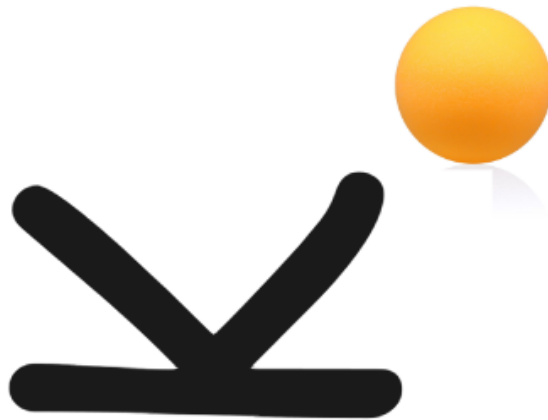


# Animated Shadow Dances Through Trees



an experiment designed to test  
how sobbing affects an old man's typing and  
writing abilities

by Charles Wolfgang Keane Tuomi

“The woods around me are imbued with an orange, flickering glow, provoking animated shadow dances among the trees.”

“you then asia”

Charles Tuomi



The Will o' the Wisp and the Snake by Hermann Hendrich  
(1854–1931)

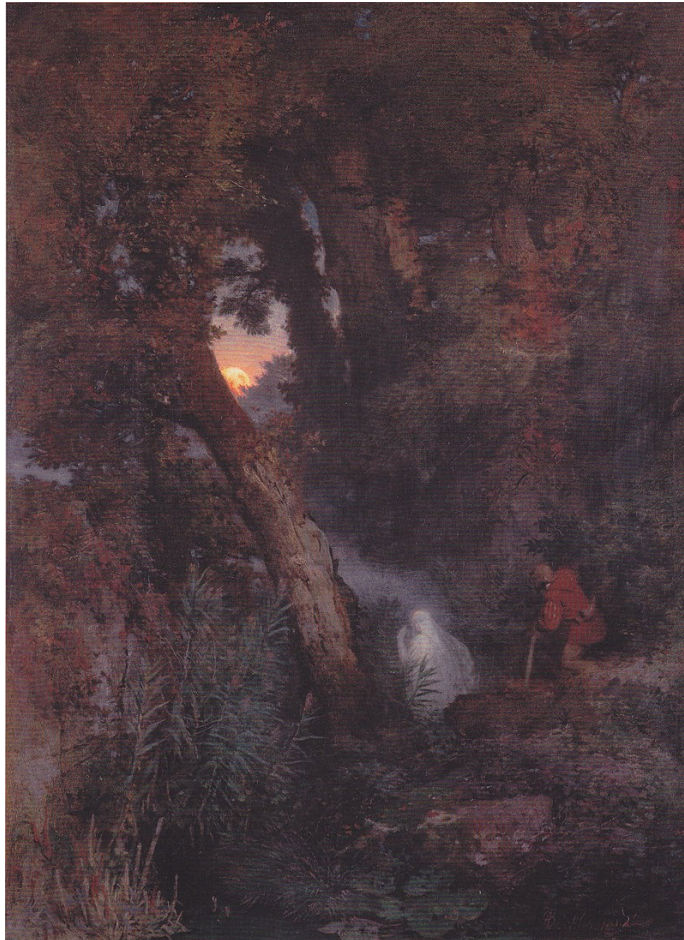
In folklore, a will-o'-the-wisp, or ignis fatuus is an atmospheric ghost light seen by travellers at night, especially over bogs, swamps or marshes. The phenomenon is said to mislead travellers by resembling a flickering lamp or lantern. In literature, will-o'-the-wisp metaphorically refers to a hope or goal that leads one on, but is impossible to reach, or something one finds strange or sinister.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Will-o%27-the-wisp>

Before me, two more 'hospital' buildings are engulfed in flames, burning like a sacrifice to long-vanished gods, a massive funeral pyre.

“you then asia”

Charles Tuomi



An 1862 oil painting of a will-o'-the-wisp  
by Arnold Böcklin

The Latin name *ignis fatuus* is composed of *ignis*, meaning 'fire' and *fatuus*, an adjective meaning 'foolish', 'silly' or 'simple'; it can thus be literally translated into English as 'foolish fire' or more idiomatically as 'giddy flame'.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Will-o%27-the-wisp>

## Ping pong



a glowing firefly

*The burning*, as one named Luis told me the other day,  
a harsh disembodied male whisper in my mind  
speaking in English with a street Latino accent, while I  
sat alone in my cramped kitchen sipping lukewarm  
tea: *keep it up*.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Will-o%27-the-wisp>

## The Ping Pong Game

Katie and I had a break from our duties as summer camp counselors at the same time one day. We went to the break room. There was a ping pong table. We started to play.

I was standing on the side of the table closest to the one wall in the room that had windows. On the wall behind Katie was a whiteboard, with various chore duties outlined, divvied up among the counselors. Someone had written the line from the Eagles song “Hotel California” on that whiteboard: “You can check out, but you can never leave.”

The ping pong game was a mere pretense. I don’t know if the windows were actually steaming, but it was just Katie and I in the room, alone, and the chemistry between us was potent.

Katie was very slender and freckled and had bright blonde hair. She had an equine face that was sort of goobery when she broke into a grin, which was always. Always looking at me and smiling. Inviting and teasing. Stealing my basketball while I was trying to shoot around in the gym. Taking the hat off my head and running away, making me chase her down.

She wasn’t even trying to make it look like she was interested in ping pong, just doing one taunting antic after another. Eventually I hit the ball to her side and she just snatched it out of the air with her hand, the one not holding the paddle. Daring me to cross the line and get it from her. I gestured for the ball. She smirked. I gestured again, said something like, “come on,” in a gentle way. She defied me. There was a standoff. I feigned annoyance. You can read about it in “you then asia.” It is the waiting period that occurs after Maria’s birth. It went on for a while. Was I going to come get her or not, so we could put the paddles down and get to the real business?

The prospect of detaching the machines is broached. You angrily resist for a long time. Two months.

I said something to the effect of “I’ll come over there and get it,” and the look on Katie’s face told me that was the point. So I did.

Eventually you can wait no longer...after no change whatsoever, you agree to take the machines away and *let nature take its course*.

I crossed over to Katie’s side of the table. A wrestling match ensued. Katie tucked the ball against her belly using both of her hands. I had to put my arms around her from behind and grab at them. Giggling. The feel of Katie’s skin on mine. She was wearing a thin white blouse, I think, and denim shorts. *Heat*. God the fucking heat: the weather, the day. Us. I reached and grabbed. Her hands and the ping pong ball lifted, heading north. I groped. Katie’s shirt started started slipping up her belly. Up. Up. Now I’m pressed against her from behind, lifting her, squeezing. Her stomach is bare, and I’m squeezing, and Katie’s laughing and I’m laughing and then we aren’t laughing anymore and still we’re competing for ownership of the ball and I might have started to growl. She had unleashed him.

Harsh whispers of lips inches from my ear, threats and lusty vows, deferential gratitude and mirth, mad cackling laughters running like brook<sup>1</sup> water through the trees behind me.

I had had a terrible life to this point. I was certain I would die young (common for people who experience sexual abuse, or so I am told), and that was fine with me. Get it over with, already, was my thinking. My fervent wish.

---

<sup>1</sup> “Brook” is the name of a blonde college classmate of mine who looked a bit like Katie. She asked me to help her with Probability and Statistics, so we hung out together one on one a number of times, a little like playing ping pong

But this, here, in my arms. Katie. Katie was Hope. Real happiness. I didn't know I could love someone like this again, so much, like a wolf puppy, ravenous and joyful. Things might be OK after all.

Glee hope venom and freedom. A thousand other sensations, but freedom above all. Fire and freedom and an unknown, un contemplated future.

I loved this girl. Loved, loved, loved her. I *loved* Katie.

I couldn't believe it. Could it be...Katie *over* Asia? This Ewe I am holding, *then* Asia, in my internal ranking system? Is such a thing even possible?

You and your husband hold hands as, with a flick of an orange switch, the physician sentences your child to death.<sup>2</sup>

Then another male counselor entered the room and shot me a disapproving look. He said in kind of a long drawl, "head games," and walked out. I interpreted this to mean that I was so much older than Katie (two and a half years, she was a ways from being legal) I was leading her on by messing with her. This was a thought I was particularly vulnerable to, given other events in my personal history. So I let go of Katie. Let go of my pursuit of the ping pong ball. And just shot out my arm, demanding the ball back.

Katie's face was a mask of several emotions. She looked shocked and crestfallen and disappointed. But most of all what I saw in her beautiful, horsey face was rage. The name Katie means "pure," and that was the nature of the anger I witnessed in her bright blue eyes. She was so fucking angry at me.

And there my life ended.

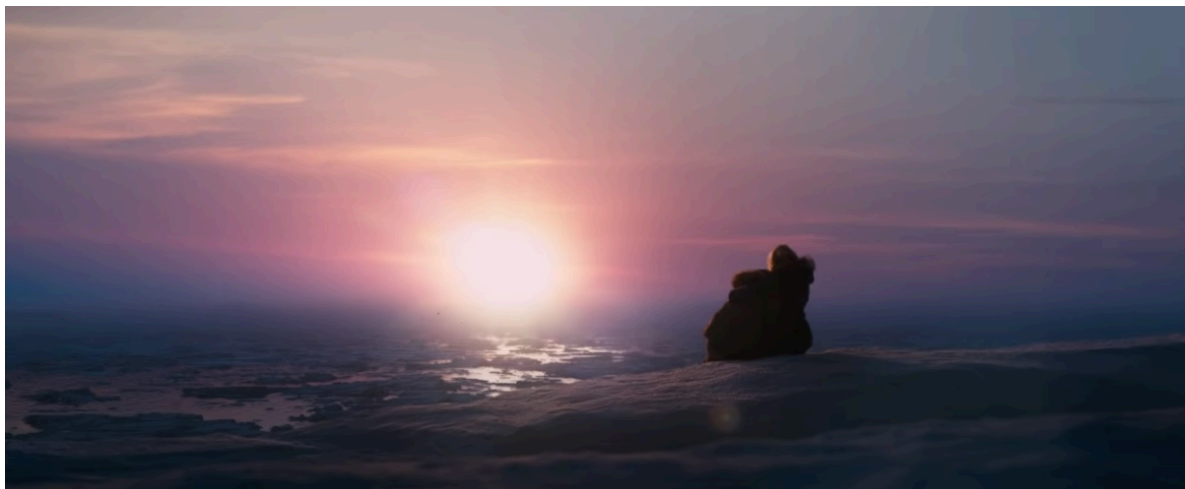
---

<sup>2</sup> It might be, but that isn't what happened. The fact was that whether or not Katie *could* have supplanted Asia was a question that would not be answered, b/c by that point, *from my point of view*, there was no more Asia and there had been no Asia for some time, just a bland, uncontroversial creature in her place that, like Maria in the story, simply persisted, using oxygen, etc. but no longer starting fires.

But my body persisted. “Life goes on, long after the thrill of livin’ is gone,” as John Cougar Mellencamp sang.

The on-screen images that make think of this terrible moment the most involve the most Katie-like actress I know of, the inimitable Melissa George. Melissa George is really, really Katiesque. Eerily spot on.

Here are two shots from the ending of the 2007 vampire film, *30 Days of Night*, when Melissa’s on-screen husband is killed as the sun rises for the first time in a month



Sunset Point



THIS is the look I saw. Exactly. Katie rage.



Here it is again, at the ending of the 200 film, *Triangle*.



▶ **Triangle 2009 - Bad Mother (Contains Spoiler)**

That's Katie for you.

Melissa's relationship with her therapist, played by Gabriel Byrne, as Laura in the HBO series "In Treatment" captures the feel of the Katie-Me thing pretty well, too.

## 📺 Gabriel Byrne, In Treatment: Paul/Laura "Answer"

Why do I digress into this coverage of source texts that are not part of the Le Guin-Tuomi-Tremblay-Shyalaman chain this essay series is concerned with?

Because I am talking about Katie, and I want anyone who reads this to know how she *felt* to be around, what a beauty and a force she was, why I loved her so and still do so many years later, despite spending such a short time with her (just part of one summer).

What I write about is nothing if it is not about empathy. Sharing *feelings* one believes are important and relevant to a topic, particularly strong ones, is at least as crucial and usually far more so than supplying facts.

Also you need to really understand the rage to appreciate what's next.

Katie's rage, captured in "you then asia" in the unending, unsatisfied cacophony of the bodiless, the angry mob of my babies, and also the rage of the other interested party here, and my own, bleeds its way into Knock at the Cabin as follows.

Crying. Shrieking. Tumult. "Will not shut up." Wailing. Thrashing uvulas. Rant. Threaten. Lunatic frenzy of voices. Harsh whispers. Threats and lusty vows. Mad cackling laughters. Insults hurled from thin air, gushing thanks. Sirens.

I am hitting hard with the audio. Will of the wisp. A dancing, bright ball in a forest. Noises. Loud noises. Lots of words for loud, irritating noises, often associated with ANGRY people. Wham. Wham. Wham. Can you dig it?

Can anyone else hear it?

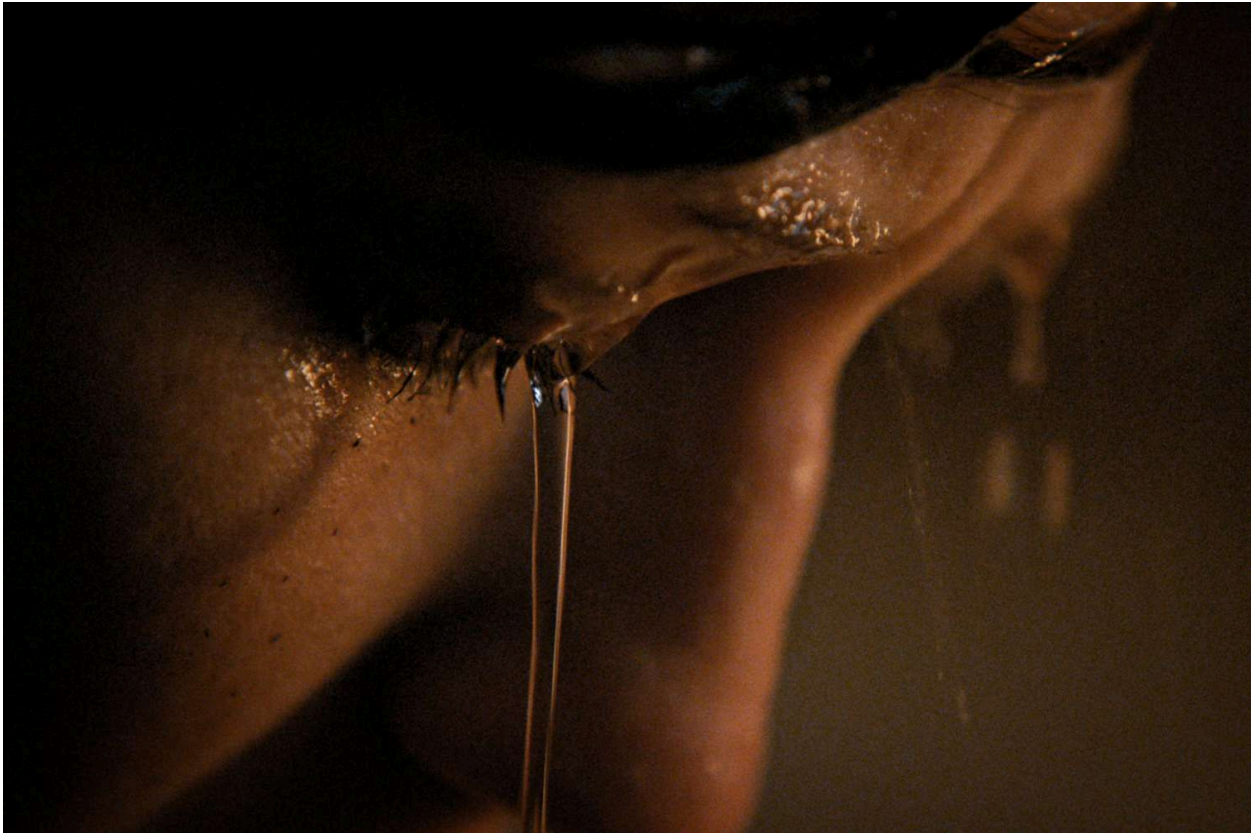
a loud unpleasant noise; a din  
"the kids were making a **racket**"



“Beating ploughshares into swords  
For this tired old man that they elected king”  
“The End of the Innocence”  
Don Henley

(leader singer of the *fucking* Eagles)

Knocking makes a racket



Someone heard.

I love you, Katie.  
Always will.