

Telamones

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Trigger Warnings:

Contains spoilers for *Renaissance*. Contains reference to a severe injury suffered off-stage.

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ULYSSES GOT TO HIS feet and pulled off his T-shirt in one smooth, unselfconscious motion, like he hadn't just been losing frothy bright arterial blood through a hole in his chest a few hours ago. In the firelight, Eli could still see the red-brown shadows on Ulysses's chest and abdomen, but that was the only evidence that anything bad had happened beyond Eli's own stained shirt and shaky mental state.

Sam looked fine. More than fine, the expression on Sam's face was actively covetous as Ulysses stripped the rest of the way and ambled away toward where the lake came up to meet the property, the muscles of his back flexing in a way they had no right to. Sam got to his feet and started after his husband, unbuttoning his cuffs as he went, and Eli went into the house.

Luria was curled up in the linen closet and made a little questioning noise at him when he opened the door to retrieve towels. He would be damned if Ulysses got to die of hypothermia after what they'd been through.

Laz was still sitting by the fire where Eli had left him, staring at the glowing logs and the embers underneath. He might be meditating, or figuring out a new design for that zaubergraph Peregrine had been lugging around. Or perhaps he, too, was replaying his brother's brush with death. Eli never knew with Laz. Farther out, he could hear Sam and Ulysses's voices out in the dark without being able to make out what they were saying. And he could hear the water lapping at the rocks and the jingle of Oliver's tags as he paced along the shore of the lake, presumably trying to prevent Sam and Ulysses from drowning, or worse. Fine with Eli. Let someone else keep the idiots alive for a while.

As soon as he thought it, he felt bad. Poor Oliver wouldn't understand at all what had happened if one of them drowned except that the pack suddenly had fewer people in it, which would upset him. He was a smart dog, which as Laz put it largely served to make him anxious without providing him much in the way of insight into the workings of the humans he was surrounded by.

Not that Eli, for all his vaunted education, had any real concept of death beyond nothing, and occasionally, no, thank you.

He must have set the towels down on Ulysses's vacant seat a little too vehemently, because Laz blinked and looked over at him. "All right?"

Eli said, "Yeah," without looking at him, and then gave up and turned on his heel.

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Laz came into the kitchen a few minutes later, carrying his empty beer bottle and the tumbler Eli had been drinking his toddy out of. It was empty. Eli couldn't remember if he'd drained it or not. He also didn't remember if he'd had two or three. There were a lot of mysteries going on.

"Doc?"

Eli blinked. "I'm—" He looked down into the sink. Another mystery was where all the dishes Eli was standing in front of the sink to wash had gone. He'd rolled up his sleeves and turned on the faucet. But there wasn't anything to take care of—had he washed them already without noticing? He was standing with his wrists under the flowing water like some crazed Lady Macbeth. No wonder Laz was concerned. "Everything is fine."

"Uh-huh." Laz set the empty tumbler on the sideboard, then moved it as Eli made a grab for it. "I'll wash it later," he said coaxingly. "Come on, turn the tap off. Come sit with me."

"Mm?" Eli didn't want to sit. He had to—the shirt was probably a lost cause; there was no way he could take it to the dry cleaner in its current state. Maybe if he soaked it first some of the blood would come out? He didn't have any club soda, but cold water and soap should do the trick—

Laz gently pulled Eli's fingers away from the buttons on the front of his shirt and took over the job himself. Probably for the best. Eli's hands were cold, and shaking

too badly to make much progress. Instead, he watched dispassionately as Laz unbuttoned the garment and pushed it off his shoulders. Then he dropped it into the sink and steered Eli out to the living room.

“I’m usually better about death,” Eli said apologetically, because they had both been quiet for some time and he felt like he should say something. “It’s not like I’ve never seen anyone die. I’m a doctor, for Christ’s sake. I’ve had blood under my fingernails before.”

“I know.” Laz pushed him onto the yellow sofa and crouched in front of the television, fiddling with the dial. Over his shoulder, but without really looking, he said, “Just because it’s usually fine doesn’t mean it always has to be. There’s a few stuck with me.”

Eli harrumphed, and caught Laz smiling to himself as he joined Eli on the sofa. The TV was playing something entirely innocuous—the musical *Singin’ in the Rain*. Eli rolled his eyes. “I’m just feeling a bit maudlin. I’ll be better in the morning.”

“Expect you’re right.” Laz draped one arm across the back of the sofa, not quite touching Eli but not out of the question, either. Eli couldn’t decide whether he liked the restraint or not. “It’s different when it’s someone you know, I think. A friend.”

Eli considered this. “I suppose we are friends, aren’t we, he and I.”

“Far be it for me to tell you,” Laz said, amused. “I just meant that you like Ulysses. Everyone does. He’s easy to

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like. And he cares so damn much, it's hard to see him get kicked around."

"You're easy to like," Eli said, snappishly. "Your brother is—"

Laz waited. "Yeah?"

"A jackass. Stop laughing."

"No, you're right. And you didn't sign up to spend the evening with him dying under your hands." Laz shivered, and Eli realized abruptly that he might not be the only one having a hard time with this. He leaned into Laz, gently, and Laz lowered his arm to Eli's shoulders. "But it worked out."

"Worked out," Eli repeated softly, doubtfully. On the screen, Donald O'Conner and Gene Kelly were tap-dancing their way through elocution lessons. As Eli recalled, there was a lot of tap dancing in the film. "What is it they say? Any landing you can walk away from?"

"They do say that." For a moment, Eli was sure Laz was about to ask him what had happened. He saw it again, the hole in Ulysses's chest Eli didn't have a way to fix, the wheezing from a punctured a lung, blood bubbling past Eli's fingertips, Ulysses's pained, surprised expression. . . . But all Laz said was, "Watch the movie, Doc. Take your mind off it."

Sometime later, Eli opened his eyes. He didn't remember falling asleep, but the movie was in a much different spot. Laz had shifted so that he was lying with his head in Eli's lap. It didn't look like an especially comfortable position, but Laz was sleeping. Eli brushed a

lock of dark hair out of his face. Up close, it was liberally salted with gray, more than there should have been for his age, but his relaxed face was young. Eli swallowed hard against the lump in his throat. It was good that Laz wasn't awake to tease him for this sudden turn toward mawkish sentimentality.

The screen door banged and he looked up to see Sam standing in the living room doorway. He was wearing grass-stained trousers and no shirt, a towel slung around his shoulders, hair still wet from the lake. As their eyes met, Eli waited for the moment he'd see Dionysus, terrible and beautiful, superimposed over the man who had become his friend. But Sam stayed resolutely himself, and Eli forced himself to keep breathing.

Sam raised a hand and gestured vaguely over his shoulder, mouthing something that might have ended with "guest room?"

"Go ahead," Eli mouthed back. Sam smiled and vanished from the doorframe. From the kitchen he heard Oliver's claws clicking on the linoleum and the sloppy sound of the dog drinking out of his bowl. On the television, Gene Kelly was proclaiming that March twenty-third was his lucky day. Eli tried to remember what day it was, because it was surely Ulysses's lucky day, but sleepiness and scotch blurred his thoughts a bit. The something of July.

It was Sam's lucky day too, if he was being honest. It wasn't Eli's. But that was fine. That was the thing about

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days—they kept coming. Someday, if he waited, it would be his turn again.

About the Author



E. H. Lupton (she/they) lives in Madison, WI with her family. When not writing, she entertains herself by running, quilting, painting, and doing martial arts. Her debut novel, *Dionysus in Wisconsin*, was shortlisted for the Lambda Literary Award. *Lazarus, Home from the War*, the fourth book in the Wisconsin Gothic series, was shortlisted for the Edna Ferber Book Award and was one of the Fated Mates podcast's best romance novels of 2025. Her poetry has been published in a number of literary journals, including *Asimov's Science Fiction*. Em is also half of the hit podcasting duo behind Ask a Medievalist.

Acknowledgments

“Telamones” was read by most of the above—Rowan, Bryan, and Blaine for sure, and I think also Eliot, my editor. It was, however, critiqued by no one; I did this myself and any errors are mine. Rowan suggested the title.

More From E. H. Lupton

The Joy of Fishes (Vagabondage Press, 2013)

Wisconsin Gothic series (Winnowing Fan Press):

Book 1: *Dionysus in Wisconsin* (2023)

Book 2: *Old Time Religion* (2024)

Book 3: *Troth* (2024)

Book 4: *Lazarus, Home from the War* (2025)

Book 4.5: *The Alignments* (2025)

Book 5: *Rénaissance* (2026)