



LUNA STATION

Q U A R T E R L Y



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Linden's Legends

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ZQ Taylor is a Silicon Valley tech writer by day and budding novelist and essayist by night. She has written for local and national publications, including InFlight USA Magazine, The Daily Astorian, and Park Ave Magazine. ZQ has been described as a southern belle in combat boots, charming and disarming.

ZQ Taylor: The Indelible Storyteller

Rumor, when properly tended, becomes legend.

Rumor has it that I descend from gods and royals, lovers and virgins, and the hands of two bloods, red and white. Through eternity, my kin fostered opulent legends and epic reverence.

Maybe you know of the princess who fled her father's kingdom to become a devout hermit performing miracles from the base of a tree? Or of Zeus transforming a dying couple, who were still vibrantly in love, into two trees, their branches forever intertwined? Or perhaps you've read Eminescu's timeless poems, all written from underneath a fabled tree?

Not to brag, but I hail from a botanastic dynasty that goes by many names. Through millennia, robust branches have thrived in Europe and Asia, across British Isles, Nordic mountains, and Romanian parks. Our crowns are lofty and lush, our roots deep and resolute. Our rings are adorned not in gold or diamonds, but with flowers and honey.

We are the guardians of secrets and the purveyors of truth. I can decipher encrypted birdsong, conceal nests and children, and capture the wind's whispers. My awning has sheltered the righteous, bristled against bias, and nurtured soulmates.

The American Tilia Branch is my direct line, with kissing cousins Little-Leaf, Tomentosa, and Henryana, who goes by Henry's Lime. I have been called Basswood, Beetree, and Silver, but please, just call me Linden.

Every tree has a story. Mine has enchanted entire forests.

Rhapsody in Spring

As a young sprout, my world was an impeccable, dense kaleidoscope of green. Rain serenaded the grass, and I swayed to catch dewdrops. Frogs added percussion. Bright lime parakeets and treehoppers darted between Spring shoots. Even the powdery smooth caresses of emerald moths on olive milkweed vines pulsed with pigment. I still recall the unforced rhythms of that Green Grace as if it were yesterday...

Oh! What is that wriggling ball of dandelion fuzz? It's floppy and coming my way! No, there are three floppy dandelions!

My neighbor is a brooding Oak tree. He tells me these are bunnies—cuddly wild animals, not plants like us.

Oh! Wait for me! I want to play with the dandelion bunnies. So, I brandish my leaves and stretch my roots to join in their frolic. My seed may be sown, but my spirit is liberated.

Wait! Where are you going? They are flopping to the canopies of Cottonwood codgers huddled by the river. I'll have a great canopy one day, and then the bunnies will hop and rest with me.

...With those earliest memories came the joy of seedling wonder. My roots were not yet well-developed, but I was grounded in my forest family and the knowing that I was conceived with hope. Let me tell you more...

Woodland fairies sing stories of two bloods planting my seed,

of a nobleman and a warrior meeting at the river yonder. The gentleman tells of mythical Lindens that hold a divine presence, promote healing, and under which no lie can be told. The warrior speaks to his noble friend of a place to honor the Peacemaker and the Eagle so that this shared land will be rooted in harmony and winged with wisdom.

These two humans sow unity as fresh as the new colonies. They hunt and share meals. The warrior's woman tucks me in at night with rich tapestries of soil and prayers. I grow strong and straight.

One day, the gentleman brings his wife, who has a seed growing in her stomach. The gentleman and Milady spread a blanket beside my burgeoning arbor to laugh and dream. Tape-stries and dreams become the light that sustains me. Way better than dandy floppies.

When I reach ten rings of age, I overhear the brazen gossip of the breeze. The winds blow warnings of angry locusts carrying rifles and a Trail of Tears flowing just past my purview, on a bloody horizon. Whatever that means.

Weeks go by, and no one comes to tuck me in or daydream. Rains pour, unrelenting in their extravagant sorrow. The warriors are gone, forced to sprout in a gaunt, far-away land. The gentleman becomes a reluctant soldier and soldiers on.

Surely, my conceivers will come home. I wait. Any season now. I hope. I believe.

Expectations have a funny way of unraveling, leaving nothing except bare truths. The reality is they never return, I am orphaned, and my world tints in colorless shards of darkness.

Evergreens hum courage, but my forest frivolity falls away, and I slip into deciduous doldrums. The annoying mighty Oak reveals

that possibilities are endless when we rotate our perspective simply by moving into the light. Huh? Ignoring my teenage naiveté, he quips something about ‘within dormancy lies great potential.’ For what, I wonder.

Time snatches precious hours. Before I know it, I have become a snarky sapling looking for a way to high-five the sky. My impatience to grow up does nothing to trellis my height. I don’t find it particularly exciting to twiddle my twigs until the growing season arrives. Crickets incessantly clacking their crochet needles are not music to my ears. Even the arrival of white-tailed deer in the clearing fails to quell my rebellious boredom to grow already.

Well, dormancy delivers, but not in the way I expect. One bleak night, the noble soldier’s wife staggers through our woods in a virulent sleet storm. Milady rests her head on my burrowing roots and sobs for the great loves she has lost—first her husband and now her sapling son.

My branches droop with grief, and I shelter Milady as best I can through the freezing storm. I can do nothing but absorb her dying tears. I call to the Legends for divine healing. I shout for creatures of the forest to come when they can. The fierce gale strangles my cries for help.

In the blue light of morning, an enormous eagle lands on my crest, and I buckle under its hefty talons, but only for a moment. His magical prowess instantly warms my soggy soul to a golden glow. Sparrows sound reveille. Floppies and wild parakeets come to fill the crevices between Milady’s lifeless branches and mine. The woodland fairies thank me for my bravery and sprinkle Milady with forget-me-nots and jasmine petals. Migrant swarms of bees pollinate and fructify. Milady’s spirit awakens as if from slumber, hugs me, and vanishes into every sprig of my being.

This same day, I celebrate my fifteenth ring with a five-o'clock shadow and six whole inches in height. Sun shines down and dries the last of my rankled leaves. I feel the earthly cadence of being whole. I am no longer an orphan, a sapling. I have become the kaleidoscope, not just with shades of green, but with all the colors of the forest. High-five, big sky!

Cicadas of Summer

Once upon a time, right in the middle of an ordinary life, Love gives us a fairy tale.

We are decades into our new country, and my embryonic innocence has ripened to a compact sanctuary of shade. Farmlands and hamlets have amputated acres of our lush forest. Humans traipse back and across the wildflower meadows in between. And a young man arrives one afternoon. He stares up at me, smiles, and grips my trunk.

How odd the sensation as he climbs me! My ample branches tickle as he brushes leaves and buds. I blush and blossom in hues of yellow. He rests a bit and swings his long legs and threadbare shoes to a beat of his own. Then, the teen climbs down and sprints away, calling out, "I'll be back!"

You know that romance festers in the rage of summer, right?

I was giddy. The poetry of how he woke me—the lustrous feeling of connection. Dusk understands, working escort duty for the screeching cacophony of mating cicadas—oh my Mother Nature, they are loud! As the moon ripples over the river and the sky changes into its sleeping clothes, I pine for the reappearance of my mysterious friend.

The next twilight, he returns. With a pretty young lady. Golden twisty vines frame her pale face, and surely, she embodies

Freyja, the goddess of love and beauty. Delicate fingers trace over a bulbous warty limb of mine. I swear, I bloom ten-fold this very moment.

Garrett and Wista. Together, they climb and swing and kiss. Garrett and Wista, sitting in the tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G. Someone calls from far away, and Miss Wista hurries to go despite the cicadas' deafening chicanery. She kisses Garrett and hugs me.

We three are in love.

Every day, Garrett waits with me for Wista. This is no seedling love—it has the purity and honor of Evergreen. Each time they kiss and cajole, I flourish with sweet honey and perfect flowers. Garrett wears his heart on his sleeve, and I don all of mine: Lindens have heart-shaped leaves!

Cicadas regale us nightly. Virtuosos of love songs. Garrett harmonizes with big plans to conquer industry while Wista sketches fanciful wonders in moss-green charcoal. Sometimes she whispers wild wishes in his ear. But the distant call of home always comes, and dutifully she always goes.

Garrett pleads with her to start a life together without the confines of her family's money or his lack of it. He will be here tomorrow, ready to go into the Big World. It will be summer solstice, a lucky day for love. Garrett's parting kiss beckons her to join him.

The next day, Wista does not show. We wait for her. Garrett carefully wedges the promise ring into his waistcoat pocket and climbs higher than ever. He peers through my dappled cushion, hoping to glimpse a sign of the golden goddess walking toward us. All we can see are her family's neat rows of grapevines laden with rich purples.

We wait in the loud quiet of the darkening woods. Nocturnal

choirs of cicadas bewitch even fireflies to light the way for Wista. But she never comes. Eventually, a gentle fog blankets us with sleep.

Morning startles me. Garrett is gone, but he's left a letter in my bark folds. The promise ring hangs by a shoelace from my warty branch.

All day, bees frenzy in their celestial dance, yet I mope, and my flowers slouch. It really does feel like the longest cavalcade of the year. By sundown, I wave away the honeybees and embrace nesting birds and vibrating cicadas.

Must we all just play our part in the world? Does Fate skewer the stars of lovers with no hope for a happy ending? Garrett has wings of an eagle, willing to find his way in the world, but Wista roots her worth in the levy of family. I gloom.

Constellations toast the solstice carnival like champagne and cabaret upon the night sky. And that's when I see her, our dazzling impressionist's flower, ascending the hill to me. Wista quickly finds Garrett's note and band of gold. At once, she crumples, weeps, and leaves—

—Now, now, cheer up! I am the Tree of Lovers, and I promised a fairytale.

That night, the cicadas abruptly vanish, their viral whirl gone. What humans may not know is that cicadas, like pure love and good wine, can burrow and mature in the vigor of soil for years. The fermentation of faith.

Eventually, Wista returns with a wine bottle and Garrett's parting gifts. The vineyard's new indigo label shows a profile of hair swirling around a sad, cherubic face shedding tears. Her father had aptly named the prized wine Wista Weeps.

Through inebriated grief, my Wista does indeed weep. She marshals Garrett's note and ring into the emptied bottle—her liquid heartache splashing—and buries it beneath my hulking roots with a prayer. I guard her hidden treasure like teeth under a pillow, wishing for root fairies to grant her wish.

Years go by. Concentric circles swell my girth, and Wista continues to visit after work. She wearies from the stronghold of her duties. She nurtures her grapes like babies, each vine swaddled and fed and guided. Even her hair and fingers absorb the inky tints of her labor.

Then, one night her father dies, and the winery is hers. She skips up the hill in the middle of the day, mourning dress flowing, coiffed hair unraveling. She speaks of messaging the Big World into which Garrett had ventured, with hopes of retrieving her only love.

Her missive—Wista Waits—dispatches with smashing success, selling in places her imagination could only conjure. Unlike previous labels of melancholy blue, the latest bottle boasts a happy moss-green sketch of our dear girl sitting under my fullest plume and holding a ring on a string.

The smells of summer harvest our hopes. I lace twigs to cradle fuzzy fledglings and bustle with bees to make honey. Voluptuous grapes spill from vines. And Wista arrives nightly with her unshackled smile. Together we wait.

And then, just like that, seventeen years from the night she buried her love and laughter, millions of cicadas burst forth from fermented ground. Their ballad pounds the threshold of human hearing.

Only they knew what a momentous occasion lay ahead.

Wista feels the vineyard flutter. She marvels as bruise-purple grapes suddenly blanch to spirals of ethereal gold as if polished by Moon. Her hair and fingertips gloss translucent.

She knows. He is here.

Garrett has returned from his worldly travels. Clammy hands belie the sensibilities of his long legs and fine leather shoes. He sets down the bouquet of exotic flowers and a case of precious Wista Waits. Message received loud and clear: Love potion, bottled just for him. He pats his waistcoat.

The entire valley holds its collective breath. Wista races up the hill, Garrett down. They mesh and mash in the middle and laugh and cry. He drops to his knees with a shiny new ring, and every blade of grass undulates in her yes.

Their wedding is held under my branches. Birds and neighbors string ribbons, a preacher blesses the union, and wine flows like the burly river.

Garrett buys the lands framing my roots in every direction. He builds a castle for his bride and a treehouse for their children. My flowers fill their vases, my honey their pots. Evenings are spent dancing to the “cicadian” rhythms under the stars. We are in love.

Gilded for Autumn

Nature never fails to wow us. She spins magical legacies with each returning season, casts dewy realms of beauty for every creature. Treetop crowns are bejeweled with leaves of brick red, bright orange, and honeyed blonde. In this otherworldly chroma of autumn, our leaves may change, but our purpose is the same: to live in harmony with the world around us and to embrace the audacity of transformation.

Firmly planted in the twentieth century, my world now spans a massive public park, mostly manicured yet softly wild from my backside down to the beloved river. The crotchety Oak is still bent in his ways, and a trio of fast-growing, smooth-talking Red Maples brightens the landscape. I admit my spine has some curvature, too, and a few branches pose in downward dog. But I am young at heart.

Life is good.

Most autumn days, our lawns are peopled with promenades and prams, picnics and parades. By evening, I sway to the nearby clickety-clack of railways—and the billowy warble of Jazz. Here, the nights belong to Tristan, a ten-year-old musical wonder.

Tristan has many siblings and a singular talent. He plays saxophone below my gilded leaves. He floats above the music. His melodies hypnotize birdsong and can charm bark from trees. Even the high-speed squirrels skittering me like a May Day pole suspend their harassment whenever Tristan tongues his saxophone.

You'd believe the boy and the sax are one, that they can levitate Time—well, if not for the kudzu. With every ghost and swell of Tristan's saxophone, the trespassing vines twist around unsuspecting shrubs and boughs, mine included. Our leaves dance until they drop, spent from the glory of Tristan's tunes.

Word of the boy maestro spreads like pollen. Variegated crowds come to appreciate music under stars. To gyrate rhythm beneath branches. To tap toes and clap hands. Curious performers arrive from nearby juke joints, country clubs, and church choirs to improvise and pizz with the kid. And tendrils of kudzu party like social climbers along my shedding canopy.

Each evening, a regal but raisined man trudges past us, gold pocket watch screaming his lateness, soundless sadness wrinkling him more. Then, one night, those Red Maple sirens elbow the man to pay attention. He looks up. Perks up. His finely tailored scowl stretches to a gaping smile at Tristan's tweedy tempo.

The man flushes to tears. You see, his wife had played the saxophone long ago, apparently with Adolphe Sax himself at the Paris Opera. While Tristan's rolling swing differs from her laced-up solos, Mister hears the same ardent soul. Tristan's sax throbs with shocking long-notes like kisses of perpetuity. And Mister feels the pecks of joy he used to share with the missus.

After the performance, Mister approaches Tristan's proud but weary parents, inquiring about the boy's musical education. Mama declares that Tristan just started playing the second-hand saxophone her husband dabbled at before they were parents. Papa concedes that his focus is on feeding mouths, not dreams.

Mister reveals he has money and connections, and until now, has had no *joie de vivre* since his wife died. He offers to sponsor Tristan, to get his talent on the sheet and in concert halls. Mama cautions they have no money for lessons, but the man insists the lad's talent is generational.

So, after Tristan's school and chores, several evenings a week, the patron pens the prodigy's genius to paper. Tristan signs his work, and Mister flails brilliant pages to urban orchestras.

The great conservatoires hesitate to offer Tristan scholarships or apprenticeships. Sure, they believe he has talent, but he is just a boy. The saxophone is just a fad. Mister whisks here and there undeterred in his pursuit.

Meanwhile, Tristan mesmerizes the growing frenzy of fans

under my gangly tentacles. Flirting kudzu and flatulent trains keep beat. The wanton Red Maples shimmy. And I shake and molt my crinkly detritus like a writer frantically penning and crumpling sheaves of paper to get his letter just right. It is impossible to stand still.

Until it isn't.

The glisten of our jubilant togetherness evaporates one scary, moonless night. The train is robbed, the air smells of evil, and the crowds shutter at home. The thieves use the desolate darkness to their advantage, shoveling behind my trunk to hide loaded bags of passenger loot until a morning get-away. I struggle to bend and swat them away. To no avail.

In the nearing distance, I see Tristan and Mister prickly against the scratch of jagged wind as they head my way. No! Stop! Don't they know to stay home? This is when I notice Tristan's saxophone leaning against the front of my trunk. He must have left it when hurrying home from school for chores before lessons with Mister.

Why, Moon, did you choose this night to go AWOL? And where is the crisp gentleness of equinox? What cruel trick is this to make me shelter the wicked?

Tristan and Mister are at my roots.

Tristan grabs his sax before he sees the thugs. Mister's wrinkly reflexes brazen anew as he valiantly protects the boy. One of the criminals makes haste with his shovel, smashing Mister to the ground and heading for my lad. But Tristan wails his sax with fierce vibrato, and the thieves freeze—just long enough for the kudzu to leap from my limbs and lasso theirs.

Mister stirs, yet Tristan is too stunned to stop playing. Each fiery

note commands the muscular kudzu to manacle the monsters. The wind takes notice, directing shrapnel-sharp squall upon the treachery. Heavens conscript Moon to illuminate the path for townspeople rushing up the hill.

In moments that feel like tree rings, the thieves are apprehended, evil has ended, and Mister is mended. Splendid.

Tristan's family crowd and hug him, coaxing the saxophone from his shaking fingers. But the saxophone does not let go.

The pink pucker of morning bathes our park. Kudzu vines slink down from branches, sweetly raking my crusty gold leaves into piles. Kids run and dive into the heaps. Music directors and orchestra conductors preen and puffer with offers. Tristan and his saxophone play for them all.

The journey for our young friend and his gold-plated appendage globetrots for decades. Tristan and his saxophone pack theaters, concert halls, and nightclubs around the world. The whiz kid makes records with major labels and famous crooners. Everywhere he travels, saxomania follows.

Tristan always makes it home in the fall. He delights local crowds. My periphery has gained wrought-iron benches and picnic tables and has lost its heroic kudzu. Tristan's family and elderly patron horde front rows.

Autumns later, Mister is buried next to his wife. His final wish is to have his service under my awning, the very place his soul had reawakened. At the memorial, Tristan extolls tender blues for his dear benefactor.

On this day, the festooned crowns of my fellow trees fade to terra cotta and burnished brass. Except those racy Red Maples—they are as feisty and vibrant as ever.

Perhaps because I am Tristan's forever friend, because his music was born under my branches, on this day, my gilded livery transforms to 24-karat gold dust. And floats above the music.

Wisdom of Winter

Nearly three centuries have varnished me with love, friendship, and understanding. And from nose to tail, I now stand at least 100 squirrels in height. In the winter of my long life, I breathe deep and rest in the majesty of knowing. My boughs are barren in the season's stark splendor and fertile with wisdom even the eagle would envy.

Through the years, I have been everywhere without ever leaving home. From my branches, year-round cardinals chide prodigal snowbirds returning with tales of hardship and adventure. Generations of deer and floppies usher curious offspring into my grasp to learn how to grow strong and clever. At the base of my gnarled roots, talented artists, students and scientists chronicle my time and selfie their own.

In winter, no tree is dying. Not really. Instead, we enjoy a much needed respite during the shorter days and subdued activities. As I wait for Sun's waning temperature to warm the corrugated folds of my soul, I reflect.

Memories ripple as if across icy river waters, frozen in time and flowing just the same. I recall so many trees, some cut down in their prime, others aged and pulpy. Many live on as the cherished pages of books—and the shelves that house them. Others make music as instruments or provide shelter.

Lindens live on in the legacies of story.

Over time, I've discovered a lot. I know that even in an ebbing woodland, beauty sprouts from ashes. I see everything change

and nothing change. And I recognize that while growth happens, maturity is optional.

I have also learned to value the big importance of small things. The frosted tranquility of my meadows. The clamoring silence of snow—each snowflake thrums through the air with keen resolve to join the greater assembly, not melt alone.

Like snowflakes and fingerprints, every leaf in all the world throughout infinity is unique. No two are alike. But I think we are all the same in that we differ. That we each have our own purpose. That we matter.

Together, we are legends in our own right.