

The LAMP

TERM 1
2026



All I Want

Scarlett Hwang

I've started to think that love was never meant for me. The kind of love that doesn't leave you guessing. The kind that feels steady. It's the handwritten notes, the smiles back and forth whispering 'I love you' in each other's ear, the one where you feel safe with, the one that gives you their jacket when it's cold. The one that I've only ever witnessed in movies and books and poems and songs. The kind that makes you fall in love with them but of most, yourself. The kind that makes you fall in love with the parts of yourself that you've always hated, the sound of your laugh and that gap between your teeth. That cheeky smile they make when you look back after they notice the little things. The things that make you you. The things that nobody else notices, the ones that are overlooked, the ones that people don't know about because they don't know you well enough. And when someone loves you, they stay. But I've never known a love like that, so perhaps it's not meant for me, although I desperate-

ly want it to be. And maybe, just maybe, love isn't an item God has put on my life list. All I've ever wanted was to be enough for someone to love me like the way they do in movies and books and poems and songs. Pretty enough, cool enough, smart enough, talented enough, and just simply enough. To be enough to be chosen. Every single time, again and again. And to be enough to not be second best, or third best, or to be someone's second or third choice. But the first. The first choice and the first best. And perhaps I've never known a love like that, and I don't know if I ever will. Sometimes I wonder if there's something wrong with me, or if my expectations are too high, but maybe what I am asking for is all too much. So maybe that's why God didn't put love as an item on my life list. Maybe that's why love wasn't ever meant for me at all in the first place.



The Hostage

Veronica Scully

At dawn I sat and waited for Elaheh in my room overlooking Ferdowsi Avenue - she had said she'd be back by "eight o'clock at the latest" with marmalade and flowers, and a copy of the Telegraph for me to read. But when I saw the smear of dawn bleaching the curtains, I couldn't stay inside my room for much longer and went out on the balcony. A few old women swathed in black cloth huddled together at the gates, heads bowed, and I suppose they cried for their husbands. One ragged boy pedalled towards the Embassy, and I could see a bulging stack of telegrams for Ambassador Herman trembling on his handlebars. But there was no sign of the foreign press anywhere along that dark street.

Elaheh had told me this, of course, but it hadn't stopped me wondering whether I would once again raise my fist before a pack of reel-to-reel recorders. Surely every freelancer would be longing for a scoop like this - "British Captain of Industry reemerges to a Rock Star Reception". I turned to go indoors when I saw her standing by the hearth, with her pale silk dress and braided curls. "Oh, you poor man," she said, reaching out to caress my hand.

"Elaheh", I said, which I was told meant 'Goddess' in her tongue - for in this place, there is no woman as splendid as she. I spoke before she had time to pity me further, "They aren't here, not even the BBC World Service".

"I know," she said, "but they won't come again for a while, not here, not while people are being hanged in the streets."

"I can wait here."

"No, you can't. You will be shot if you are seen. Come inside where it is safe."

Her kitchen was dark and cool and smelt strangely of citrus and something else I could not place. Elaheh spread a tea cloth across her lap, spread marmalade over bread, and poured the tea. She undid her braid and brushed out her hair so that it hung in waves down her back. My wife's hair had turned white at forty.

She would not meet my eye, but handed me a bundle of documents each addressed from Ithaca and each marked 'Strictly Confidential'. She pulled the belt of her skirt tight around her waist as if to make it smaller.

Still looking down, she said, "I have come here to tell you that you will be going home soon."

"We've all heard that one before."

"The Ambassador says you curry favour with the Iron Lady."

"She is my leader."

I went to turn the radio on, twisting the knob until I found a ghostly signal from BBC World, intonations of my dear homeland.

"...Meanwhile, a new international row adds considerable fuel to Anti-British sentiment in post-revolutionary Iran. The impending release of an eminent English CEO of oil supplier Kleos Corporation, who escaped the fate of his colleagues by sheltering in the British Embassy marks a notable success for the UK's Prime Minister. ..static.. In late 1978, the Kleos employees were rounded up by Islamic militants after a display of public drunkenness outside the Intercontinental Hotel in Tehran... static..."

But Elaheh had stopped listening. She closed her eyes and jammed her fingers into her ears. She stood against the great orange sash that had thrown itself from the lights of the city. It wrapped itself around her, like a bandage.

"Oh Elaheh," I said, I can't leave my wife."

"How romantic."

"You know I have to leave. Think of my son wondering, 'Is my father dead?'"

"Your son is surely grown and gone." she said. "Stay with me and you need not worry about them. This is your new home, and I promise you will be safe".

I laughed outrageously and watched her silk dress furl at her ankles.

She had always kept the plantar boxes on the windowsills – bursting with lavender and rhododendron and a small laurel tree by the gate. Sometimes she coiled verdant vines above my bedposts, perhaps to remind me of the outside world, or in some forlorn hope that it would one day become our wedding bed.

“Are you still in love with her?”

“You know really, it’s clear as daylight. I just want to go home, that’s all.”

“Are you?”

I laughed again and put out my hand to touch her slender arm. It would, perhaps, be agreeable to wake up beside the goddess one last time.

When dawn rose like a bright-eyed flower girl, I woke and dressed. I thought if I smelt Elaheh’s skin, it would have the faintest fragrance of citrus and her colour would be touched by petals. I had seen those same dusky flowers floating upon the shores when I first entered this foreign land; she was rooted here, but I wanted to go home. At that very moment, somebody knocked on the door.

“The Ambassador?”

“No, he knocks more gently.”

Someone knocked again now, urgently. Elaheh got up, brushing against a sprig of black poplar. The door opened. I did not recognise the man, but she did. She interrogated him sharply in her native tongue, before turning to me again. “He is your driver,” she said in English. “But you must hurry - it seems you have an enemy in the Minister for Maritime Transport.”

“Have you packed everything?” I asked.

“The only thing I can give you is your passport.”

Behind our backs, the perpetual noise of the wailing women folded into itself. Together we watched the fading light, counting down what time remained. I, a mortal and she, a goddess. Elaheh held me until our heartbeats slowed and the engine began to rev. Then she carried herself back to the lighted bedroom.

On my way to the border, I heard the British news-reader again:

Chanting crowd. “One of the most remarkable things about the Iranian Revolution is its incredible capacity for mass mobilisation...static...demonstrations of several million...static...hundreds of thousands more expected pouring into the centre of Tehran in buses, in cars and taxis and on foot.”

As we drove through the centre of Tehran, people shook the car, almost overturning us, before dragging us out to the middle of the mob. My driver had drifted away from me, but there was only one thing I cared about then – to leave, to escape, and I was determined that my feet would carry me there. I felt the thumping of my heart, my breaths coming out fast and unable to settle. A sudden gust of rain or blood had carried fat droplets over me. The good coat Elaheh had given me had been torn to pieces. I felt the heat of the people around me, so many people, through their clothes. I held on to my passport as though I would drown if I let it go.

Suddenly, the dark sky was cleaved in two as a woman’s white hand dragged me from the crowd. An American. She scooped me into a truck and drove me beyond the edge of the frothing masses. With the mighty wave of sound crashing in on itself in our wake, she turned to me and said, “As long as you’re wrapped in our flag, and the eagle is behind you, I can guarantee your safety. But your journey is not over yet – you still have a few questions to answer”.



The Attack on Jade Winglet

Summer Damghani

The wall was writhing with humans. Just like it was every day. Jade perched herself at her station, watching people scurry around carrying buckets of water and others calling out instructions in preparation for dragons. It wasn't every day that a dragon flew past or landed near the city, so some days she sat listlessly with her torch in her hand all day without actually doing anything. But today was not one of those days. One of the lookouts - Oscar - leaned over the wall, pointing downward. "Dragons!" he called, his tone heavy in urgency. "Three of them, on that ledge!"

Jade stood up, checking her torch. Was the flame enough to kill three dragons? Guards barked orders as a few people rolled the ballista launcher up to the edge of the wall, armed with a spear that poked through a slot in the stone. Now it was her turn. She nimbly climbed onto the wall, her long amber hair swopping in the wind like it wanted to be free from her head, and took a quick glance towards the dragons. A pale yellow dragon sat side by side with a black one and a shimmering, iridescent blue-purple-green one. She'd seen dragons like the pale yellow ones many times, but nothing like the other two. Were they two entirely new species of dragon? If so, what were three dragons from different species doing together? And were the colours on the blue-purple-green dragon... swirling? Nonetheless, she leaned over the wall, touching the flame of her torch to the tip of the spear and watched in delight as it burst

into flames that licked around the point. She jumped back as people started bustling around the machine, twisting the ropes and pulling the levers to point the spear at the dragons on the ledge. One of the guards shouted a command and the spear was fired, arrowing down cheerfully to where it would steal the pale yellow dragon's life. An echoing roar sounded from above the city and a silvery-blue dragon swooped down and exhaled some sort of breath that froze the tip of the spear. Ice crystals swallowed the flame and added weight to the spear, knocking it off course. It crashed against the cliff and dropped aimlessly to the earth below. The iridescent dragon shrieked, turning a bright, eyeball-scorching orange, and the pale yellow one, for some reason, leaped in front of and protected the black one. The silvery-blue dragon wheeled above the other dragons and barked something before all four of them moved to the ledge above the city, out of range.

Jade climbed down from the wall, unable to shake the four dragons from her thoughts. She had seen two silvery-blue dragons before, but she hadn't seen either of them breathe icy stuff. Her question from before echoed in her mind. What are four different dragons from four different species doing together? And why do they protect each other? Then she shrugged the thought off. Dragons were dragons. Who could explain the behaviour of mindless beasts?



A Woman's World

Lylah Turner

**NOTE: Both stories are told by separate narrators, separated by the horizontal line.*

If you're that clever, you can argue yourself into anything.

That's what he told me but my voice was never going to be heard. My dream has always been to find out the mysteries of science, contemplate the world and find out the true reason for our existence. My father had always believed in me, yet, he'd never thought about the reality of a woman's life. Look pretty, act dumb, find a husband, please the husband, do the cleaning, have kids, stay young, keep quiet, be polite.

It was never about how clever I was, father, I could never argue myself into joining the science industry. They'd have never let me if I hadn't cut my hair and been the man of their dreams, the man of the future. It had been about the background, father. It'd been about my gender and shape. I'd done it anyway father, I'd made the team and discovered it all but the findings of my true gender got me expelled and disgraced upon.

If I'm that clever, why can I not argue myself into my dreams? Why can I not argue my gender into equality and fairness? If I really am that clever father, couldn't I have predicted it all? Dreamt of a family and home with a husband who could tolerate my talk?

Forgive me father, but I am not that clever.

I cannot argue to change who I am, or who they see me as.

We lived in the blank white spaces at the edges of print. The mount in the middle of a field of crops, leaving farmers to flatten it out to match. It was planned out so I'd have been the ink in the letters the print would focus on preparing. I'd have been the flowering crops in the field that the farmer rushes to perfect. It didn't end out that way though, I just ended up depleting further and further into the white spaces until my name wasn't even visible in their bibliographies.

I'd married him of course, it all had been going fine. No I didn't love him, I simply put a smile on my face and carried on with my duties... but he didn't. When the trees would sway out in the garden, he'd bark of his newest complaints. When the birds would sing on the windowsill, he'd call on his most honest of feelings. That's why I hated the interviews, when I'd smile and act whilst he broke character and forgot his lines again.

The same name in the articles, the misery in my eyes they'd place in the centre of the page... and despite being true, I was only ever blamed for it... blamed for being unlovable and not pretty enough... that I should put up with it... but I too decided to bark at the trees, to call on my most honest of feelings as the birds would sing away, just to give them a piece of my forgotten lines, the newest paragraph that'd suddenly cast me in the blank space.

I wasn't going to be the white space below a paragraph that the print had written itself, I wasn't going to be at the edge of the print anymore.



Two Screws Loose

Mary Formston

The kettle rattled as it began to boil.

Lucia didn't notice; she was too busy muttering. It sounded quite similar to the kettle in fact - a soft, repeated flurry of sharp corners and stuttering syllables - ebbing and flowing with the swirling mess contained within, slowly coming to a boil. The only difference between the two was that the kettle's blabbering could be understood.

The reason why it was rattling was mainly because Lucia's father had purchased it online - the cheapest option with the best reviews and the fastest delivery. Their previous kettle had stopped working for a similar reason, and he didn't seem to recognize that maybe his system of convenience over quality was the reason why they were on the 3rd kettle that quarter. To be more specific, whatever child had constructed it in an attempt to feed their family clearly wasn't an engineer, as they had joined together two of the inner components (the fast-heating technology shared with the disposable vapes made a warehouse over) with a slightly loose screw - meaning that the (already poor quality) technology within was being shaken against the walls as the bubbles began to appear.

Lucia saw and heard this frankly dangerous scenario unfold as she stared at the kettle, but was (thankfully) unaware of its occurrence. It wouldn't have made a difference if she had elected to hear it anyway - she knew her dad wouldn't do anything, and she wasn't that into tea - she only used it to make her instant noodles when she was home alone and not bothered to cook. No, Lucia was too focused on the twisted reflection of her owl-like eyes in the thin plastic, stretched and warped and bending with the heat. People said they were lovely and big, her eyes, with 'lid space' and a 'doll-like' nature. Good for make-up, good for being coy, yet good for nothing. Lucia didn't think they were lovely and big. She thought they were freakish - disproportionate to the rest of her face. She couldn't make them work - Ella Purnell could, but she was an actress, so she could just act like she looked amazing. Lucia had to drop out of Drama. People looked twice when they saw her for the first time, and always commented on them to

break the ice; sometimes she wanted to gouge theirs out in response - but she held back. Good people didn't do things like that. So, bad people who everyone thought were good shouldn't either.

As the kettle rattled further her eyes shook and warped even more, the lashes tweaking and twitching like the legs of a half-dead spider - which is exactly what they looked like, now that she thought of it. They were disgusting, oozing parasites of fur and flesh that deserved to be squashed and killed, and she could see them even clearer now, crawling out of the seams of her eyes, spiders, dead spiders, dead spiders were part of her eyes and they deserved to be destroyed they were disgusting they were bulging they were the windows that let out the depravity of her soul and everyone else's were normal and good and-

The kettle stilled. It had finished boiling.

She brought her hands down towards the noodle cup. Blood was under her fingernails.

She closed her eyes as she reached for the kettle. She couldn't stand to see the reflection. What she'd done.

As she made the noodles, her muttering continued, but at a much lower volume now that it wasn't competing with anything but her thoughts. The reason she muttered was because she had her religion exam coming up and she could not rote-learn any of the quotes or information regarding Christianity - Islam and Judaism were fine, but not the one she had literally grown up alongside, for some reason - and if she stopped saying them, she'd forget the wording. That was her current excuse when people asked what she was always whispering about, anyway. The real reason was far less relatable, and would probably put her on some kind of list. Lucia liked putting other people on lists, but hated being in them. Or at least knowing she was in them - *ignorance is bliss*.

It was a miracle that the kettle hadn't exploded by now - that none of them had, really - but especially this one. Mainly because of its low quality construction, but that one loose screw was truly a disaster

waiting to happen. The heating element was slowly being jostled and eroded with each usage, chipping away at the already weak materials, revealing the reactive components to the world. Any additional external force that pressed even slightly too hard would set it all off - destroying the kettle and harming all those who were near it at the time. Maybe Lucia's family was very lucky, maybe they just innately knew how much it could handle, but it would happen eventually.

Not today, however. Today, Lucia was shuffling up the stairs while stirring a piping hot bowl-mug thing

of noodles and muttering to herself. Today she was studying for an upcoming test she was nervous about but ultimately would still do just fine in, probably. Today her father was out, having a job interview, so he would never know where the scratches on her cheeks really came from.

Today, the screw would go unnoticed. And tomorrow.

And tomorrow.

And always, she hoped.



A New Generation

Summer Damghani

Sand slipped between Venus's claws and clung to her exhausted wings as she collapsed into the dunes. After days of flying and drifting across the endless sea, the sand beneath her claws still felt unreal. I can't believe I did it. I can't believe I'm here, she thought breathlessly, wiggling herself deeper into the dunes. The waves lapped curiously at her leafy-green tail, and the thump of her leaf-wrapped pouch at her chest gently reminded her of what she left behind. But I had to, she told herself. I couldn't stay, not when I knew what my tribe had planned for the HiveWings. The pouch full of seeds was all she had left of her continent. But now she was at the Distant Kingdoms — which really did exist — completely safe from the LeafWings and the HiveWings and everything on Pantala forever. Was she a hero acting out of bravery, or was she a coward? Probably a coward. She lifted her head from the sand and gazed over the environment around her. Desert stretched to the horizon, wavering in the heat. Is there anything even out here? she wondered, her hopes dying. Yet she lifted herself up, raising her wings. Prove that you're not a coward and keep going, she scolded them and hesitantly rose into the sky.

Endless dunes rolled beneath her as Venus glided unevenly across the terrain. Nothing but sand greeted her in every direction but one. A blobby shape just within eyesight provided her with faraway hope, though she could not yet see exactly what it was. "Wait... is that... are those..." she murmured, narrowing her eyes. The shape clarified into a small oasis with (more importantly) not deadly, not carnivorous, completely ordinary palm trees. "TREES!" she squealed, unable to help sounding like a young dragonet as she dove into the pool. Her scales were no longer scorching, her wings relaxed and there were no waterwheels or bladderworts in the water. This is paradise, she thought, floating on her back.

'Pretty new strange dragon,' the trees whispered in their treelike way.

'Hi,' she whispered back with a glimmer of leafspeak.

'Pretty new dragon speaks!' they chorused with delight.

'Are you going to eat me?' she asked, grimacing in the memory of the deadly plants of the Poison Jungle.

'Eat dragon yuck no,' they agreed. Venus smiled, echoing her happiness through her leafspeak. The Distant Kingdoms had normal trees — something Pantala lacked greatly. She relaxed at the thought that she had made the right decision running away.

"What kind of dragon are you?" A sharp voice called from behind her, jolting her back to reality. She swivelled around to see a dragonet around her age appear out of the shadow of one of the palm trees. His midnight-black scales blended in perfectly with the darkness. Dark purple eyes stared into hers from a majestic snout

that tilted curiously towards her. His wings — one pair, but bat shaped, nothing like any of the Pantalan tribes — were scattered with silver scales like stars against a moonless night sky, and he had this sort of mysterious air about him. Overall, he looked like Clearsight did in all the books she had read about the shared ancestor of all HiveWings.

"I-I-I'm a LeafWing," she stammered, still marvelling at the new dragon's scales.

"That's not one of the Pyrrhia's seven tribes," he muttered, almost to himself.

"I'm not from here. I'm from Pantala, across the sea. There are seven tribes here?"

"Yeah, that's not always the greatest thing, though. In the case of wars. I can't believe the lost continent exists! My name's Knowledge, by the way," the black dragon grinned at her.

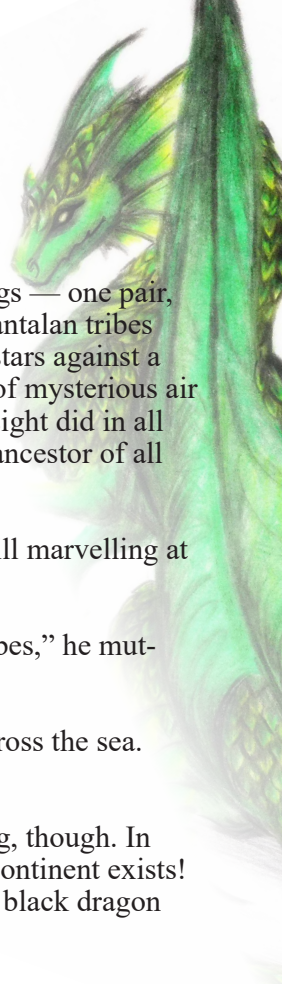
"I'm Venus," she introduced, reflecting his smile.

"Why did you come here, Venus?"

Venus flinched at the memories she had tried so hard to bury deep in the roots of her mind. The plans, the dragon-eating jungle, the war the LeafWings wanted to start that would kill numerous dragons on both sides and could end with her tribe wiped off the face of the earth once and for all, the HiveWings who hadn't even been alive during the Tree Wars that would get hurt. "I... ran away," she admitted, glancing down at the water that lapped at her chest. "A long time ago, a tribe called the HiveWings tried to wipe us out, and now my tribe wants revenge, but they don't see the weak points in their plan. Most of the HiveWings alive today weren't alive back then, and the queen can mind control them, so we should be going after her, not the entire tribe. I tried to tell the LeafWings that, but they wouldn't listen, so I left. I know I'm a coward."

A sudden weight on her shoulder got her raising her head. Knowledge had waded into the oasis and reached a talon out to her. "Hey," he whispered, "If you're a coward, then I am too. My tribe, the NightWings, have a plan to take over the rainforest and kill all the RainWings. I mean, our home is pretty terrible, but that doesn't justify our actions. I should have stayed there and fought for justice, but they started kidnapping RainWings nearly a year ago for study, and the way they treat the prisoners is so horrible I couldn't stand it anymore. I left, too."

She stared into his deep, meaningful eyes. Two dragons from different continents, who are completely different from each other, yet exactly the same. She cupped his talons in hers and proposed, "Want to go be cowards together?"



Puzzles!!!

The WordSearch.com

The Lamp Term 1 2026

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ATTACKS
VENUS
GODDESS
SCREW
EYES
TORCH
DRAGONS
LOVE
SILENCED
COWARDS
KETTLE
GENERATION
DESIRE
NEWSPAPER
RADIO
RECORDS

Play this puzzle online at : <https://thewordsearch.com/puzzle/9613546/>

Thank you so much for reading this term's edition of The Lamp.

Also a huge thank you to everyone who submitted their work - the entries are all fantastic. We want to continue to publish, so please continue sending your work in: artworks, writing, whatever!

This edition of The Lamp was led and organised by Mary Formston.
Thanks to Ms Walker and the English Department for their ongoing support!

Cover art by Mary Formston.