

When I Met Ian Curtis

by Jarrid Deaton

I started out with a lie. That's not fair, so here I am in the second sentence admitting to it. Of course I didn't meet Ian Curtis. You probably know that he's dead. Lead singer of Joy Division. Killed himself. I was born in Kentucky in 1977, so what did I do, somehow end up meeting him in Manchester, England before he watched a Herzog flick, listened to some Iggy, and got a closer view of the ceiling? No. I was just being cute, or clever, or who the hell knows. I realized my mistake before I even started, but I decided to kind of apologize instead of ditching the whole thing. Anyway, I doubt my little lie or me owning up to it will matter in the end. By the time anybody scans over this, chances are I'll be dead, too.

Okay, no freaking out. I mean, this isn't a suicide note. This is suicide fiction. I'm not being cute again. Maybe I am. I can't tell anymore.

With this being fiction, I probably shouldn't care, but I was always told that you shouldn't set the reader up for something that doesn't happen. Keep that in mind, yeah?

David Foster Wallace killed himself. You probably know that. I never finished *Infinite Jest*. I did like his essays, though. Liked some of his short stories, too. I never had pasta with DFW at Olive Garden. Never will. He's dead and I'm probably a newer version of dead.

Three concrete steps up to my house and its like going to the gallows, I swear. Why I even came home, I don't know. I'd quarantined myself in one room. The one room without a leaking ceiling and with the least amount of black mold. I stayed in the house until I died. Maybe. This isn't real, so don't worry.

Had it figured out, partially, I thought. It's so stupid to make this about a girl, but it is in the end. Indian style on the end of a hotel bed with her face close to the television so she could hear it without turning up the volume, early 90's sitcom on a channel dedicated to things like that, and she didn't want to wake me up. She couldn't sleep, but she didn't want to disturb me. Motionless on the end of the bed while I took gulps of air like an asthmatic bear and drooled on both our pillows. I happened to wake up for a second and saw her there. That's the kind of girl, you know, the kind that you can hedge all your bets on.

In a casino, if you're at the blackjack table, you can't say, "Hit me" and expect the dealer to give you another card. You have to scratch the felt with the end of your finger. It's all signs and motions. If you didn't know that going in, chances are you lost. Maybe you lost everything.

Hit me.

Five years later and that girl, the one that was so quiet at the end of the hotel bed, she hands me a card and I bust.

Clever. Write more about card games and love when you know nothing about either.

Breece Pancake was from West Virginia, the kind of guy who could probably play some poker, but he lost. He wrote, told the truth, and he lost. He's dead. Shot himself.

I never was a gun person, but I always had fun when I would shoot them. I'm not sure what that means. I guess guns scared me. They scared me because they made things too easy.

From outside, my house looked fine. The inside was a total mess. Health department disaster type mess. I lived in a metaphor for me.

Cute, clever. I'm at it again. The only thing that matters is truth, but there's none to be found here. Good thing I let you in on that early.

What I did, sometimes, I'd think about this girl that I met once. One time. Talked on the phone three times. I'd think about her in panties and a They Might Be Giants t-shirt painting her toenails green. That's it. I'd think of her painting her toenails green and expect this to calm me down or keep my mind off my recent five-year failure. But when I lost, I lost big. I did it up right. Even my little fantasies turned on me. In this one, the girl looked up from her painting work and her eyes were the same green. She shined those eyes on me and said, "What's the point?"

Green. Yellow and blue make green. Sickness and depression make mold. Green mold, not the black kind. Already talked about it.

About ten years ago I was in a fast food place waiting on this girl to show up with some of her friends. This wasn't the end-of-bed sitter or green toenails and eyes.

Waiting, I saw this guy I recognized as a graduate student in the philosophy department at the college I attended. The girl also went there. This guy, he made a big deal about the ingredients of an apple turnover he'd purchased. He was going on and on with the manager about some long chemical-sounding word that I couldn't really make out. Said it rendered the apple turnover a non-vegan dish. He yelled and pointed for close to five minutes before smashing the thing on the counter and sticking his finger down his throat in an attempt to puke on the visibly frightened and confused manager. I watched the whole thing and thought, "Is this what it's like to believe in something?"

A couple years later and that guy, name was Michael, slit his wrists and drank half a bottle of hydrogen peroxide in a Super 8 motel bathroom.

See what I'm doing with the suicides? A musician, two writers, and a grad student. Weave, you bastard. Watch me go. To be honest, this kind of manipulation makes me sick. I'd throw up, but my stomach contains three spoons of crunchy peanut butter and half a bottle of Dasani water. Could be, I'm trying to starve. A hunger strike against the injustices that I've probably brought on myself. At least my mother will understand.

My mother drove a hearse for three years.

No she didn't. She's a nurse. She's a bank teller. She's a high school math teacher.

Here I am just wanting death to show up again. Here I am trying to tighten the narrative noose. Black on white. Dust and bones. I still get mail for a guy named Randall. Maybe that's me. You know. I mean, the fictional "you" knows. This invented "you" knows all about this invented "me" and this whole lie of a story.

Neither of us exist. Is that sad? Scary, maybe? Does it pull a pail of sorrow from the well in your guts? I mean, an actual person's guts. Manipulation again. Shouldn't have to do that. At least it shouldn't be blatant. Sad, scary, subtle. Maybe that would be okay.

This isn't real, so don't worry.

