



# THROUGH BENDED GRASS

a fantasy by Aidan Moher

*(Excerpt One)*

## Chapter One: The Note

BYE MOMMY. DADDY CAME TO PICK ME UP.  
HE TALKS FUNNY, BUT IS NICE.  
I LUV YOU. FROM LEWIS

The note, held loosely in my slender, trembling hand, mocked me as I scanned over the scribbled words for the hundredth time.

The first thought to run through my head after reading it was to ponder how the hell he knew who his “daddy” was, my second was the slow crawl of dread as I realized that the one constant in my life – since my mum had died – was gone.

Had been stolen.

I let the note drop, watching as it slowly wafted down to land peacefully on the rumpled dinosaur-patterned bedspread. It sat there, bathed in a shaft of early morning sunlight, mockingly serene, as unwanted tears tickled my cheeks.

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I heard the door click closed behind me and reached down to give it an extra jiggle, just as I always did, to make sure it was locked. It wouldn't look very good on my resume if I

were fired for being the dumbass that allowed my previous place of employment to be looted into destitution.

I was especially happy to get out of work that night because I had a date. A very special date, in fact.

With Lewis, my son; the love of my life.

Work had been coming hard and heavy lately, but that's what you get when you're working for a busy tourist centre in the middle of Summer. People need things to do on their vacation and God forbid they actually do the work and research themselves! I'll be the first to admit that I usually just pull rank and punch out pretty much as soon as I finished my work for the day, but ever since Samantha had "hurt her back" doing something mysterious and *fake*, she had been working half days and I was having to pick up the pieces behind her. So these days I spent *a lot* of time with Random-Tourist-A, a sizable amount of time with Random-Tourist-B and very little time with Lewis Hayes, my six-year-old son.

Not tonight, though. I had rented some videos and promised Lewis that we would have a movie night. Just the two of us, the couch, a disgustingly huge bowl of popcorn and all the movies we could stomach. Lewis had been talking about it non-stop for days.

Right now, though, Lewis was at his aunt's house. My sister, a stay-at-home mum with three children of her own, looked after Lewis while I was at work. So I jiggled the door again and, sure it was locked, headed into the balmy, summer evening towards the empty parking lot and my waiting car.

I was at peace. Lewis' slow, even breaths pulsed heavily against my chest where he lay warmly cuddled, snoring ever so softly. Even after all of his excitement about our special night, Lewis started to fall asleep midway into the first movie. I couldn't help but smile as the subtle draw of sleep had threatened to overwhelm him. His eyes drooped and his head

nodded slowly down to his chest, but always, just at the last moment before sleep fully took him over, his head would pop up, foggy eyes stretching open, and he would give himself a fitful shake.

Minutes would pass and the process would repeat itself – each time he would slip deeper towards sleep before waking himself. Finally his fight proved futile and he fell into a deep, content sleep.

So I watched my sleeping son, the movie completely forgotten, and relished the feeling of contentment and rightness that settled over me. For the first time in years, since those early days before my mum's death, I really felt like I was in control of my life. Things were finally falling into place.

I won't bellyache about how being a single mother isn't easy – you've heard it all before and I'd no one to blame but myself for the situation, but it was always a constant shadow lingering over my shoulder. I had made a mistake that day in Ireland, and the effects were still rippling through my life – they always would – but I had known it would be hard when I had decided to keep my baby. I cried for days before the decision, my sister always there beside me, forgetting the fact that I had abandoned her and dad for so long, showing me what family truly meant. From the moment I heard Lewis' first cries and the first time I had held his little body close against mine, hearts beating an uneven staccato, I had known that there *was* no other decision. The small boy, curled tightly up against me, filled a void in my life that I hadn't even known existed.

My life had changed that day in Ireland, obviously, but I wouldn't have it any other way.

He looked so small in his new bed, the duvet practically swallowing him up as I pulled it up over his sleeping body. But at the same time I also couldn't believe how big he'd

grown! He was a little man now; so full of life, of vigour, of personality. I looked around the room, taking it all in, appreciating the moment. I knew there would be a day when he would tell me that he was too old for the dinosaurs that covered his room: the wallpaper, the bed spread, the stuffies piled up next to him. I just hoped it wouldn't be soon.

I left Lewis' room and dropped myself wearily back on the couch. The clock clicking away on the wall read 9:33. *Gods, nine-thirty on a Friday night and I'm getting ready for bed! When did I get so old? It wasn't that long ago that I wouldn't ever start getting ready until this time. But such is life, I suppose.*

I flicked the television off, lifted myself off the couch, and headed to the kitchen to put the kettle on for my nightly mug of herbal tea.

*Time to turn in.*

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Something was wrong.

My eyes blinked open, still heavy with sleep, and I glanced at the blurry face of the digital clock beside my bed. The alarm blared heavily in my ears. I set my alarm every night, but it had been over a year since I had been woken by its shrill, insistent yodel. Always before, Lewis, without fail, would crawl into my bed, just before the alarm sounded and wake me, pressing a warm hug against me before turning my bed (and me) into his own personal jungle gym of laughter and tumbling.

Right now, though, the bed beside me was cold and empty.

I lifted myself out and carefully moved out of my bedroom, slippers feet whispering against the laminate floor. A breeze drifted through the apartment, drawing a prickling of goosebumps up the exposed skin of my arms and legs. I wrapped my arms around myself

as I cautiously moved down the small hallway leading from my bedroom, feeling unnervingly like a stranger in my own home.

The door to Lewis' bedroom stood cracked open at the other end of the hallway, the blue glow of his stegosaurus nightlight still visible in the early morning light.

*Lew likes his door open. This is normal. This is okay.* Useless, scrambling excuses tumbled through my head. As I moved closer to the open door, I was startled by a strange, unfamiliar scent tickling my nose and my memories, and an indefinable sense of nostalgia flooding through me.

The forest, loam and earth. *Life. Primal. Death. Magic.*

Thunder crashed in my chest with each beat of my heart. I was no longer able to even fool myself that nothing was wrong. It felt as if lightning crackled through the tense air, my fear growing with each panicked step.

I began a desperate, awkward scramble to Lewis' door. I ignored the door's crash as it slammed against the wall. The smell of earth permeated the air of his bedroom. My breath was a ragged tattoo of sound, shattering the still silence.

Lewis was not in his bed.

Resting on top of his rumpled dinosaur-blankets was a scrap of paper, torn from a page of his favourite storybook, which lay discarded beside his bed.

On that scrap of paper, scrawled in Lewis' childish handwriting, was a note.