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<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-7293-5256> (2019) Short story:  
'Camelot'. Granta.

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## Camelot

A typical child feels dangerously. Ideally the typical carer of this typical child creates a space where such dangerous feelings are not unacceptable: they can be expressed without too much humiliation or bodily harm. Such a caring carer sets meaningful and predictable boundaries. They absorb the most difficult of the child's difficult feelings without the child becoming shadowed with guilt for requiring such care. Ideally the carer and the child, or carers and children, who share a loving, difficult, typical household *contain* one another, psychologists say, like some kind of garment that is also a wardrobe.



(All C needs to do is make it out of his bedroom and along the landing to his father's bedroom. C's father lies inside a colossal black tulip that is carnivorous. C must free his father from the tulip's mouth before his father is digested. The great disaster is that C's bed is soaked with piss and his father does not enjoy changing the sheets. Another great disaster is that between C and his father are his assailants and yet C's fellow knights are at their leisure, as though the battle is won. It is possible that the knights do not see C's assailants because his assailants are precisely the same size and shape as the bedroom. He attempts to explain this to the knights but what comes out of his mouth is C's own language, which they do not understand. Lancelot is virtuous and pure but useless as chewed paper. Galahad is what he imagines meat tastes like. C imagines dancing with Galahad at the feast where Galahad eats all of the meat. The dance is geometric and intimate while nobody touches and he feels hard and yielding at the same time, the way that the grey

trunk of Galahad's horse is composed of clouds. C has spiky flowers in his hair, which is the way Galahad likes it. Galahad is a dark machine that dances like a father who is happy. The whole scene has the texture of a rug made from a furry animal, luxurious and sinister and C feels suddenly responsible for a death. C retreats from the awfulness of this feeling then slaps himself furiously on his stinging thighs in an attempt to bring himself back to the surface. He waits beside a mirror until the knight is tired from all of his eating and the long joust and the weight of his excellence and eventually falls asleep beside his blue plumes. C looks at the sleeping knight's armour. He trembles at what he is compelled to do. He draws courage from his extraordinary results in his recent exam on plant biology. There are twenty-five layers of armour and when C is dressed finally he falls over with the weight into the mud on the bedroom floor. To his great relief Louise Nurdling is too busy learning her lyrics to notice. How on earth does she remember the words while moving her legs and her arms in the ways that are correct? C cannot even coordinate himself to explain plant biology to his father while eating vegetable stew and making sure that his father does not cry out of his eyes. Louise mistakes the shadowy movements of his assailants for the beat. It is possible, it occurs to him, that an assailant is hiding inside Louise Nurdling. He begins to cry. But it is as though everyone is looking over his shoulder at someone else who is the one who is actually crying. He is glad to feel his soft carrot-like ribs heave inside his armour. He thinks of the beached whales that he knows are blown up by explosives. He would rather they replanted the whales in the part of the rainforest that his father purchased on his behalf, the only part that will remain intact by the time C becomes a man. He thinks of all the specks of himself and of his father that have brushed off his skin and off his father's skin and scattered around the house. He imagines that the furniture is saddened by the specks when they land. The bookshelves, with their thunderous clouds of dust, are saddest of all. They are so sad that they spend all day laughing. It is only at night that the sadness of the furniture, a hilarious daytime sadness, becomes a

nocturnal rage. Like a bowling ball C's own rage is returned to him from an obscure hole in the ground, jumpy and ready to knock down all in its way. He remembers his mission. The door of his bedroom is a horizon dot. It is indistinguishable from the column of enemy infantry cresting the black hill. He will need to be armed. He crawls to the corner where he stores his sword. For his thirteenth birthday he asked his father for a sword. This was on account of his terrible disappointment with his judo apprenticeship. It was becoming apparent that Big Mark with the handlebar moustache and the glossy shins was never going to reveal what a man truly was capable of. Manhood, C knows, is an invitation to the enemies. If he is going to be a man and defend himself from the assailants of all men, he concluded, either they would all have to wear judogi and be patient while his weak fingers found a good hold, or he was going to have to supplement his natural defences with a weapon. There is a great deal at stake. His legs sting both with piss and where he has slapped them. He must extract what is left of his father from the tulip's acid. He picks up the sword. Its rusted blade lives in a black holster with black tassels like an anemone. It reeks of death or the charity shop. A battalion of intricate lead figurines assemble at his flanks. He painted, every night for a month, their livery pink as the inside of his father's mouth. Since Lancelot is too busy in the mirror and Galahad is asleep these pink warriors must serve as C's army. They hail him with their tiny collective voice. He finds their enthusiasm and smallness unbearably moving in his eyes. For the first time an optimism over saving his father. The moment is ripe for an assault on the bedroom door. But there is a problem. What if he is captured? He himself would never torture his enemies on account of the chivalric code. He cannot be sure that his assailants would be so merciful. He has been practicing levitation so that when he is captured and strapped to the spiked chair that his enemies reserve for their greatest foes his own weight will not destroy him. That is the canniness of vegetarianism. He himself is made of a cork-like material that is hollower than the other humans. His body has a consistency

which is more like Perceval, who has blown in through the open window and who studies the framed photograph of Aston Villa and chews gum. Perceval picks up the claret-and-blue football from the floor with drooling curiosity and brings it to his mouth. It bounces off his teeth and lands near C's most frightening assailant, the bookshelf. C is determined to resist these books, whatever it is in them that leaves his father drifting like a plastic bag through the house, not remotely beautiful. C realises that Perceval's stupidity provides a distraction which is an opportunity to strike. By now his father is more flower than human. If he cannot make it to his father's room in the morning C will find nothing but a pile of bones and pollen in the sheets. C's own room is streaked with blood. He knows that it is Louise Nurdling's blood. But Louise's body remains immaculate. C begins to suspect that the catastrophe is taking place not in his father's bedroom but in his own bedroom. It is the quality of a human body that is called *mass*, a quality that a body cannot not possess, that pushes the body down everywhere there is contact with a surface of infinitely sharp unchivalric spikes. He makes the brave decision to shed Galahad's armour. Now he is light and light enough to make a run for the bedroom door. He has cried a dry puddle on his face. Louise holds her arms towards him. He must deny himself and Louise the bliss of that embrace. He knows, suddenly, that the urine each night is precisely the same as the acid that the tulip secretes to dissolve the body of his father, even though it is not on a biology exam. He runs towards the door with one single aim, which is to climb inside the tulip that is carnivorous.)



I am particularly susceptible to the pleasures of prologues, epistles to the reader, characters introduced only to tell stories about other people, pilgrims passing the time with what you are about to read. I like the feeling (of being misled).

To protect myself from it I placed it inside a frame.

In doing so I discovered C's childish misapprehension (that the father required the son's care) has grown up to become the truth. The father is dying. The child, of course, has moved away. He has children of his own.

The story opens with C's father wondering how to break the news to his son, who he imagines, with fear and hope, is asleep in the next room, imagining his father.

'All C needs to do is make it out of his bedroom,' he begins, and the child is placed back inside the father (who is inside the child). We are safe.