I started throwing clothes into a garbage bag. I sat in the floor of the closet and my leaded arms and legs pulled me into the fetal position. I laid there using the bag of clothes as a pillow and fell asleep.

I woke up the next morning to a loud knock at the door. I didn’t hear you come back to get ready for work, but your dirty clothes were in a pile next to the bed. My head felt swollen. I wrapped my robe tighter around me and walked downstairs. The knocking came again, more rapid this time. It was my mother.

She was holding a cigarette in her right hand with her purse slung over the other. She took off her sunglasses and threw her

cigarette down into a plant bed, pushing past me into the apartment. I picked up the still burning cigarette butt and put it out on the concrete. She had already gone up the stairs and was coming out of the bathroom when I reached the top of them.

“Where should we start?” she said.

“Start what?” I said.

“Packing.”

“How did you know I was packing?”

“Oh, I didn’t. I just came over to check on you and saw your little garbage bag suitcase in the closet.”

“I’m not packing. I don’t have anywhere to go.”

“Just come stay with us for a while. Your dad got a new TV and set up the surrounding sound-”

“Surround sound.”

“What?”

“You said surrounding sound. You meant surround sound.”

She rolled her eyes and went downstairs. I sat down on the floor and rubbed my face. She returned with a handful of trash bags.

“Wash your face. You’ll feel better. Maybe put a little makeup on. I feel better when I put a little makeup on,” she said.

“I don’t want to,” I said.

“Listen, I don’t know what’s going on, but I can tell you haven’t taken a bath in a couple days, and I’ll be willing to bet you’re not taking your medicine either.”

“I don’t want to take it.”

“So don’t, but you should at least get out of this apartment if it’s making you feel bad. It smells like burnt popcorn here anyway.”

She began removing my clothes from hangers and packing them into the trash bags. She would occasionally stop to hold a shirt out and then up to her body to check if it would fit her.

“We broke up, Mom,” I said.

“Well, I didn’t think he was the one anyway,” she said.

“Too controlling. Your dad said it the first time they met.”

I laughed at this and hobbled into the shower. I washed the previous night’s makeup off my face and it occurred to me that you must have called her. When I came out of the shower, she had all of my clothes in trash bags and I surveyed the apartment. Nothing else belonged to me. We walked out to the parking lot and Daddy was waiting in his truck.

“Dad wanted to come too,” she said.

The three of us piled the trash bags into the back of the truck and I stepped up into it. Momma took my keys and drove my car behind us. Daddy didn’t say anything. I laid my head down on the center console and he awkwardly slid his arm under it as a buffer. We were already turning up the dirt road to home when I realized I forgot to throw away the

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pan of brownies.

...

I slept the rest of that day and most of the next. I woke up to the sunshine on my eyelids. Momma must have come in and opened the blinds. I rolled onto my side and curled up my legs so I would fit on the twin bed. There was a glass of juice, a pill and chewable vitamins on the nightstand. I ate the vitamins and stared at the pill.

My eyes traveled to the bedside lamp. There was a chip in the base from a night I had purposely knocked it off the table during a particularly bad struggle with medication. I turned the lamp, so the white ceramic indentation faced away from me. I rolled onto my other side and one of the dogs was staring at me. Momma walked by my open door with a laundry basket in her hands.

“Oh, don’t mind him. He likes to lay on that bed during the afternoon. If you scoot over he’ll jump up there,” she said.

I stared at the dog until he turned and followed Momma into the kitchen. I sat up and turned the lamp back the way it was. I swallowed the last pill and the cup of juice.

Momma once said the best way to get over a man is to get under another one. I met him at the end of the driveway and opened the truck door. I called him earlier that

morning and told him to come pick me up around two. Momma had gone to run errands and wouldn’t be back for a few hours. He moved a hard hat from the passenger seat and tossed it into the truck bed. I hadn’t seen him in five years. He wore the same sun faded Yankee’s hat for most of the time I’d known him. I’ve always hated the Yankees. Even Jesus hates the Yankees, but there I was pulling it off his head and smoothing it over my hair. He drove us out past the county line and onto a gravel road. We pulled into an abandoned church parking lot. The marquee read “Sin, a short word for a long sentence in Hell” and he killed the engine.

We sat in easy conversation for a few minutes until we realized we had nothing of substance to say. Familiarity allowed time to fold in on itself and I was happy to be someone you didn’t know. I lay down in the truck seat and he unbuttoned my jeans. His fingertips felt like cats’ tongues on my hips, and I turned my head to stifle a laugh in the truck seat. A small puff of dust came out of the cushion and made my mouth taste like limestone. I wondered if my hair would smell like limestone dust.

Afterward, he disappeared behind the church. I opened the glove box and saw a tire pressure gauge and a handful of napkins. The cup holder was full of change and I sifted it with my hand. A gold band

caught my eye and I picked it up. I absentmindedly tried it on my ring finger and the cookie cutter dug into my heart's soft edges.

He walked back around the building and I jerked the ring off my hand, threw it into the cup holder, and slammed the glove box shut. He drove me home and I asked that he stop at the edge of the driveway again. I stepped out of the truck without turning to say goodbye. The truck idled behind me for a moment and then all I heard was the echo of the engine. I took my shoes off and walked barefoot on the rocks, allowing them to poke the bottoms of my feet.

...

I took the dogs out for a walk later that day. We came upon a baby rabbit sitting on the trail. I worried the dogs would try to harm it, so I picked up a rock and threw it toward the rabbit. I had hoped spook it back into the woods, but overestimated and hit the rabbit on the head. It seized for a moment and lay down. I walked over and poked it with the toe of my shoe. It didn't move.

Guilt crept over me and I picked up the rabbit, walked to the edge of the property line and chunked the body into the field in between the tall grass and Indian Paintbrush. I turned and called the dogs to me. We walked back into the house and I sat down on the far edge of the couch. Momma came

into the room wearing a tie dyed muumuu with rhinestones near the neck. No doubt, one of her roadside purchases. Momma was a champion of the street vendor.

"You can turn the TV on if you want," she said.

"I don't know how to use these remotes," I said.

"It's easy babydoll, I'll show you."

"No. It's okay. I don't really feel like watching anything right now."

She ignored me and turned it on anyway. She walked over to me with three remotes and started explaining them to me. I didn't hear anything she said. I was thinking of the rabbit I killed and tears began to wet my eyelashes.

"It's okay, baby, it just takes some time to learn how to use them. Your dad has this set up real weird. I can write it down if you want," she said.

"Okay. Thank you. I'm sorry."

"You don't have any reason to be sorry. Oh look, you're in his spot. He likes to sit there. Could you scoot over?"

She pointed one of the remotes at her dog, who was staring at me. I moved to the middle of the couch and the dog jumped up next to me. He stared at me until he became bored and stuffed his face into one of the cushions.

"I'm going outside again," I said.

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“Okay, we’re eating dinner in an hour.”

I found a pair of Daddy’s boots next to the door and put them on. I walked out of the backdoor and past the property line. The boots were too big and I pulled my feet up to keep them from falling off. I waded through the tall grass and hoped the rabbit hadn’t been drug off by another animal. I found its body stretched out, head a little swollen from where the rock hit it. I held it in the crook of my arm and high stepped back to the barn.

I found a shovel leaned against the outside wall and chose a soft spot near an old burn pile. I made it six inches before I hit rock. Daddy had come home from work and walked around the side of the house to check on me. I was leaning on the shovel, sweat dripping down my cheeks. Daddy looked from me to the rabbit.

“I can’t go any further. The ground is too tough,” I said.

He turned and went into the barn, emerging a few minutes later with a pickaxe.

“Give me a little room,” he said.

I moved my shovel and the rabbit out of the way and we took turns, him breaking up the ground and me shoveling the loose dirt to the side. Momma came out of the house and walked barefoot over to where we were digging.

“Mom, bring me an old

shirt,” he said.

“Do you think we should get a box too?” she said.

“No, we don’t need a box. I think three feet down will be enough.”

Momma went back into the house while we continued to dig. Daddy put his foot into the hole to measure.

“I think that’s good enough,” he said.

Momma came back with an old pillowcase and wrapped the rabbit in it. She placed it in the hole and I shoveled the loose dirt back on top. They stood and watched me stare at the grave for a while and then Momma disappeared into the tall grass.

“We’re happy you’re home,” Daddy said.

“I won’t stay long. I don’t want to be in the way,” I said.

“Don’t go too soon. It was getting pretty boring here without you.”

Momma came back up from the field with a handful of Indian Paintbrush. She spread them over the top of the grave and the orange buds stood guard over it. We put the tools in the barn and walked back to the house. Momma and Daddy walked in front of me, and he put his hand on her back when he opened the door for her.



# The Good Boys

*Rachael Unruh*

Another minute rolled over on the dashboard clock. The sound of dogs rattling chain-link settled as Lucian cut the engine. He cracked the window, letting in the salty night air. A chorus of crickets filled the silence. He sat back, tapping the palm side of his class ring against the wheel. Another minute rolled by.

Barking erupted as the screen door scraped open. If it weren't for the headlights he would have been hard to spot. Lucian watched him hop the small gap between the mobile home and the steps, taking them two at a time and cutting across the dirt lawn to his car. He headed towards the back, ready to round over to the passenger's side, but stopped before he reached the trunk, making a sharp turn to come around front.

Lucian twisted the key as he climbed in.

"You took too long."

He looked over at him.

James' hair was a mess, like he hadn't bothered to shower in days. His clothes were still the same as they'd been on Saturday even though it was Sunday night, or really Monday morning.

James leaned forward, bracing his hands on the dash with his eyes fixed out the windshield.

"I loved her, man," he said.

Lucian tapped his finger against the steering wheel.

"Yeah," he said. "Everyone knows."

He put the car into gear and pulled away. They headed east out of Charlottesville, too far for streetlamps. The gravel roads were packed down to a washboard but the weight in the trunk kept them steady. They passed the old cemetery in silence, the rows of cut stone too full for the tiny grass lot.

It was dawn before they reached town again. They parted ways in the parking lot at school.

Word traveled fast, and by the time first period started James already had a small crowd that followed him everywhere he went. Lucian offered condolences with his friends in the hall, but left him after that like any other day.

James wasn't a boy easily liked. There was a certain edge that came from living in the park that stuck around him no matter what. Mostly he kept to himself, coasting on B's, with few friends, and a two o'clock penchant for smoking L&M's in the boys' locker room. He was nothing special.

They passed each other a few times before class but never spoke. Lucian stayed on the bench that day at football practice. When the other players asked why he'd missed the party, he said he'd been sick.

At noon the students were called to the gym for an assembly. The principal stood in front of the school to talk about what had happened. He had two teachers flanking him, holding flyers with Charlie Summers face on them. He said her parents thought it might help.

Charlie hadn't come home on Saturday. Her parents had filed a police report that night, but because of her recent decline in school and a rise in poor behavior the police filed it as a run away. Her family wasn't happy. They went quickly to flyers and a sixteen second slot on the

nightly news.

The teachers passed around the stacks as the principal spoke. Lucian took a few when they reached him and handed them along to his friends. He never saw James.

School let out early. Some of Charlie's friends wanted to send out search parties through Charlottesville in case someone had seen her. Lucian didn't wait around to volunteer. He got in his car and spun out toward the east side of town. In fifteen minutes he was pulling up next to the dirt patch lawn still staked with the skeleton of an old chain link fence.

He took off his letterman and threw it in back. Dogs sounded down the street as he got out. He made sure to peer around back to check if the old man's car was there.

The screen door to the front was unlocked. Inside he could hear the sound of the TV. He knocked a few times, but didn't wait long. A few seconds and he was pulling back the screen.

The place was dark. All the curtains had been drawn and the lights were out. He kicked aside a few beer cans and went over to the TV. The volume knob was still twisted all the way up. He let the sound buzz in his brain a moment before reaching down to shut it off.

He looked around the room. The ratty carpet was cleaner than usual. It was pushed to one side like

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a rough comb over from where the furniture had been pulled clear of the door. Despite it all small dark stains could be seen in various patches around the room. The old man's guns were still propped against the china cabinet beside the window. It must have been Wednesday since James' dad was last here.

Lucian turned and headed down the hall. He followed the trail of light waiting at the end. The last door sat at a crack. He didn't knock. He grabbed the doorframe and pushed the fiberboard, letting it swing open on its own.

He could see James, slumped over at the tiny desk shoved into the corner. His head lie resting on his arms, watching nothing.

"Where were you?"

James raised his eyes to him.

"They passed out flyers in the gym. Kids started a search party after school." Lucian took a step in and kicked the door closed. "Where were you?"

James pulled his arms in, sitting up slowly. "I didn't think anyone would notice."

"Everyone noticed."

Both boys were quiet a moment. Lucian came to stand in front of him.

"What did I tell you?"

James lowered his head again, digging his hands into his sandy hair. His shoulders slumped

in.

Lucian brought his hands down on the desk. "Look at me!"

James' hands tightened in his hair. His head stayed lowered.

Lucian leaned over him. His hands choked the edge of the desk. James didn't move. Lucian jerked the desk back, knocking his elbows off the side. The lamp beside him keeled and hit the floor.

"Stop." James pulled the desk back towards him.

Lucian grabbed his arm and yanked him forward. "I swear to Christ," he said.

James tried to jerk free. "Stop!"

"This isn't a fucking dog, James. We can't just leave the gate open."

James knocked his hand away. When Lucian reached down again James stood from his chair. Lucian's stopped.

James was still. He watched him, his bloodshot eyes empty with tears. Lucian waited. After a moment of nothing he stepped beside him.

"Next time, do what I say."

He turned and headed for the door.

"Her family's making a thing about it," he said. "The cops will probably talk with you again soon."

He made it home in time. He parked his car in the carport and took the side door into the house. His mother was in the kitchen. He knew she'd expected him to go with

his friends to help look for Charlie. He told her he'd gone to see James instead. That was okay to say.

His mother had always liked James. When they were kids they'd spent hours after school playing soldiers around the block. James' sleeping bag had been permanently set up in Lucian's room. He spent more time there than at home. When he'd found the puppy, Lucian's mom had let James keep it in the backyard.

His mother liked to talk about those times, especially in public. She would smile, and Lucian could see the pride she held for all the things she remembered. Like she'd been doing James a favor, setting up play dates with her son and the poor little trailer boy from church, whose mamma always brought store bought pie on potluck.

"You were always such good boys," she'd say.

She never talked about the times after, or the times in between. It was never about the days he'd come in from playing, red faced with tears on his cheeks. She never mentioned all the toys that had broken, or what happened to the puppy when it was gone.

"You should invite him over for dinner," his mother spoke, dropping a few things into a pot on the stove. "Poor James. I'm sure this is hard on him. He and Charlie must have been going together since middle school."

Lucian said nothing.

"You two were such good boys," she said. "I never understood why you stopped seeing each other."

He frowned.

"You were just such good friends. I mean, sure, you could be bossy, and he certainly had his little temper, but boys will be boys. You used to be inseparable. It was like once he met Charlie you two just stopped." She kept her hands busy so she didn't have to look at him.

Lucian filled a glass from the sink. "I got busy," he said.

His mother shook her head. Once they started middle school Lucian was never around when James came by. When he was he didn't take the phone. There were plenty of times his mother had hung up on James, telling him Lucian wasn't home while he sat on the couch watching M\*A\*S\*H.

He left his mother to go upstairs. When his father came home from work they all sat around the table, saying grace for the less fortunate like James, then filling their plates until the serving bowls were empty.

It was midnight when he heard a knock on his window. As soon as he opened the storm screen James crawled in, his hands wet and gritty from the rain soaked shingles. Lucian moved aside before ducking his head through to check out back.

"Are you stupid?"

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He glanced down the lattice, not bothering to whisper. The only other rooms on the third floor were the guest room and the bathroom.

“No one saw me,” James said.

He shut the window and turned to face him.

“How do you know?”

James went over to his door. He took the handle and pushed it all the way into the frame, making sure it clicked.

Lucian stepped forward.

“How do you know?”

James leaned his forehead against the wood.

“I asked you a question.”

“Shut the fuck up.”

“Someone could have seen you,” he said. “You shouldn’t be here, why the hell did you-”

“I said shut up!”

James’ voice bounced back at him from the door. Lucian’s words dropped off.

He stayed there a second longer before releasing the handle. He turned to face Lucian.

“You talk too much.”

Lucian was still. James stepped away from the door, coming into the moonlight. His eyes were rimmed and empty.

“You yelled at me today, too,” he said.

Lucian watched him carefully.

“Right in my face. Like a dog.”

James stopped in front of

him. It was familiar, the way he looked at him. Like when they were boys. His right hand was open, his left twisted up into a fist. Lucian said nothing. It was better to just let him.

James brought his hand around. It cracked against Lucian’s jaw, sending the taste of blood through his mouth. He kept his head turned away until James grabbed his throat and straightened him, his eyes reddening again.

“You think you can talk to me like that?” His fingers tightened around his neck. “You’re not my old man.”

He couldn’t help it. Lucian knew he couldn’t. Maybe it had been his old man. After all that time maybe he’d knocked something loose in him.

Lucian tilted his chin, dropping his jaw to suck in a breath. He didn’t fight. It never helped. Maybe if Charlie had known to stay still, none of this would have happened. But she hadn’t always known James, not like he had. James loved her, sure, but not in the right way. Not in the way a good boy should love a woman.

It was always Lucian who had known him best. He’d hidden the toys James left broken, and the puppy when he’d done the same. He left the gate open and told James not to say anything. He promised him he’d never have to worry.

James was angry, but the redder his eyes got, the looser his grip became. Soon his hand was only a touch on Lucian's neck. Salt water flooded his eyes briefly before disappearing. Then there was nothing.

They stood together in the dark. Lucian didn't move. James kept his hand on his neck. It felt different for a second, like it did in those days during junior high, when they only talked after everyone else had gone to bed.

After a moment James let go. He turned away, back toward the door. Lucian reached up to rub his neck.

"My old man came back," he said.

The words were heavy. Lucian dropped his hand.

"He was drunk, maybe, I don't know. He was looking for a fight." The tension returned to his voice. "He started yelling at me, said he'd heard about Charlie, thought I might have something to do with it."

There wasn't a need to guess. If you knew James, you knew. But few did. Fewer and fewer.

James scrubbed his face with his hands, pushing them through his hair. "I warned him, if he ever came back. This isn't my fault. He always tries to fight when he's drunk. I had to defend myself. He shouldn't have talked about Charlie like that anyway." He sat down on the edge of the bed. "Maybe I was a

little drunk too, but not like him. He just wouldn't shut up."

He continued on like that for a minute or two. Lucian waited before he spoke. Eventually James trailed off.

"Where is he?"

It was still dark when they reached the park. Lucian pulled the car around back and popped the trunk. Within a few hours they were heading east out of Charlottesville, past the old cemetery and onto the dirt road. The gravel was packed down to a washboard, but the weight in the trunk kept them steady. On the way back at dawn, the route looked the same.

# Goodbye Yellow Brick Road

*Ryan Caron*

The gray gravel driveway crunches under rubber as I coast up the path and towards the dilapidated old house. The house is several hundred yards from the main road, which is more of a dirt trail enveloped in several miles of woods. The property is isolated. There are neighbors, but you would have to drive several minutes away before you could find them; not exactly the kind you can borrow a cup of sugar from.

As I park and exit my little silver Volvo, I look on at the living memory that seems to stand just as strong as the day I left. The front door, an off-white color, is closed on the face of the faded yellow house that has remained unoccupied for many years. Somehow, the arts-and-craft clay flowerpot remains ensconced in the edge of the wooden railing of the old patio. The heat of the summer sun beats down on my back and I perspire as the humidity weighs itself on my lungs.

I walk toward the patio and up the steps, which groan under the now unfamiliar weight each step brings, and reach for the flowerpot.

Good. He didn't move it. I pick up the key that lies underneath.

I replace the clay pot, open the door, and walk in to see that, much like the exterior, the interior is just the same. The dark brown couch with the patchwork quilt draped over the back occupies the center of the living room, situated in front of an archaic wood-paneled television set. A tall lamp with a stained glass, multicolored shade stands in the corner. The carpet ends suddenly on the dividing line between the living room and the linoleum-floored kitchen, where a gas stove and the most hideous, putrid-green, metallic fridge can be found. I walk in and pass everything else, proceeding directly to the back room. The door sticks, unwilling to open freely, so I throw my shoulder into it and pop it open. A small mist

of splinters follows. I curse under my breath as a splinter ricochets into my arm and cuts my left wrist just beneath a razor-thin scar. The gash isn't deep enough that I'm spraying like a Quentin Tarantino movie and the blood that does come won't stain my black blazer, so I wipe it on the wall and let it be.

The different knives, the oil barrel, and all the various tubes and tools that I remember being here are gone, the room completely empty but for the faint smell of ammonia. I wonder if he threw it away of his own accord or if someone discovered it upon his passing. Whatever the case, it's a weird but welcome change to the state of the room. I back out of the doorway and turn around to another directly adjacent to it: my old room. I place my palms on the surface of the door and push it open because the doorknob was broken years ago, even before I left. If everything else had remained the same, my room had changed completely since the night I left. The bed wasn't overturned, the dresser was standing, the lamp didn't lie broken on the floor, and the closet door I had broken had been replaced. My stuffed monkey with the fez hat even hung with his arms wrapped around the bedpost, floating above the bed with his tail resting on old pink pillows. The only thing that hadn't been replaced was the picture frame on the nightstand,

which was now absent, and the long mirror residing on the back of the door. A spider web crack begins around the middle and stretches toward the outer edge of the mirror. I stare into it, greeted by an olive-skinned woman with shoulder-length, straight raven hair, naturally black with a violet hue, striking emerald green eyes, and sharp, angular features; however, the crack gives the mirror a funhouse effect, so there are a thousand false gems in the shards, eyes vying for my attention. It's creepy.

I walk through the back door of the house and out into the yard, greeted by endless crimson poppy flowers and a breeze. I see the metal shutter doors of the storm shelter poking through the red petals and the aluminum shed, rusty and hobbled, but still standing. The poppies used to be grown in rows and separated clearly from the grass, but left unattended they have divided and conquered the pasture. I think of Rosie and how she would have loved this.

"Francis," she would say, "look at all the flowers!"

"Careful," I would respond, "If you fall in, they'll eat you right up!"

She would giggle and say, 'That wouldn't be so bad.'

My breath catches and a knot forms in my chest, but it has nothing to do with the humid Omaha air.

# The Talon

Among the red poppies, we lived; we felt the fresh rays of dawn bathe our skin; we watched the sunset sink beneath the sea of glowing green and flee through the tree leaves into the night; in that prairie field, we loved and were loved in return. The only thing redder than those poppies were Rosie's cheeks, flushed scarlet with delight at some trivial event made significant by her joy. I pick the biggest and lushest poppy I see in the field and take it to our big green cedar tree, laying it on a big knot at the base of the trunk. We lived by the flower and, so too would it seem, we died by it.

I walk back to the house and into the living room. I stand for a moment and stare at the wall, gazing at nothing. For the first time, I realize that the house has developed the dank musk of empty homes, the destitute aroma of the abandoned and lonely, the lingering death of occupancy. I can't stand it. I sit on the couch and feel a sharp pinch in my lower left thigh; it's a needle in an empty syringe. Now I can stand, apparently. And throw things. And scream. And cry. And rip shelves from bookcases with no books. And swing tacky lamps at plaster walls. And put holes in plaster walls. And punch plaster walls. And hit a support beam behind a plaster wall. And cry harder because my wrist decides to try its hand at contortion. And scream expletives at plaster

walls. And ceilings. And kick plaster walls. And forget there's a support beam behind the plaster wall. And howl like a dog as I stub my toe. And fall clumsily to the ground in a dramatic heap.

After what I feel to be a suitable amount of morose moping and feeling sorry for myself curled in the fetal position, I extricate myself from the scratchy brown carpet and hobble to the kitchen counter for support because hot coals of regret are still burning in my foot. That's when I notice his door is open. It never used to be open. I put pressure on my foot and, when I decide nothing is broken, I walk through the door.

In the seventeen years that I lived in my father's house I only ever remember being in his room four times: three to hide under his bed because he had forgotten to lock the door when he wasn't home and Rosie and I were playing hide-and-seek, and once the night Rosie died to tell him that I would never be back. Yet here I am, standing in the doorway of a dead man.

It's taken me years to pass through this doorway. It's been almost five since he passed away. I couldn't even bring myself to go to the funeral in Kansas. I should probably feel guilty, but I don't. He promised great things with beautiful lies and tantalizing flowers but gave people nothing but false hope and temporary access to a wonderful

land that never existed in the first place; when it was gone, it left them with nothing but an unfillable hole and track marks. Every time he opened that hole, a little bit of their soul escaped along with their worries, doubts, and dreams.

When Rosie decided to try the Kool-Aid and drank too much, I blamed him. She drowned in the drink he had made; he may not have given it to her, but it was his drink nonetheless. I wouldn't wait to be crushed under the weight of his mistakes like she was; his path was his own, but my future lied beyond his yellow brick road.

So I left. Traveled west, dressed in the clothes I had on my back and a bag filled as full as it could get. I worked my way through community college and night classes, and took on an astronomical amount of debt I still haven't completely paid off yet going through a pharmaceutical program in San Francisco. That's when I got a call that he had been shot in the head, probably by some junky that needed a fix but couldn't pay him, and he had left everything he owned to me: a house of horrors and a field of poison.

"No thanks," I told the lawyer before clicking off the call.

Wicked as I may have been, I was angry; he reaped the seeds he sowed, at least one of them anyway, and I couldn't find the time to feel bad. But I did, which became

evident in the years that followed. So I came back. Returned to this backwoods penthouse. Just to satiate my morbid curiosity, to visit the mausoleum of my childhood.

The long journey that led to the first step through this doorway was surreal; it was like stumbling through the wardrobe, tumbling down the Rabbit hole, flying up to the second star to the right and straight on 'til morning. But it was different. There was no magical land over the rainbow where youth lives eternally in reckless abandon, no fairytale where the innocent are protected by a black-and-white shield of ignorance: only a morally inept reality comprised of a million shades of grey.

I see his room is the same, but for a small shrine on an old oak armoire. I drift over to investigate. A thousand clippings of pictures adorn the exterior of a makeshift jewelry box; some I have seen before, most I have not. Miniature Rosies and Francises are scattered about and mingle erratically with other figures, mostly their father. Every picture the man shares with his daughters captures a permanent grin on him and wide, mirthful laughs on them. The collage, though faded and relatively colorless with age, glows radiantly in my eyes.

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# *Faerie Court*

*Soft music falls from  
Painted lips. The Queen's  
New human pet. Boychild  
He was, and he sang  
Like a Nightingale.*

*(Three coins say she's rid  
Of the trembling brat  
'fore a week has past)*

*Beside me sits an  
Unseelie braggart  
Peering at the new  
Toy I have. A red  
Music box it is.*

*(It sings with the voice  
Of a foolish girl  
Who longed for true love)*

*Ignoring her, I  
Watch the evening show  
A marvelous dance  
By human maidens  
Dressed in gowns of silk*

*(The red iron clad  
Feet smash and crash as  
They dance their lives away)*

*Leaning back, I sip  
Sweet wine brought to me  
By the serving wench.  
She flinches as I  
smile, fearing my bed.*

*Oh, lord. What jewels these  
Mortals be, indeed.*

**Matthew Sauls**

## ***Kallisti***

*This small seed sleeping in the soil,  
With much time yet until its toil,  
Rests its small head on its warm bed,  
As its wee roots begin to coil.*

*That seed grew, and it touched the sky.  
It bore fruit from branches on high.  
Apples hung like tons of suns,  
Perfect and in ample supply.*

*The tree's children could grow no more,  
Ev'ry one fell from branch to floor.  
Their ideal peels of gold had rolled,  
All along rotten to the core.*

## ***Emerge***

*Open to new day  
Flowing out into the world  
Hear the robin sing*

## ***Pink, Fuzzy Flower***

*Her yard that had a big mimosa tree  
Is where I used to climb to think and hide,  
And watch the birds, the children and a bee  
That wanted to see the bloom by my side.  
That day as it flew close to where I sat,  
I did not notice where it was flying.  
I was watching kids playing with a cat.  
My hand went to sleep. I began trying  
To move it around and get the blood back  
Into my mitt. With the sting in my thigh  
I thought that I suffered under attack,  
And shouted shrieks as I fell from the sky.  
Mrs. Henley hugged me tight that day.  
The kids watched me, instead of going to play.*

**Dana Sundquist**

## ***Chasing the Dragon***

*He drove along rows of identical ivy covered homes,  
though not until they were swallowed into Shadow,  
accompanied only by silver beams Moon rained  
as She looked down, over him  
following his every move.*

*Ten cent pistols whistled through air,  
alley juice bottles kissed pavement,  
Blue Devils danced through hungry fires  
stainless steel pierced porcelain skin,  
let us see who breaks whom,  
the symphony of this southern town  
engulfed him.*

*Only she found a way to escape Fate's  
oak tangling grip.*

# ***I Will Pretend Not To Remember***

*When you tell me to meet you at 10 o'clock sharp in your favorite coffee shop  
I should pretend not to remember,  
Because when the time comes I'll only be standing outside  
Waiting for a flash of red to make my heart beat faster than the speed you  
are driving,  
While you're actually still in bed, dreaming  
Of her.*

*When you advance towards me,  
Arms wide open,  
I probably shouldn't hug you back, or  
Show a hint of the longing I feel to be in your  
Arms. You'll only hold on too tight, make me love you  
Too much, end up leaving too soon. Your arms  
Will tattoos themselves around me, no amount  
Of scrubbing or scratching will remove  
The permanent markings left behind.*

*When you ask me why I've cocooned myself in walls of ivy, bricks, fire,  
I will pretend not to remember.*

**Alexandra Munoz**

# *Fingiré no Recordar*

*Cuando me digas que te encuentre a las 10 en punto en tu café favorito,  
Debería fingir no recordar,  
Porque cuando el tiempo venga solo me quedare parada afuera  
Esperando que un destello rojo haga a mi corazón palpitar más rápido que la velocidad  
en la que manejas,  
Mientras tú todavía te encuentras en cama, soñando  
Con ella.*

*Cuando tu avanzas hacia mi,  
Brazos ampliamente abiertos,  
No debería abrazarte de regreso, o  
Mostrar un toque de la añoranza que siento por estar en tus  
Brazos. Tu solo me aferraras por demasiado tiempo, hacerme amarte  
Demasiado, terminarte yendo demasiado pronto. Tus brazos  
Se tataran alrededor mío, ninguna cantidad  
De depurar o rascar removera  
Las marcas permanentes dejadas atrás.*

*Cuando me preguntes porque me capullo entre paredes de hiedra, ladrillos, fuego  
Fingire no recordar.*

# *All the World is Yours*

*All the World is Yours,*

*shrouded in a sea of stars,  
which often tread their cosmic trails  
and tell eternally their tales  
of heroes fighting monsters who  
reflect the fears of not a few;*

*covered by the ocean deep,  
from which the spark of life began  
with single cells which would expand  
into a group from which came you  
and all of those you ever knew;*

*cloaked in clouds and whispered winds,  
which carry creatures of the wing  
and cause the leaves of trees to sing  
while chirping birds begin to mew  
into the setting shades of blue;*

*wreathed beneath concreted roads,  
emblazoned by the mark of man  
and all that happened by His hand.  
He will demand with loathsome smirk,  
You gaze upon His mighty works.*

*But who is man but grains of sand,  
and what's the world, the little Earth,  
compared beside a universe?*

*Among the indefinable  
and vast expanse of all that is,  
Meaning only comes from you.  
Knowing that and nothing else,  
All the World is Yours.*

**Ryan Caron**

# Love is All and Gone

## The Seed

*I found the seed that famously declares  
 a war with ruby blossoms red as blood  
 that roots inside the heart and will ensnare  
 the unaware the day its flowers bud  
 The seed that grows in barren, arid grounds,  
 or murky swamps ensconced in em'rald moss,  
 or tundras wearing permafrosted gowns,  
 or jungles draped in vines and humid gloss,  
 can summon light among the darkest shade  
 and flourish, even in the deadest place.  
 Its petals fall, with wondrous serenade,  
 to wash the lotus eaters foolish face.  
 My heart, it seems, was taken unaware;  
 the seed has planted, much to my despair.*

## The Spark

*It's funny how a spark can lead to flames  
 engulfing all the world you ever knew  
 and leaving nothing but a single name  
 to seize your faculties in sudden coups.  
 A fire burning bright in darkened nights  
 Invites a moth to bathe inside its heat,  
 consuming all when foolish wings ignite  
 among the fires flickering retreat.  
 The coals that stoke the blaze, though hot to hold,  
 incite in men a fervid passion fierce  
 as life provides. A lonely heart is cold  
 until a kiss allays the lonesome fears.  
 My empty heart has known a vacancy  
 relieved by sparks that light inside of me.*

## The Sink

*When craters break a flat and perfect land,  
 a void is left that fills with freezing lakes  
 of water left by rain that drops from hands  
 that form in clouds when stratus levees break.  
 But though the space appears to be complete  
 with level planes symmetrical with all  
 surrounding fronts, ceruleanic sheets  
 conceal a deep abyss, a tragic fall.  
 When anglers are thrust into the pool  
 by turbulence and shattered dinghys,  
 the gaping maw consumes them between cruel  
 teeth to lie beneath the waves of a mini sea.  
 The men pursuing what they love are made  
 into a corpsy anchor to be laid.*

## *Twenty-One*

*We heard the ghosts of rifle rounds  
as twenty on engaged the air  
in dreary cemetery grounds.*

*We mourned the boy of twenty-one,  
who bore the clothes a soldier wears,  
when morning brought a setting sun.*

*We watched him sink into a grave  
beneath a bronze and marble square,  
enlisting with the fallen brave.*

*His mother's heart and father's name  
were lost to loosened dogs of War  
when angels saw his soul reclaimed*

*and all the seeds he'd never sow  
and all the years he'd never bear  
were lost to moments never known.*

*The vacancy the boy had left  
could not be filled with solace prayers,  
or simple words of sad regret.*

*He's not the first or last undone,  
too young to leave this mortal sphere,  
the boy who died at twenty-one.*

**Ryan Caron**

## ***Outing on an Irish Causeway***

*Strange.*

*How time leans forward and makes the present feel like a thing of the past.*

*But then it is.*

*Each singular second streaming along*

*Finds its self lost and lacking relevance.*

*Like breaths that manage to escape greedy lungs.*

*Joining the masses that have come before*

*and the countless prepredicted which will follow after.*

*Reclaimed by the void of which it came, but which it also never left.*

*Part of that infinite being*

*There is solace.*

*That which never belonged to anyone.*

*Lacking the consequence of loss,*

*It all comes together whilst falling apart.*

*It is retched and hopeless and perfect.*

## *Nostalgia*

*some fish*

*live in limbo*

*—longing for*

*a place in dreams, a memory*

*a certain slant of light*

*an egg-shaped curve of stone*

*a rushing rapid*

*— until together they return*

*deposit treasure*

*and lie undreaming*

*among the stones*

*“...it is as if I had a string somewhere under my left ribs,  
tightly and inextricably knotted to a similar string situated  
in the corresponding quarter of your little frame.”*

**–Mr. Rochester, Jane Eyre**

## **Curious String**

*i am no jane, no alien thing  
yet here beneath my ribs  
i feel a string  
of ever-love  
that tethers me to you*

*wind may take me  
fire enchant me  
siren voices call me*

*but curious string  
it pains me  
till i come to you  
again*

## ***For West, Jack's Son***

*Why do you resist me?*

*The snake-knots of your sinew  
writhe and beg in moonlight  
against your will.*

*Your unintended dawn teeth  
flash secrets, bare  
inferences for keen eyes to see.*

*Your pores and hands whisper  
yearning things from misty woods  
silent for years, nearly forgotten.*

*Your pores and hands and dawn teeth call  
to me. Your snake-knot sinew writhes  
and begs for me. Your misty  
woods remember, cry out, crave.*

*Why do you resist me?*

*I have nothing to give that my eyes  
haven't given already.  
My feral heart has no more  
than the fire blazing through it.  
My eager mouth has no more than midnight  
breath whispered against your close skin.  
My intentions are no more than your  
loosed sinew on misty-dawned morns  
uncoiling  
uncoiling  
in my arms.*

*Why do you resist me?*

**Amy Luznicky**

## ***Kenneth Goldsmith Interview***

*To me,  
cut and paste is writing you know.  
It's all the same to me.  
I have no problems  
with, uh, the craft of writing.  
It's a craft in and of itself,  
but a very different kind of craft.*

*I should know - I'm very crafty.  
Are you impressed yet with how crafty I am?  
I won a profile in *The New Yorker*;  
MOMA made me poet laureate:  
All accolades in praise  
of uncreative writing.*

*What's that?*

*Uncreative writing deals  
not with individual words,  
but with data sets.*

*Data sets  
can then be sculpted to construct  
an avant-garde career  
for a provocative word-processor like me  
because, you know,  
it's all the same to me:  
Cut and paste;  
Poetry;  
The autopsied body of Michael Brown in Ferguson;  
The lifeless body of Christ in the tomb in Jerus'lem.*

*It's all the same to me.*

## *Map-Making (pt 1)*

*Spread out against my grandmother's kitchen table, a blank canvas lay,  
its corners draped over the round table's frame,  
its edges filled the sitting room,  
and I paced around the table with pens, rulers  
and protractors in hand.*

*Closing my eyes in meditation,  
I envisioned my world –  
all its rugged beauty –  
all its climbing mountains –  
all its singing forests –  
all its pouring waters –  
all its resting valleys –  
all its neat perfection.*

*I plotted landmarks I'd visit first;  
I visualized the trail I'd blaze in my world.  
After sketching the images into the air,  
I took my cartographer's tools,  
and the lines danced onto the pages.*

*Continents arose  
and rivers flowed  
and mountain with icy peaks grew.*

*Slowly, at first, their outlines morphed;  
then it all evolved into the world I wished to travel.*

*My best calligraphy emblazoned each river crossing,  
each mountain path, each valley rest,  
each moment I planned to cherish.  
And the ink dried, and, finalized, the map was folded,  
put into a pack, and awaited departure.  
When morning dawned the start of the day  
(and the start of the journey),*

## *Map-Making (pt 2)*

*I set off from Grandmother's house to the first landmark,  
 the River Transition, a mile-wide expanse of water  
 dotted with sandbars and islands for a smooth journey across.  
 After hours of travel, I crowned the hill overlooking the river,  
 but in the valley below, I found  
 no nestled riverbed, no rushing rapids,  
 a simply empty valley full of daffodils and lilacs  
 dancing in sporadic lines to the tune carried by the wind.*

*Unperturbed, I journeyed further to my next stop:  
 a mountain range worth hiking over,  
 for at the top, I would see  
 the world I built in perfect majesty!  
 Feet stepping true, hands grasping true,  
 I reached the pinnacle of the highest peak,  
 and stretched before this zenith lay –  
 lay a world I had not drawn.*

*Fumbling through my pack, I found, at length, my map,  
 and everything was drawn the way I recalled.  
 Had I gone the wrong direction?  
 Had I taken a wrong turn? a wrong step?*

*The chilly breeze gusted as the sun dusked,  
 and the clouds, great thunderheads, condensed.  
 The map, unfurled and humming with the wind,  
 rattled the breath of dying bones;  
 the ink seemed to fade, to retreat, with every  
 tossing gale carrying the scent of rain.  
 It seemed to cry for mercy as the rain  
 pelted it with ballistic artillery,  
 and the ink, bleeding out, ran  
 off the edges of the map of the world  
 I created at my grandmother's table.*

**Christopher B. Bivins**

# *Echoes*

*Listen to the echoing knell of lost generations  
when teenagers call to each other.*

*The canon rounds cry so faintly:*

*the lamentations of an abandoned mother  
when the daughter asks for a pencil;*

*the lamentations of an impoverished father  
when the son lashes out in anger;*

*the lamentations of an underserved family  
when the brothers cry “Injustice!”*

*We have ears so we can hear,*

*and the canon-ripples spread and fade, spread  
and fade, spread and fade:*

*the lamentations, though, reverberate –as hearts  
beat –*

*and begin the next refrain.*

# ***This Poem***

*This poem has no meaning.  
It is not about love or loss,  
Seeing the universe in your eyes,  
Loneliness or bus stations,  
Happiness or sleepless nights,  
Forests or the endless ocean.  
It is not sad and it will never end.  
This poem has no meaning,  
And that should be enough.*

## ***Istanbul***

*Upon the ancient roads of Istanbul,  
I saw the minarets of mosques and how  
they perforate the sky, as turquoise as  
the ornamented tiles within the domes.  
Those domes, which house the tourists there,  
marv'ling while songs that echo through the streets  
do call the ones who clasp their hands and pray.*

*And by the waters of the Bosphorus,  
beyond the caravanserai, there stands  
a palace where once there ruled the sultans.  
Where once the walls so high did keep a place  
so secret, fountains gurgling, thrones bejeweled,  
and harems fraught with vengeance, love, and pow'r  
Is now an empty shell beside the sea,  
where tourists flock and gaze at days gone by.*



*Micro  
Fiction*

## From Dust to Dust

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## Indonesian Jungle Drabble

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# **From Dust to Dust**

*Matthew Kirby*

*All artifacts of the attic acquire hairy backs. Blowing books bound in it scatters the tattered coats, a blizzard to a gentle snowfall.*

*Douglas's hands tapped tapped the table, teak, and glanced at the wall clock like his eyes were themselves the pendulum. He looked down at his clammy hands, and only now did he notice his finger feather. He picked and picked at it with his freshly trimmed nails like one of those crane games. He seized it finally and tore the hangnail like a condiment packet. What came out looked like a ketchup, mustard, and mayonnaise concoction; it seeped out slowly till he squeezed his packet finger. The doorknob turned; he licked it clean and got it all over the heart that was in his throat.*

# **Indonesian Jungle Drabble**

*Amy Luznicky*

*There, amid the mist and moss of Kali Waterfall, the creature was seen – finally! A pygmy tarsier, not witnessed in the wild since the 1920s, foraged in the dark branches. Stephan’s heart beat wildly as his dumb fingers grasped for the zipper of his camera bag. Slowly, so slowly, he pulled, praying that the waterfall would drown out the sound. He slid his camera from the open mouth of the bag and sunk down onto one knee, steadying himself and framing the shot. As he focused the lens, he noticed a group of peculiar shapes rising from the jungle. Gondolas?*

*Creative  
Non-Fiction*

# How to Be an English Major

Alexandra Munoz

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*Featuring..*

# How to become an English Major

*Alexandra Munoz*

## One

**You must first fall in love with books.**

As a kid I was quite soft spoken and shy. I would spend my recess in the classroom on the reading carpet, no one ever noticed I wasn't out with the other kids.

I preferred the company of books to the company of other people. It was in the third grade when I first fell in love with books, all thanks to one J.K. Rowling.

## Two

**Try your hand at another language.**

Growing up in a Latino household with parents that spoke little to no English meant that Spanish was the only language allowed. English was something I was expected to learn during the eight hours I was at school. As many of you who have taken Grammar, Linguistics, and/or The History of the English Language know, English is a complex and sometimes ridiculous language. It was not easy, but after a few years of reading, writing, watching t.v., and speaking in this language, I lost my accent, but was able to boast being fluent in two languages as a child.

## Three

**Stop resisting Shakespeare, he has already let himself into your life.**

During my freshman year of college I sincerely thought I would only have to deal with Shakespeare maybe once, in one lit class..... I was wrong.

I joined the English Honor Society at my college, where I met a horrible little man. Rude and stubborn, I hoped never to bump into him on campus again.

The Bard of Avon had different plans, however. During the honor society's annual Shakespeare Bake Sale, held on Shakespeare's death day, I was set to work our table with an interesting older man whose war stories I found fascinating. He was not the one who walked down the hallway towards the table when it was time for setup, however. Instead, the horrible little man who I vowed to stay away from did.

His name is Aaron, and now he have two fur children together.

## Four

**Don't be afraid to write it down.**

Once I hit high school I found myself overwhelmed with emotions, I never quite grew out of being 13. Writing, I soon discovered, was the only cure for me. I took every possibly writing class my small suburban school offered. From research and technical writing to creative writing, I was in all of them, and enjoyed every bit of time I spent in the classroom. Writing isn't just an escape, it is a way to preserve yourself.

## Five

It's okay not to know.

When I started college, I was sure I wanted to teach, and I knew I was too far gone into nerdism to bother finding a way back out. Teaching English seemed the ideal career path to go down, so I started my journey at a community college pursuing an Associate of Arts in Teaching. After three semesters at community college, I let myself get impatient, and rather than staying a full time student, I decided to half my time between Northwest Arkansas Community College, and the University of Arkansas, where I declared my studies in English Lit and German.

The university was beautiful, the library magical, the secret crooks and cranies to hide away and read all too perfect.

### **And of course, too good to be true.**

Splitting my time between two campuses, helping run a couple of student organizations, maintaining a weekend job and making time to help at the family business, assuring my brothers were good to go each day while my parents made sure the other noticed they were being ignored, and a failed attempt to develop and keep a social life outside of school and work, the pressure built until I imploded. I experienced my first anxiety attack while at work preparing one of my favorite foods, pizza. How cruel the universe.

Following this, I lost much of what little motivation I had to keep going and failed out of most of my classes, which left me with very limited options to finish my bachelor's degree.

I'd visited NSU once before with that horrible little man from the bake sale, after I'd found he wasn't actually all that horrible.

Deciding to give it a shot, I filled all applications and paperwork that lead to my transfer here, where I have felt more at home than anywhere else. Though I didn't break the pattern of declaring an english education academic path first, I do not regret the english literature degree I am soon to complete.

In following these five steps, I cannot assure you that you will become an English Major, but thank you for your time or whatever.











