

Vanitas With Fishes  
By Helena Gagnier

The light wasn't so bright, at first. But the longer I look the brighter it gets, until it's all I can see. It engulfs me, swallowing me whole in an enormous gulp; I am Jonah, stuck in the stomach of an anglerfish that glows from within.

When people talk about the light at the end of the tunnel, it's usually described as enthralling. You are irresistibly drawn to it, like a minnow to a shiny bait. I'm pretty sure I'm dying, or will be soon, but this light is anything but compelling. It's terrifying. I want to run, but I'm stuck. I can't wriggle free.

Maybe, for dirtbag humans, the light is a final interrogation room. I wasn't so horrible, though. I only ever killed on a contractual basis and never of my own volition. That's better, isn't it? I'm not really to blame for the lives I took, just as a gun doesn't bear the guilt of its owner.

"Any last words?"

The voice makes me blink, loosening the light's hypnotic grip. The red glow left on my eyelids reveals just how long I've been staring at that bright overhead fluorescent bulb. It's time, I guess. I didn't think I'd be so cold.

"We're all gullible fucking fishes, aren't we?" I ask, still thinking about that light.

The man—technician, executioner, grim reaper, whatever—shakes his head. I don't know if it's an answer or an expression of disbelief. He's scared of me, I can tell. Even strapped to the table in a hospital gown, he thinks I have power. I want to reassure him, and I want him to be right. But a gun has no power without a hand to wield it.

I lie my head back and look at the light. Close my eyes, see the red of my eyelids. It's like I'm lying in the sun. A shadow passes over me—his arm, reaching for the needle.

"Ready?"

I nod without opening my eyes, afraid both of the shadow and of seeing the light. Just a gullible fucking fish.