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The Shadowlands

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Author Bio

Geoff Calver was born June 14, 1985 in Fribourg, Switzerland to two Canadian parents, thus making him a true maple-leaf toting Canuck. He fell in love with writing at the age of six when he read *The Art of War*. At age nine he befriended fellow French Canadian Jack Kerouac, as well as Allen Ginsberg, and Neal Cassady, subsequently he got himself into some trouble in Haight- Ashbury. In 2004 he began attending Gettysburg College. He is majoring in Writing the Narrative, a self-created major, and is a proud editor of the Mercury fiction section, he is also a frequent editorial writer for the Gettysburgian in the gonzo tradition of the late Hunter S. Thompson. He hopes to someday meet Ryan Adams and would like to travel the world, taste many exotic foods, and write about his experiences.

The Shadowlands

She'll be standing on a street corner, lighting her cigarette. She'll look at you with dark brown eyes. She'll ache for a quick buck. She'll do anything.

You come to a stop, glance over at her. She is desolation in its purest form. You question the sanity in this world. You offer her a quick buck. In this insane world she is an anomaly, a quiet, sad temptress on a street corner.

It's the underworld. Unnoticed by most, looked down upon by those who know it's there. This is where the girls who got knocked up in high school spend their days. This is where a fifty will get you a dime bag or other party favors. This is where the world's lost souls gather. On some dark street corner in a city with a forgettable name.

You drive by and chew your nails in the comfort of your SUV. You look nervously around, hoping to god that she isn't here. Not knowing where else to look. You think back to the girl you once knew.

Amy had a smiling face and an infectious laugh. She used to read Burroughs and Kerouac. Told you that the modern world of the American man was an infectious disease you had to avoid at all costs. You smoked your first cigarette with her. Used to sit on park benches and talk books for hours. She used to be an intellectual.

Street lights stream by. Girl after girl walks to the window, still, no Amy. Decrepit brick buildings sink and bend over the horizon and smoke trails across the moon. The Beatles sift quietly through the car, settling on your heart and your ears.

A hushed voice. "I don't know how we're ever going to find her."

Shut up. Shut up. You want to tell the voice shut up but you know it's true. Miles of red light district and you're aware that the possibility of finding Amy barely exists at all.

I can see her face. Big bright red cheeks, turned to sunken stones. A dark hollow consuming her features. Her voice once high and light. Now, who knows?

Amy came from Colorado. Some town near Aspen. Her parents were the wealthy sort who treated her to trips around the world and spoiled her rotten. She turned out alright though. Not a Veruca Salt type. She was the first girl I befriended when I arrived outside that frightening dorm in ninth grade, afraid of meeting new people. Afraid of being away from home.

We walked to class together one fall day that year, and she told me, "You're the greatest guy I've ever met." I wasn't sure I deserved it, but I took the compliment and tried to give her all the love in the world.

She loved horses. I know, she told me every damn day. Constantly she talked about her horses. "Biscuit is so great. He's this chestnut and I love riding him. Oh, I love riding him. You should see it out there, we ride through the aspen trees and it's just so damn gorgeous."

She showed me her art. Paintings of a girl's face which turned to a purple mountain. Newsprint behind a swastika. I couldn't understand half of it.

I waited 'til junior year to kiss her. We were seventeen and lying in her bed, watching a movie on the TV. My hand lay on her stomach and I leaned over, touched her lips and held on tight.

The guys in the dorm, they ripped on her with a vengeance. She had the façade of a stupid ditz. The way she talked about her horses! Guys are guys are guys. I'd come back from her room and the questions bombarded me. "Hey there champ. How you feeling tonight? Did ya tell her to bend over and grab her ankles? Slip her the shocker?"

"She's so dumb." And you know what, they were right. She fucked a million and one guys. I can't count myself in that demographic.

Truth is, beneath it all, we liked her. When she stopped showing up at the room we laughed less. Nights I'd sit guilty in my bed and wish I'd treated her better. Wondered about the horrible truth behind peer pressure. She wasn't bad. She was great. She was the one girl who paid attention to us sad saps. Now we had lost it. I had stopped seeing her, stopped talking to her, she wasn't cool, I wanted to be. It was a stupid choice.

Senior year I only heard about her. I rarely ever saw her. "I hear that she sits up there in her room shooting up."

"I hear she has a cocaine addiction."

"I hear she has a sex addiction." She was a rumor. No one seemed to know the truth, no one seemed to know what she looked like anymore.

Cold December night. Everyone standing, cheering the hockey team. An ambulance rushes past. Our eyes tear away from the Deerfield player rushing up the ice. It stops outside her dorm. Calamity.

I visit her in the hospital. No one else stops in. I sleep the night next to her, watching her breath rise up and down, her lips cracked, her eyes sunken. They'll tell you weed is a gateway drug. Amy skipped weed altogether. Speed and heroin were her flavor. You tried to comfort her and tell her it was alright, but she wouldn't listen. Her body shakes and convulses, you try and calm her seizures, she spits in your face.

They said she overdosed on heroin.

Monday afternoon, April 20. I call her and she doesn't answer. Her room mate hands me a note. Dark ink on wrinkled, lined paper. "Gone." Are the only words on the sheet. Don't know where.

I can't give up on her. She was great. She wasn't amazing. But she was great. She was there for me. She was a shoulder to lean on and now she was gone. Gone, swallowed up in the streets of some god forsaken city in a huge, unforgiving country, where the weak are stepped on and shoved to the ground. She doesn't stand a chance.

Guilt sets in. You sit in your car and look at the pretty little women walking around and you wonder if you played a part in her disappearance. You wonder what happened to all of the girls here. They're just girls. Were they tormented? High school is tormenting. Unless you're a select group of few, high school is defines pain.

I pull into a parking space and put my hand on the wheel. Kill the engine. Light a smoke. Screw it.

JESSIE COX

The Others

They say that those who sow in time shall reap.
Big-boned, with big goals and big work they are
Not frozen, but warm with success; not a
Corpse in sight. The new father gets to sip
His coffee in the diner at night while
The woman in the corner plays that flute
Without going flat for once: the glory
Of sweat revealed in its entirety.
(Pay no attention to any silent
Sobbing, suppress the growing sickness if
You can. It would not be normal or right.)
Well, to their visions of empty but diligent years
Leading to ultimate pleasure, I say, "Yeah, right."
The early flamingo just gets the ice.