

Spooky Action at a Distance

enhanced excerpts from the collection *Twolvehbern*,

by Charles Wolfegang Keane Tuomi



“We all dressed up as Wolves
and **We LOoked Fire**”
Eldest Daughter (2025)



“Life was a
willow and it
bent right to
your wind”
Willow (2020)

TAYLOR
SWIFT

The name
“Kimberly”
means
“meadow of the
royal fortress”

The Life of a Showgirl

Studio album by Taylor Swift · 2025

The Leap from the Bridge is Ungainly

The leap from the bridge is ungainly.

It is not at all the elegant diver's pose he has envisioned. It is a clumsy fall with pinwheeling arms. One moment he stands on the ledge, and in the next he simply steps off,

steps out,
drops down...

With his stomach floating somewhere several meters above him, James squints into the wind, focused on the rapidly approaching river.

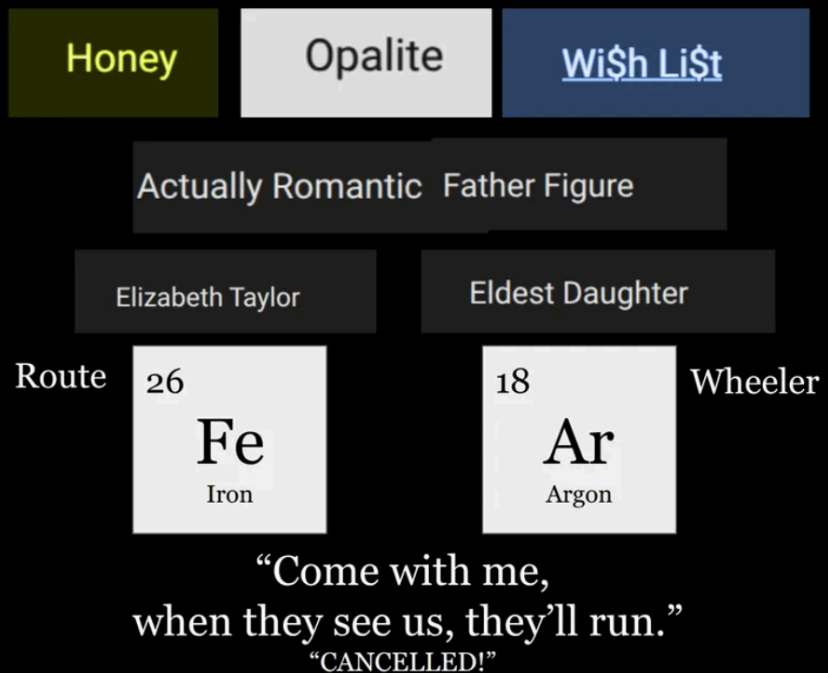
Things begin to happen.

#

For instance:
The phone rings. Rang. Whatever.

He lifts it from its cradle to find an unfamiliar, queerly accented voice occupying the other end of the line. Speaking slowly, the voice tells him a story, about an accident on Route 26 that could not have occurred. About a wet road, and a fictional eighteen wheeler with bad brakes. About (after an awkward pause) a death. The strange voice mentions only the one death. Apparently they do not count fetuses, James thinks, whilst tallying the imaginary deceased.

A long time after the odd voice on the other end of the phone has stopped its foolish talking, James lets the telephone drop to the kitchen floor.



#

He is about to die.

The river rushing to meet him teems now with human figures, clothed in white and floating like buoys tethered to the bottom: a host of green-white faces raised in his direction; tangles of serpentine hair wafting like seaweed; small round mouths open as if in hymn. Some of the faces are familiar: his mother, his father, a coworker whose name he forgets.

And of course Kim. She floats a little above the rest, her pixie face pale just below the surface, arms opened wide as if preparing an embrace. Her emerald eyes sparkle. A familiar smile curls her lips.

That's when James realizes the bungee cord will not hold. It's either too long, too loose, or it will snap.

He squeezes his eyes closed, bracing.

—————•—————

Vacuuming their living room for the first time after the funeral (again), he pulls the loveseat out from the wall, and a small paperback slips predictably from somewhere, landing on the carpet with that same soft *thunk*.

James (re)reads the cover: *Gateways to Other Realities*. One of Kim's books, one of the myriad New Age pseudo-mystical texts lying, half-read, around the house at all times.

He sits cross-legged in the middle of the living room floor, opens to the bookmarked page, and the passage he reads, through vision blurred by tears, imprints itself on his mind so vividly that he will conjure it up later (for instance, now) word for word:

"In Tibetan Buddhism there is bardo. Literally, the 'in-between'. A transitional condition or state, as may occur during meditation, or during the moment of dying, or in the gap between death and rebirth. Also sometimes during dreams. Pivotal moments, all, those upon which the direction of our lives, however many they may be, largely depend...Certain forms of meditation are used to reach this threshold, as are some hallucinogenic drugs. The point seems to be to go to the brink of death, or perhaps a little beyond, returning with the ability to walk between worlds. To bridge realities. To glimpse behind the curtain into the next room."

And so it would and does occur to James, eventually and now, again: That there is, that there might be, a Way. And that he might just try or have tried it.

—————•—————

He has perhaps two seconds left to live by the time he re-opens his eyes. His bones, all of them, will snap like brittle twigs when they hit the water at this speed.

The faces are close to the surface now. They rise to greet him, holding out their arms and smiling. Kim is positively beaming. She might be crying. It is hard to tell. It all happens so fast.

James smiles, too, and opens wide his arms.

There are costs to his border walking. Physical and otherwise.

After-effects, he will find, include dizziness, vertigo, and a confusing mixture of oddly combined tenses that leave him increasingly disoriented in his everyday life. He will also experience vague inexplicable limb pain, spatial disorientation, and her smiling face beneath a floppy white sun hat, specks of black potting soil dotting her pink nose and cheeks like

freckles.

Kim walks up the steps of their back porch, small and sunburned in a blue tank top and shorts. The glittering lake and the late afternoon sun is at her back, and she is, oh my god wasn't she beautiful.

They kiss(ed): Lips gritty with dirt, sun-warmed faces, the exhaustion of a hard day at work in the garden melting away. He touches, touched the softness of her cheeks; breathes, breathed in the scent of her, deeply: damp earth, sweat, new life, and her hair, like berries.

She pulls back at some point, gently, big green eyes expanding. He had never seen eyes like this, before hers; perfectly round, huge, open.

Kim's eyes.

"They," she whispers, had whispered, always whispers, cupping her comical little pot belly with two small hands, "were going to love this house."

James knows this is wrong. Kim had said, dammit Kim says, "are". But he smiles and agrees, agreed anyway. He always agreed, agrees.

Then she dances awkwardly there on the porch, in the red-pink glow of the sun setting across the lake, and he was dancing too and laughing, at the two small dirty handprints on her blue tank top, on either side of her pregnant middle.

She is, was Kim: His very own, a pot-bellied gorgeous miracle with soft tiny hands and enormous eyes and a smile that went, goes on forever.

The bungee cord holds.

It does not snap. It is not too long, and it is not too loose. An instant before he hits the seething river, James feels a hard jerk on his ankles.

There is a fraction of a moment then, a bardo, an in-between, before the tautness of the cord begins to pull him upward. In that measureless span of time, he is close enough to feel the river's icy spray on his cheeks, mere inches from Kim's face in the water below. Reaching out for her, he feels the river swallow his finger tips. She stretches her hand toward his.



It is as if she is his reflection. Literally **his better** half.



Willow (2020)



Image from the
video for “Bad
Blood”
(2014)

“Take my hand, that’s
my man.”

Willow (2020)

Then he is being taken away again, yanked upward violently. His body begins to spin and just before he loses sight of the river, Kim, her round face small now, purses her lips and blows him a kiss.

—————•—————

"Once not enough fer ya, huh?"

A lanky, suntanned kid takes a little blue ticket from James' hand. Spitting a mouthful of chaw over the side of the bridge, the boy shakes his head and grins, like he just knew it, like he had this guy pegged from the beginning. As he fastens the gear to James' ankles, he turns to his coworker, a girl collecting money and doling out tickets a few feet away.

"Hey Joanie. I think we got ourselves another addict here," he yells, gesturing at their latest repeat customer with a long thumb. He winks conspiratorially at James, gives him a hearty slap on the back. "You're all set."

James nods, steps onto the ledge, and takes a deep breath, looking straight down into the river. Sunlight glances off the dark, moving current like the twinkling of stars. There's nothing unusual, no one else in the water; not yet.

"Hey I's just joshin' ya man," the kid calls from behind him. "We all know the feeling, bro."

No, James thinks, as he steps out,
off,
down.

I didn't, don't think that you did do.

Whatever Happened to Tinkerbell

Written for my son on his 24th birthday in 2023

“But you keep sending me funny valentines

And I know you think it comes off vicious

But it's precious, adorable

Like a toy chihuahua barking at me from a tiny purse

That's how much it hurts

How many times has your boyfriend said

"Why are we always talking about her?"

Actually Romantic, by Taylor Swift (2025)

Once a stuffed moose named Moose left the store it had lived in for almost its whole life to come to Hadn't thought of you in a long time live with a young Boy.

Pretty much right away, the Moose and the Boy became the very best of friends. The Boy held Moose and hugged Moose and said nice things to him. They whispered secrets to each other and played games.

The Boy took Moose with him everywhere, even when he and his parents went out to places.

Because the Boy loved Moose.

And Moose loved the Boy.

One day, while the Boy's parents were shopping for a new house, the Boy and Moose both went along with them. It was an unfamiliar place. The Boy and Moose went exploring. Moose was holding the boy's hand, as always, but something caught his eye. In one of the bedrooms, there was a vase, and sprouting out of that vase was a collection of beautiful yellow lily flowers.

The lilies gave Moose an idea.

“I bet the Boy would really love one of those lilies,” Moose thought to himself, remembering all the times he had seen the Boy smile and laugh while they played together in the yard or went pirating around with one another in the woods. “And I bet if I just took one, the people who put them there wouldn’t even notice.”

There were a lot of lilies.

“It’ll just take a second,” Moose thought.

And Moose let go of the Boy’s hand, just to go fetch one of the flowers.

There are many things faster of foot than a stuffed Moose, so the task of flower fetching took Moose a while, longer than he expected. But eventually, he had fetched the Boy a perfect lily. He had climbed the bureau on which the vase stood, he had reached up and into it, and he had gingerly extracted a single lily. He had climbed back down the bureau and back into the hallway where he was sure the Boy would be waiting.

But the Boy was not there.

Moose looked up and down and left and right and the Boy was nowhere to be found.

Moose wasn’t worried though. The Boy and he did not spend *every second* together, even though it felt that way to both of them, in the best of ways. But the Boy and Moose always got back together again.

The Boy must be somewhere close.

So, Moose went looking. In every room on the second floor, then down the stairs to check all the rooms on the first floor too. The Boy was not there, and neither were any of the adults who had been in the house, either.

Moose was alone.

“That’s OK,” thought Moose. “The Boy has taught me well. I know how to be strong and fair and to keep trying until I succeed because I have seen the Boy do

that, over and over again. He makes it look easy. I can do that, too. I will find the Boy myself!”

So, with great effort, the Moose managed to find a way to open the door to the house and get outside. He made his way down the front steps and then the driveway and then into the street and he began walking.

He remembered watching a show on television with the Boy, where someone who needed a ride was walking down the road backwards with their thumb out.

“I’ll do that!” thought Moose.

But then Moose realized something.

He didn’t have thumbs.

So, Moose put down his head and he walked, and he walked. It started to get late, and his legs grew tired. But he kept walking and fought off the nagging sense that something was wrong.

“I must find the Boy,” thought Moose. And he thought of the Boy and how strong and kind he was and it gave him strength between steps to take the next one.

Then a car pulled up on the side of the road. The passenger side window scrolled down, and Moose saw a lovely little girl’s face looking back at him.

“Are you lost?” the girl asked.

Moose thought about not answering. This was not the Boy. He trusted the Boy. But he didn’t know this one, this Girl. But he needed to find the Boy. He needed to be brave. Like the Boy was.

“Yes.” Moose said. “I’m looking for the Boy.”

“Which Boy?” the girl asked.

“You know, the good one,” said Moose.

The girl turned to talk to the driver of the car. Then the door opened, and she leaned down to pick up Moose.

“I’m not sure I know him,” the Girl said. “But if you come with me, I promise I will try to help you find him.”

Moose looked into the Girl’s eyes. He didn’t even have a mouth, but his mouth dropped anyway.

The girl’s eyes. The kindness there. The warmth.

She was like the Boy. Moose loved her already.

“Ok,” he said. “Thank you.”

The girl held Moose in her lap as they drove to a new place. Her hands were different than the Boy’s. She held him not quite as tightly as the Boy did, and her fingers were slender in comparison to the Boy’s. But Moose liked how it felt. Just as much as he liked the way the Boy held him. They both made him feel good, just different.

“It sure is nice,” thought Moose. “To have TWO WHOLE FRIENDS.”

He had never even imagined that was possible.

When they arrived at the Girl’s house, she asked Moose about the Boy. What he looked like. What kinds of things he liked to do. The sound of his voice, where he went to school.

She giggled and asked Moose what color underwear the Boy wore.

Moose felt like he should say something about this being inappropriate, but he couldn’t help laughing instead.

Despite long and sincere heartfelt effort, the Girl and Moose were not able to find the Boy. Not for a long, long time, anyway. Longer than we have time to talk about today. But they became very good friends. Just like the Boy and Moose had been. But different.

Moose thought about the Boy every single day. All the time. And while he missed the Boy every day, all the time, Moose was never lonely.

And neither was the Girl.

Celestial

More or less true story, written in 2022

This scene feels like what I once saw on a screen

I searched aurora borealis green

I've never seen someone lit from within

Blurring out my periphery

My smile is like I won a contest

And to hide that would be so dishonest

And it's fine to fake it 'til you make it

'Til you do, 'til it's true

Like Snow at the Brach , by Tatylor Swift (2023)

“Like a toy chihuahua barking at me from a tiny purse”

Actually Romantic , by Tatylor Swift (2025)

It begins when an awkward broken boy to whom taking risks is entirely unheard of takes one anyway.

The girl is just that beautiful.

Their seventh-grade school day is coming to a close, and he is placing erasers in the closet at the back of the classroom when he notices her standing nearby. And by her, he means Her. Victoria. The coffee-colored wide-eyed slender exquisite otherworldly creature he has wondered at in deep and reverent disbelief from a safe distance all year.

Neither child knows they are about to save the world, but that's perhaps the best indication they might be about to do just that. Those who believe themselves to be saviors, after all, never are.

The risk the boy takes isn't a calculated one and to an onlooker might feel small, perhaps like nothing at all. Just a childish impulse. For reasons that will become clear to him only in retrospect many years hence, for a few moments he takes it upon himself to pretend that he is being dragged into the closet by an unseen monster. He makes a goofy mock-frightened face and wraps one of his own hands around his neck and acts as if he is desperately trying to claw his way out of its grasp.

He has probably never said more than a few consecutive words to the angel for which the performance is being given. He has no idea how it will be received. He hasn't thought it through.

And yet for a few seconds.

an Aurora in the shape of
the smile of
a girl made of
love itself
blossoms
miraculous
into being

and squinting into its brilliance, bathed in the heat of it, he feels like an actual person. As if he had heretofore existed solely as what he would later come to know as a wave function, a smear of probabilistic potential that only here, now, in the sight of this girl, collapses into a material being.

The sincere, open happiness in her face, a face the world does not deserve, overwhelms him entirely. It seems as if she not only sees and hears him but (and dear Lord how could this possibly be true) maybe even likes him.

She won't, she can't, know that the monster he is pretending to fend off is all too real, that his show is meant not simply to entertain but also to inform. He really doesn't know it himself.

But some part of him seems to, because his mind takes a snapshot of her there, grinning in her Catholic school uniform, and quickly finds someplace to keep it, tucked away deep, safe from the real horrors with which he has already become intimately acquainted. The ones that have climbed inside of him and now refuse to leave. The ones that will bring all the future darkness and which will make his thin and then not-so-thin frame feel heavy and increasingly burdened by an invisible anchor. The ones that will tempt and twist and torment him into mistakes as he advances in age, deeds which themselves will only plant seeds for more such terrors to take root within him.

The boy's memory will become legendary for being porous and vague, but this one memory will be a notable exception. This one he can and will summon on command, over and over, to serve as a lantern, or a beacon, allowing him to navigate the murky, oily sickness that is his inexplicable inheritance.

He will be able to see the girl's face forty years later as clearly he sees it now, and he will need to. Because somehow, for reasons not entirely clear to anyone, this one single, resplendent droplet of experience possesses the ability to set fire to the entire vast black ocean within him. That ocean will be polluted by past and future abuse and mistreatment and shameless ceaseless taking from him as if he were Silverstein's Giving Tree, until little remains but pain and an infuriating hope that doesn't have the wisdom to give up the ghost and...still, stubbornly, definitely, this.

Victoria's smile. Timeless and perfect and more potent somehow than any poison they can cram down his gullet, before, then, or since.

A simple, real smile that sets fire to the night of his childhood, blazing across his inner sky like an impossible comet, ending in time but never ending in reality.

A smile that went, goes on forever.

There are those who deny the cosmic significance of the smile, of course. I mean, saving the world, they ask? And the boy, who normally troubles himself a great deal with the opinions of others, won't trouble himself at all with this one.

You weren't there, he will say simply.

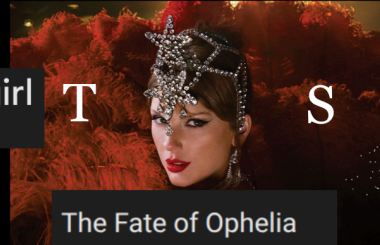
You didn't see it. I'm the only one who did.

That aurora was just for me.



The Life of a Showgirl

Studio album by Taylor Swift · 2025 ·



T S

The Fate of Ophelia

Elizabeth Taylor

Eldest Daughter

Ruin the Friendship

This is the way the world ends.
This is the way the world ends.
This is the way the world ends.
Not with a bang but a *Willow*.

T.S. Eliot

"The Hollow Men"



Willow (2020)