



PROSE IN POOR TASTE

HORROR *Sleaze* **TRASH**

PROSE IN POOR TASTE

VOL. 3

Arranged by Arthur Graham

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Trashy Women

Jason A. Feingold

All Dave could think about was trashy women.

He knew that it was wrong on so many levels. He knew that referring to anyone as ‘trash’, much less women, was wrong. He knew that judging women based on how they looked or dressed, or how many teeth and tattoos they had (what he called the tooth-to-tattoo ratio) was wrong. He knew that categorizing women as ‘cheap’ or ‘easy’ was part of a phallocracy he genuinely thought was rotten at its core.

Still, all Dave could think about was trashy women.

Another complication was that Dave was married. Very married. Their relationship was solid, even if they hadn’t had sex in years. Often he compared it to living with a really cool roommate. That said, if she ever caught him fucking a trashy woman, it would end in their divorce. He could look, surreptitiously, but he could never touch.

He couldn’t go to dive bars where he might meet trashy women on the sly. Dave knew that no good could come of him entering a dive bar. It wasn’t his world, and the people who frequented dive bars would know that just by looking at him. At best, he would be tolerated. At worst, he’d get rolled. Trying

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to pick up a trashy woman in a bar was simply out of the question.

The only alternative Dave could think of was other places where trashy women might congregate, like supermarkets on the outskirts of town. There he would find what he was looking for — underdressed, over-inked women without the benefits of modern orthodontics in their youths. Frankly, without the benefits of just about anything, like money or good parents or a decent education.

Dave didn't want to fix them, though. He just wanted to fuck them.

When his wife announced that she'd be going with their son on his school trip to New York City (and that he'd be staying home with the dogs), he knew that this would be his one-and-only shot at finally picking up a trashy woman. He might never be left alone for two consecutive nights again for the rest of his life.

Dave began preparing a month in advance, slowly accumulating cash with his debit card on each visit to the post office or grocery store. He had a feeling he might need money if it came down to it. If the trashy woman turned out to be a hooker, well, then he'd have to pay. He had no idea what it might cost him, however, so he embezzled three hundred from their joint checking account just to be safe. He was too afraid to try Googling the going rate.

The buses to New York City left at the insane hour of one-thirty in the morning, for reasons no one but the teachers in charge could really fathom. When

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one of the busses didn't show, Dave was forced to wait with his family until another one arrived, as no one was sure if the trip would actually take place as planned. It was three in the morning by the time the second bus arrived, and Dave was finally able to drive home.

The quickest route from his son's school was through a rather seedy part of town. Not only was Dave not afraid to drive through this area, but he actually looked forward to it. There were plenty of trashy women for him to ogle as he drove through it four times a day, taking his son to and from school.

Dave didn't expect to find a trashy woman right off the bat at this ungodly hour, but there she was on the street corner, just waiting for the light to change. In the dark, he couldn't pin down her exact age, but she looked to be at least legal. Even though the night was cool, she was wearing only a halter top with short shorts and flip-flops. As Dave drove by, they made brief eye contact, and he felt a wave of sexual desire pass through him so profound that he almost stopped the car. She was just what he was looking for.

Unfortunately, however, he was not prepared for her tonight. His money was stashed at home in his sock drawer. He hadn't gotten a motel room, and there was no way he was bringing a trashy woman back to his house. Also, he didn't have any condoms on him. And he was scared. So Dave kept driving and had to settle for jerking off that night instead.

* * *

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Dave spent the next day making all the necessary preparations. He bought a box of condoms. He paid for a cheap motel room. All of this was done with cash, of course, and in places he never went so he wouldn't be recognized. It gave him a sexual thrill to be doing these things, and he spent most of the afternoon with a tremendous boner. Then, as the late spring day languished into evening, he got in his car and began trolling for trashy women.

The first place he went was where he'd seen the woman in the halter top early in that same morning. Of course, she wasn't there. He knew that there was no reason she should be, but it was as good a place as any to begin his search. In a way, he was relieved. If she had been there, he had no idea if he would've even had the courage to approach her. How were these things done?

He went to one of the supermarkets on the fringes of a bad neighborhood and sat in the parking lot, watching people come in and out of the store. There were lots of trashy women, but all of them were accompanied by equally trashy men or parades of children so close in age that they might've only been ten months apart. He began to get nervous. He began to fear the police would pull up next to him, see his tremendous boner, and cart him off to jail for being such a pervert.

Dave was about to drive away when he saw a trashy woman leaving the supermarket with heavy bags clutched in both hands. She was walking toward the edge of the parking lot, clearly not headed for any of the jalopies parked there. Wherever she was going,

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she was going on foot. Dave saw his chance. He started his car and pulled up alongside her. He rolled down the passenger side window.

“Need a ride?” he asked.

The woman stopped and looked him over.

“Maybe,” she said. Her accent, unlike Dave’s, was heavily Southern.

“Hop in,” Dave said, his voice slightly shaky. “I’ll take you wherever you’re going.”

“How do I know you ain’t some creep or weirdo?” she asked. “How do I know you ain’t gonna kidnap and murder me?”

Dave knew it was a fair point.

“Do I look like a creep or weirdo?” he asked her.

He could see on her face that she was considering it.

“Creeps and weirdos never look like creeps and weirdos,” she said.

Dave hadn’t been expecting an answer like that. She was smarter than he’d given her credit for.

“I’m a nice person,” Dave said. “I just hate to see you have to carry those groceries all the way back home on foot.”

“Okay,” she said, opening the door and sliding in beside him, placing her bags on the floorboard in front of her. She settled in and turned to face him.

“I got me a knife,” she said. “Don’t try nothin’ or I’ll stick ya.”

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“Fair enough,” Dave said. “Where am I going?”

“Pull out and go right,” the woman said.

Dave followed the direction.

“I’m Louis,” he said by way of introduction with the first fake name that came into his head.

“Amber,” the woman said.

Perfect, Dave thought.

“Turn right at the stoplight,” Amber directed.

Dave did as he was told.

“Where are we going?” Dave asked.

“Foggy Bottom,” Amber said. A notorious slum.
“Where do you live?”

“Mount Pleasant,” Dave lied again.

“Are you rich?” Amber asked.

Dave chuckled. “No, I’m not rich.”

“Keep going over the railroad tracks,” Amber said.

The realization suddenly hit Dave that he was heading deep into the wrong side of town. *There’s still time to abort this*, he thought. *I could let her off here and get the hell out.* Instead, he kept driving.

“What are you doing being out here all alone at night?” Dave asked. He realized he shouldn’t have said it just after the words had left his mouth.

“I know it ain’t Mount Pleasant,” Amber said pointedly. “But my car’s busted and I didn’t have nothin’ to eat.”

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"I'm sorry," Dave said. "I just meant..."

"I know what you meant," Amber said. "Turn right here and keep going."

As Dave drove, he watched the area steadily degrade, and it hadn't been very good to begin with. It excited him and filled him with dread all at the same time. He glanced over at Amber. She had been pretty, once upon a time, before years of hard living had caught up with her. Crude home tattoos adorned her chest, arms and legs.

"Are you married?" Amber asked.

"No," Dave lied. "How about you?"

"I ain't married neither," Amber said. Dave found that to be very encouraging. Boy, was he horny. Horny-like-a-teenager horny.

"It's the house on the corner," Amber said. Dave pulled up to the curb and stopped. The house on the corner was a little bungalow that had been subdivided. Dave thought the inside of the apartment must be the size of a postage stamp.

"Well, thanks for the ride, Louis," Amber said. She opened the door. When the dome light came on, Dave felt exposed.

"Want me to help you carry those up?" Dave stammered. Amber turned and squinted at him, then looked him up and down.

"Okay," she said, sounding reluctant. She handed him a bag full of cans. "C'mon."

Dave exited the vehicle awkwardly with his heavy

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load. He followed Amber up the short walkway, eyes glued to her ass the entire time. He watched as she opened three locks on the door with two separate keys.

"I suppose you want to come in," Amber said.

"Yes," Dave replied simply.

Together they crossed the threshold. The inside of the apartment was chaos, clothes and garbage strewn everywhere. Dave didn't have to guess at whether or not she had roaches. He just hoped that he wouldn't bring any back home with him.

"Home sweet home," Amber said. "This is my living room-bedroom. Over yonder is my kitchen-bathroom."

"Kitchen-bathroom?" Dave asked.

"You ain't never heard of no kitchen-bathroom?"

"No, honestly, I haven't."

"I guess they ain't got those in Mount Pleasant," Amber said. Dave wished he had told a different lie. "Put them cans on the table."

Dave put the bag on the table. He almost missed the fact that the table was actually a piece of particle board sitting on top of a bathtub. Amber began putting the groceries away. Dave scrutinized her as she reached up and bent down, catching a flash of tits in the process. When she was done, they stood in the kitchen-bathroom and looked at each other. It was very awkward, and it was all Dave could do not to squirm.

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"I'd ask y'all if ya want somethin', but I think I know what it is ya want," Amber said.

Dave nodded, unable to speak. He could feel his heart beating in his ears.

"You got a hunnerd dollars, Louis?" Amber asked.

Dave fumbled for his wallet and counted out five twenties, handing it over to Amber. She took it and put it in a coffee tin in the cabinet.

"I ain't no whore," Amber said. "That's a present you just gave me."

"Uh huh," Dave said, the non-verbal "uh huh" being the boundary of his ability to articulate.

"Now I'll give y'all a present," Amber said. She knelt down in front of him and took his pants and underwear down. Dave was so hard he could scarcely believe it. She took him into her mouth, and within a few seconds, it was over. She got up and spat in the sink, rinsing her mouth out from the tap.

"That was awful quick," Amber said.

"I'm sorry," Dave said lamely.

"But you still hard," Amber said. "Come over here."

Amber led him over to the bed, hopping out of her shorts along the way. Following close behind, Dave almost tripped on the pants that were still down around his ankles. Amber spread herself out for him as he fumbled in his pockets for a condom.

"You don't need that," Amber said. "I'm clean."

Without another word, Dave fell forward and thrust

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himself deep inside of her, knowing he was risking a social disease and not even caring at all.

Not too long after they started, Dave heard loud music coming from a car outside, so loud that it was shaking the windows.

“That’s my boyfriend,” Amber said nervously. “He ain’t supposed to be here...”

Pure, unadulterated fear hit Dave like a baseball bat to the back of the head. His erection deflated instantly as he groped for his pants, yanking them up in a frenzy.

“Get out the back!” Amber hissed, slipping back into her shorts.

The music abruptly stopped.

Dave hurried to the back door as if his life depended on it. It took him a few seconds to work the lock, but he made it outside before the boyfriend made it in.

Flattening himself against the wall of the house, he closed his eyes tight and tried to control his breathing.

Just let me out of this, and I’ll never do it again, Dave prayed to a God in whom he didn’t believe.

“Who parked out there?” came a male voice from inside the apartment.

“How the hell should I know?” Amber said.

“I don’t like nobody parked in my spot,” the man said.

“What do you want me to do about it?”

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“Watch your mouth, bitch!”

Shaking with fear, Dave quietly worked his way around the side of the building until he could see his car parked out front. He felt for his keys in his pocket and thanked God that they were still there. He rushed to the car, opened the door, and started the ignition.

“Hey, hold up!”

For some strange reason, Dave didn’t peel out into the street right then and there. Instead, he rolled down the passenger side window.

“What you doin’ here?” the strange man asked, leaning halfway into his car.

“I-I was just leaving,” Dave stammered, finding he was paralyzed with fear.

“I didn’t ask you where you was goin’,” the man said, “I asked why you was *here*.”

“Just let me go,” Dave pleaded.

“Did you fuck my bitch?” the man demanded to know.

“What?” Dave replied incredulously.

“You deaf?”

“I’m not deaf.”

“I said, DID, YOU, FUCK, MY, BITCH?!”

“N-no,” was all Dave could manage in response, wondering why the hell hadn’t he just driven off.

“I don’t believe you,” the man said, withdrawing one

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arm to reach back behind him.

Dave didn't have to use his imagination to guess what he was reaching for, and he wasn't too keen on finding out.

It was then that Amber suddenly appeared behind the man, grabbing frantically at his arms. He turned around and smacked her, hard. Taking advantage of the distraction, Dave put the car in gear and floored it, leaving them both in the dust.

Dave heard a series of pops as he drove away. Suddenly it dawned on him that he being was shot at. *Shot* at! He skidded around the next corner and didn't stop until he was safely back in his own driveway.

As Dave waited for his legs to stop shaking so he could get out of the car, he wondered what Amber's boyfriend was doing to her right now. That trashy woman could be taking the beating of her life, getting killed for all he knew.

Catching his eye in the rear-view mirror, he saw who the real trash was.

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Raspberry Heart

Ben Fitts

“You know, I wasn’t always a raspberry,” said the raspberry.

“That makes sense,” Mr. Dudley said, glancing up from their resume. “You would’ve had to have been a flower before you could be a berry.”

“No, no, no,” sighed the raspberry. “I was actually never a flower at all.”

“So you just came into existence as a fully formed raspberry?” Mr. Dudley asked.

“Nope, not that either. I used to be a person, then one morning I took a shower. I walked into the shower a good-looking thirty-three-year-old woman with legs for days, and I walked out a raspberry.”

“What happened in the shower?” he asked.

The raspberry shrugged the best it could without having any shoulders, causing its tiny gray blazer to shift slightly.

“I couldn’t tell you,” said the raspberry. “It’s honestly kind of a blur.”

Mr. Dudley made a note on his clipboard. The raspberry had no face, which made its emotions hard to read, but he still got the sense that it felt

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concerned whenever he scratched another note onto the page.

“All that I’m saying is that I’m more than a raspberry. I used to be a human, and I have all the qualifications that come with being a human. I have a B.A. in Economics from Sarah Lawrence College and a Masters of Business from Georgetown McDonough. I have over a decade of experience in the private sector.”

“Is that information not on your resume?” he asked, scrutinizing it for further inspection.

“No it is,” said the raspberry. “It’s just that you haven’t asked about, or even mentioned anything on my resume even once. All you’ve done is ask me about being a raspberry!”

“Because that’s more interesting,” Mr. Dudley said. “Everyone who has ever interviewed for a job at this firm has brought a resume. They’ve all had degrees and previous work experience and qualifications and all that nonsense. But you’re the first candidate I have ever interviewed who is a raspberry.”

“But I’m more than just a raspberry!” cried the raspberry with such fervor that it wobbled a little bit.

The raspberry was too small to sit on the chair usually reserved for interviewees and still be seen, so it had been set beside by Mr. Dudley’s computer monitor instead.

“Ask me about the seven years I worked as head of

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marketing for Kington Pharmaceutical Supplies,” insisted the raspberry. “That’s actually relevant to this position.”

“Being a raspberry, do you still have to eat?” he asked.

“What?”

“Do you still have to eat?” he repeated. “You appear to still be alive, in a way. In your raspbitic state, do you still require the intake of nutrients in order to maintain your existence?”

The raspberry sat in silence.

“And if you do need to eat, can you just chew off a little bit of yourself?” Mr. Dudley added as an afterthought. “If you were to eat a small amount of yourself, would it grow back?”

“I don’t have a mouth,” said the raspberry after a pause. Mr. Dudley guessed that counted as an answer.

“How is that you’re even talking to me? It’s not like you have a throat and vocal cords,” he said after a moment of further consideration. “Or do you?”

“No, I don’t have vocal cords. I’m a goddamn raspberry,” said the raspberry.

“How are you vocalizing then? You don’t have a mouth that’s opening and closing to form syllables, or at least not one that I can see. Yet you manage to communicate to me in clear, articulate English at an audible volume with a distinct, pleasantly feminine lilt to your voice. How is any of this

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possible?”

The raspberry trembled as it turned an even brighter shade of red than it had been before.

“I don’t know!” it shrieked. “I don’t even know what happened to me! I was enjoying a perfectly nice, calm Sunday morning an ordinary human being, and then I somehow I became a motherfucking raspberry! I don’t know how this shit works! I’m just trying to live my life as normally as I can, regardless of whether or not I’m a raspberry!”

Mr. Dudley lowered his clipboard and looked at the raspberry, his hazel eyes big and mournful.

“You’ve been through so much,” he sympathized. “I’ve never previously considered the struggles a raspberry might face in modern society, especially if the raspberry was once a person used to enjoying the perks of human privilege.”

“A good-looking human with legs for days,” sniffled the raspberry.

“Yet you still come here and apply for a high-paying position at a prestigious marketing firm,” he continued. “You haven’t given up on life, despite the fact you are destined to live the rest of yours as a raspberry. I admire that. In fact, I might go so far as calling it inspiring.”

“Does that mean I have the job?” asked the raspberry, its voice quivering with hope.

“No,” Mr. Dudley said. “I’m afraid I can’t get over the fact that you are a raspberry. Every time I’d see

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you in your cubicle, I wouldn't see my new head of marketing. I'd just see a raspberry in a tiny pantsuit. It's nothing personal. In fact, it can't be, because you're not even a person."

The raspberry emitted a pained, gurgled sound. Then it exploded. Tiny chunks of raspberry and polyester fabric rained down upon Mr. Dudley's desk.

"I guess I broke its tiny, raspberry heart," he said, surveying the carnage.

Mr. Dudley pulled a bag from the mini fridge beside his desk and withdrew a turkey sandwich he'd been saving for lunch. Lifting the top piece of bread, he scraped the remains of his interviewee onto the plain turkey, lettuce and tomato.

His sandwich could've used a little raspberry.

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The Treadmill

James Babbs

In the dead of the night, suddenly I awakened and sat up in my bed thinking I heard a noise and the first thought that crossed my mind was—the treadmill's in the basement. Why the hell was that the first thought that crossed my mind?

I got out of bed and went down to the basement and, of course, there was the goddamn treadmill, sitting there, mocking me with its silence. It had been several months since the last time I had used the damn thing. I had been all gung-ho when I first bought the treadmill but my initial enthusiasm for exercising waned after those first few weeks had passed.

I looked at the treadmill. Something made me reach out and touch it. I put my hand on the treadmill. It felt cold. I gave the treadmill a gentle push as if to say, you can't intimidate me, you fucker. I turned off the lights and left the treadmill sitting there in the dark before going back upstairs. I had trouble falling asleep.

In the morning I got up and got ready for work. I had peanut butter on toast and coffee for my breakfast. I went to work and put in my hours and got gas in the car on the way home. I came home and turned on the TV. There wasn't really anything good on but I

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left the TV on anyway. I had a frozen pizza for supper and watched some more TV before, finally, going to bed.

In the middle of the night, suddenly I awakened and sat up in my bed. Had there been some kind of a noise? I wasn't sure what it was but I got out of bed and went down to the basement. The treadmill was, still, down there but something was different. The treadmill had moved. It was only a few inches but the treadmill was definitely not in the same place it had been the night before.

I touched the treadmill. It didn't feel as cold as it had felt the night before. I looked at the treadmill and laughed. Fuck you, I said and I waved my hand at it before turning off the lights and heading back upstairs. I went back to bed and lay there for the longest time just listening to the radio before, finally, falling asleep.

In the morning I got up and got ready for work. I had a sausage and egg biscuit and coffee for my breakfast. I went to work and put in my hours and got gas in the car on the way home. I came home and read a book for a while. I had some canned soup for supper and did some more reading before going to bed.

Sometime during the night, suddenly I awakened and sat up in my bed thinking the treadmill's trying to kill me. What the fuck? What kind of crazy thought was that? I figured I must have been having some kind of weird dream. I looked at the clock that was next to the bed. The red numbers on the clock read 3:33 so I stayed in bed and fell back asleep.

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In the morning I got up and got ready for work. I had some powdered doughnuts and coffee for my breakfast. I went to work and put in my hours and got gas in the car on the way home. I came home and went down to the basement. Right away I saw the treadmill had turned a hundred and eighty degrees and was, now, facing in the opposite direction from where it had been before. This was crazy, I thought. What the hell was going on?

I grabbed the treadmill and struggled with it. I lifted and pushed and, finally, managed to get it back in its original position. I was sweating and trying to catch my breath. I looked at the treadmill just sitting there all innocent. You piece of shit, I said. I got on the treadmill and started it up. The belt moved at a sluggish pace and I walked without any trouble at all.

I began to relax. I started swinging my arms settling into a good rhythm. I chuckled and then I laughed. See, I said. No big deal.

There was a strange noise and the treadmill lurched and started going faster. I had to quicken my pace to keep up. Shit, I said. The speed of the treadmill increased even more. What the hell? My legs were beginning to hurt. I had to stop the damn thing. I had to get off. I hit the power button but nothing happened. The treadmill was making loud screeching noises. Suddenly I lost my footing and went down.

I was thrown off of the treadmill. My left foot hit the wall with a sickening smack. I felt a jolt rushing through my entire body. I was lying on the floor. I

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didn't think I was capable of moving. The treadmill made some loud cracks and pops and then the motor gave out a low moan before going completely dead. I thought I smelled smoke but I wasn't sure.

I managed to roll myself over. I was on my back looking up at the ceiling. I saw the bright lights above me. I smiled and closed my eyes.

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At the Gate

John Yohe

when the two friends could no longer avoid the angry men with guns + atvs + leafblowers, they made their way to the gates of the walled city just before sundown and knocked on the small steel door to the side of the gates. a small slit opened. two eyes appeared in the slit, flicking under long lashes from one man to the other. —what do you want?! we dont allow straight white men!

—please, said one. we/re not like those others. he gestured behind them. —we/re hungry.

—are you jewish?

the man tilted his head slightly. —what?

—are you jewish? you look jewish.

—well, i mean, yes. secular though.

—thats fine. do you believe in israel?

—i/m sorry? believe?

the person behind the slit sighed. —believe in the right of return?

he shrugged. —i guess? i dont believe in the killing of palestinians tho. or their displacement, of course.

the eyes glared. —wrong answer. we dont take muslim extremists!

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—i/m not muslim! i told, i/m atheist—

—we dont allow muslim extremist sympathizers!
you/re either with us or against us!

—but...i just think the palestinians should be treated
equally, like humans—

—sorry jew boy. jewish self-haters arent allowed!

—but—

—move along!

the first man stared at the glaring eyes for some
seconds, then turned to his friends. —if you can still
get in, do it! i/ll meet you somewhere!

—i/m not leaving you!

—no! the orange people are too close! theres no
other way. its either/or!

—its never either/or!

—just do it! go!

the first man ran from his friend, away from the
walled city towards the hills. his friends stared after
him.

—straight white men not allowed! you may as well
go after him!

the man turned to the glaring eyes. —but we—i—just
want shelter. water. maybe a pizza?

—no straight white men. are you gay? closeted?

—uh....

—do you want to suck dick?

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- excuse me?
- do you want to suck dick? fantasize about it?
- well, i mean, in certain fantasies. but i like women!
- too bad. are you bi? that counts.
- i mean, i have fantasies about being forced to wear womens underwear while my girlfriend laughs + has sex with a real man.
- cuckolds dont count. but are you trans?
- um, i dont know? i dont think so?
- are you a little bitch?
- i mean, maybe?
- do you feel like a little bitch in the presence of real men?
- maybe? but that doesnt make me a woman, does it?
- well, it doesnt make you a man.
- i guess thats true.
- we have a womens mountain bike race this weekend. if i let you in, you could sign up.
- oh, that wouldnt be fair. i mean, i/d sign up for the mens race.
- ah ha! i knew it! you *are* a man! your politics are so transparent!
- thats not politics. thats like, social issues.
- i knew it! cisgender male!
- what do you mean?! politics is about the

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exploitation of the working class!

—communist! socialist! anarchist! you/re like the dead white men you read!

—look, if you dont let me in, I *will* be dead! the conservative christians want to kill me because i/m not pro-life!

—if it wasnt for men like you, women wouldnt have to worry about abortions. get the fuck out of here!

—seriously?!

—seriously!

the slit closed. the man stared at it. he turned to the distant roar and dust cloud of atvs and leafblowers coming closer.

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Miracle In A Men's Room

Matthew Licht

One advantage of a religious education is a life-long obsession with sex. Eons later, I still remember Debbie Spinello.

A second-year girl, Debbie Spinello was secretly voted 'Most Developed' at St J's Junior College.

The school had separate entrances for males and females. Demerits were handed out, penances assigned, for being out of uniform. So I was surprised when I ran into Debbie in the Young Men's room. She was smoking a forbidden cigarette, unfiltered.

"Wha-what're you doing in here?" I gasped.

Debbie Spinello exhaled a Bikini Atoll cloud, puffed a fleck of tobacco off her unfrosted lip (Holy Regulation #31B: Thou shalt not apply lipstick, nor lip gloss!) and said, "Duh. What about you?"

"This is the Young Men's Room. I need to urinate.

"Well, don't mind me. I ain't leavin' till I finish this butt."

But I couldn't leave. I was about to piss my pants. I approached the urinal. My hands shook when I unzipped. My penis was hard as an iron bar.

Debbie heard the silence, came over to see what was wrong.

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"C'mon," she whispered smokily in my ear.

Mortified, I prayed for a quick, painless death.

"You're pee-shy? That's cute...Whoa! You got a fucking hard-on."

She punched my arm. I thought she'd report me to the Sisters. Holy Regulation #3 was: Thou shalt not never have a hard-on.

"We could, uh, not waste it," she said. "Know what I mean?"

Her cigarette sizzled when she flicked it into the urinal. Her slender fingers came together again, not in prayer. "Well I do, even if you don't."

"But... but... I gotta get back to class," I said. "Father Hurley's gonna send a patrol out for me in a minute if I don't..."

"Don't worry. This won't take long. First, you get it wet."

Debbie Spinello bent at the waist, and nearly hit her head on the cup of the urinal. The Fathers said that what she did was the worst thing that could ever happen, but it felt good.

When she stopped I didn't want her to. But then she said, "Wanna fuck?"

I nodded dumbly. "Too bad," she said.

My heart sank. The nuns had used Debbie as bait to trap a boy in his sinful lust.

"My folks have me checked once a week. Doc Snyder would report me for sure. He's my Dad's oldest

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buddy. Besides, I don't want to get pregnant. So you have to do my ass, OK?"

This time I nodded furiously.

"Unbutton me. I got a surprise for you."

She had to guide my hands. I fought the urge to rip and tear.

"Here silly, lemme show you how."

A gold medallion hung on a delicate chain in the hollow of her neck. Below was a heavy-duty white cotton bra. I grabbed.

"Be gentle," she whispered. "And warm your hands first. Ready for the surprise?"

Was Debbie Spinello really a boy? I'd heard stories from guys who'd been to Times Square. Was she an undercover cop? At that point, I didn't even care.

She unsnapped her bra and showed me the most beautiful things in the world. I wanted to start crying. But all I could say was, "So what's the surprise?"

That's when she tweaked her nipples.

"You got milk! You're lac... lactating! I thought you said you didn't wanna get pregnant?"

"I'm not pregnant, silly. It just happens. I thought it was a miracle at first, but I was too embarrassed to tell the Sisters. Doc Snyder says it's rare but normal. He said some Latin word, but I forgot. Mom has to buy me these special absorbent bras."

She knelt down and took me in her mouth. It was all

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too much.

“Do you like...”

Way too much. I nearly exploded, fell over backwards. I thought she'd be angry.

“Wow,” she said. “You must really like me.”

“Oh Debbie,” I moaned. “I love you. I always have. Do you know how often I've dreamed...”

She stood up and turned around, pulled up her skirt, pulled down her panties and braced herself against the wall over the urinal.

“You gotta spit on it first.”

I went to clear my throat.

“Ew,” she said, “not like *that*! You're supposed to, like, just drool on it a bit.”

I did as she instructed and she reached around, guiding me in.

“Ow! Go slow! Go slow!”

So I went slow, even though I wanted to root around in Debbie like a warthog. To help keep my cool, I recited the Lord's Prayer backwards.

“Quiet,” she said. “This feels really good, but we don't wanna get caught, do we?”

We did not.

“Milk me so I get off fast. But do it gently.”

I pretended I was back on Uncle Olaf's farm in Wisconsin.

Debbie wrothe and squirmed. We fell against each

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other, crashed into the urinal. The thing flushed. We slid to the cold tile floor.

“Omigod,” Debbie whispered. “I can’t go back to class like this. You gotta help me out, OK?”

“Sure,” I said. “What’m I supposed to do?”

“Clean me up,” she hissed. “Come on, hurry.”

She got on all fours.

Debbie tasted evil. When I was done, she whipped around so we could kiss.

The memory of that kiss lingers on and on.

Debbie wiped her mouth on my shirt, walked out of the Men’s room and out of my life forever.

She got kicked out of school for smoking.

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Nerd On A Stick

Jospeh Farley

A desk sat in the middle of an otherwise empty room. The room had white walls. It featured no windows, no paintings, no photographs, no bookcases, no adornments to break up the expanse of white paint except for a series of doors. These were painted white so as to blend in as much as possible with the walls. The doors were metal and strong, but this was not something you could tell at a glance. The ceiling was also white with recessed lighting that was well hidden from anyone first entering the room. There was no carpet. The floor was covered with white linoleum, a single sheet, not squares, the shade picked precisely to match the walls and ceiling. This gave the room a sense of vastness, a sense of loneliness, a sense of silence.

A desk, black, metallic, sat in the middle of the room. Behind the desk in a black swivel chair with comfortable cushions and ample lumbar support, sat a man appearing to be in his mid-thirties with a crew cut. The man was wearing a black suit, a white button down shirt, crisply pressed, and a thin black neck tie. A metal sign on the desk read Bartholomew Squint, Human Resources Manager.

Another man, who also appeared to be in his late twenties, was seated in front of the desk in a small

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black metal chair. The chair was stationary and had no back. This man was also wearing a suit and tie. An interview of sorts was just reaching an end.

“Thank you for applying,” said the man behind the desk. “I am glad we had this chance to chat. But I do not think you are what we are looking for just now.”

The man who was interviewed stood.

“I appreciate you giving me the opportunity to interview. The job market is tight right now. Do you think you could keep my resume on hand in case something else opens up?”

The interviewer looked at the man with a smile that was more a sneer.

“We do get a lot of applicants, but I’ll see what I can do.”

“Thanks.”

The interviewee extended his hand. The man seated behind the desk ignored the hand even though it was mere inches from his nose. The hand stayed suspended in the air over the blotter for an inordinate amount of time. The interviewer stared at it with a look of increasing distaste.

“Please do not leave the way you came in. Exit through the door on your right.”

There were a series of doors around the room. The interviewee retracted his hand, looking sheepish. He picked up his coat and headed to the door on his right. He opened the door and stepped through. The door opened onto air. The interviewee screamed as

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he fell spinning the thirty stories to the pavement below.

The interviewer got on the intercom. "Ms. Watson. Send in the next applicant."

The next applicant came in. The interviewer adjusted the nameplate on his desk.

"Hello, Mr. Squint. I am James Murray. I see you have my resume."

"Yes," Squint spat out tersely. "Sit down."

The man sat.

"Tell me Mr. Murray," Squint asked, his voice absent of warmth or emotion. "Why is there a blank spot on your resume?"

"What do you mean?" asked Murray leaning forward in his chair.

"There is a nine month unaccounted period in your job history. Care to explain?"

"I was trying to write a novel."

"Were you employed while you were trying to write this novel?"

"No."

"So you had no job for nine months?"

"I guess you could say that."

The interviewer drummed his fingers on his desk.

"I don't like writers as a rule. Don't like artists either. I can tolerate dancers. They are fun at parties. Are you a dancer Mr. Murray?"

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Murray shook his head. "No, I'm afraid not."

"Too bad," Squint said. "I am afraid we cannot use you."

Murray begged, "Please reconsider. I need this job. I won't let you down. I am hard working. I'm willing to learn. I'll even put in extra hours for free."

"I would hope so."

"What can I do to land this job? I'll do anything."

A glint came to the eyes of the interviewer.

"Can you dance Mr. Murray?"

"I can learn."

Squint commanded, "Dance for me Mr. Murray."

"Dance for you? What? Here? Now?"

"Yes. Dance for me. You said you would do anything."

Murray got up slowly. He straightens his tie, then starts to dance. There was no music. Murray had assessed himself accurately. He was not a very good dancer. He was awful.

"Not good enough Mr. Murray," Squint said. "Simply not good enough. Please exit through the door to your left."

Murray looked dejected, he headed to the door on his left and opened it. Murray stepped through and fell into a roaring fire. The door he had stepped through shut.

The interviewer sighed with boredom. It was going

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to be a long day, but variety helped.

The interviews blended into each other. Several victims later, the interviewer dismissed another applicant.

"I don't understand why you even bothered to apply. Exit through the door directly behind my desk.

The man went to the door, opened it, and stepped through. There was the sound of a shredding machine and blood curdling screams.

Mr. Squint pushed the button on the intercom.

"Ms. Watson, send in the last applicant."

A twenty-something with a crew cut in a black suit, with a crisp white shirt and a narrow tie entered, appearing surprisingly similar to Mr. Squint.

"Have a seat mister, er, Desoto, is it?" Squint said.

"DeSade," replied the applicant. "George DeSade."

"Mr. DeSade," the interviewer asked. "Your resume seems... adequate. Just barely. Why should I consider you for a position as a Human Resources Assistant?"

DeSade cleared his throat, and then made his pitch..

"I understand I would be assisting with interviewing job applicants. I think I would be an ideal fit. I enjoy causing pain. Physical and mental anguish. I feel I could make a lot of people suffer if I were to be hired. That is all I could really ask for. The salary is secondary."

The interviewer paused.

Squint sat in silence, making a pyramid with his

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finger tips. He watched the candidate to see if he would squirm. DeSade did not squirm, he sat rigid and motionless, while exuding an air of complete calm. After a length of time, Squint relaxed his fingers. He flashed a thin grin.

"I see," said Squint. "Finally a candidate with who I can relate. Not that you really deserve the job. Think of yourself as a fill-in until we can find someone better. When can you start?"

"Next Monday. I'll be busy this week killing my neighbor's dog. It is a poison job. Gravy soaked sponge. Need to make sure it takes the bait."

"Gravy soaked sponge?"

"Expands in the belly," DeSade explained. "I understand it is dreadful. First time I tried it. Used to use pellet guns."

"Interesting," Squint said, resting his chin on a single extended finger. "You may have potential." Suddenly he glared at the applicant. "But don't be too pushy. Remember who is in charge. Don't go bucking for my job, or it won't go well for you."

"I wouldn't dream of it," said DeSade in a voice that dripped sugar. "I'm not overly ambitious. I just want to be part of this organization. It has been one of my lifelong goals. To work in a place like this...and destroy the lives of others."

Squint grinned. It was friendly evil.

"Good. Keep thinking that way and you could survive with the company... for a while. See you next Monday, after the dog dies."

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“So I have the job?”

“Yes,” said Squint with a slight eye roll. “Go back out the way you came. Ms. Watson will give you some papers to sign.”

Squint reached into his desk drawer and pulled out a strange item. A barbecued kabob of some kind. He offered it to DeSade.

“Nerd on a stick?”

The kabob had a small man with glasses and pocket saver impaled on it. The man appeared to be alive and squirming in agony, despite burns and barbecue sauce.

“Wow, how do you make them so small?”

“Trade secret.”

“Too bad I had a big lunch.”

Squint did not hide his annoyance.

“You don’t know what your missing. The sensitive ones tastes so good. I have more.”

Squint took a bite, ripping off an arm with his teeth. The nerd screamed in a high pitch squeak.

Both men laughed.

“Maybe I will have one after all.”

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Big Killa

Victor Cass

There was once a rapper so crazy that he would shoot a member of his crew on stage at every show. Big Killa was his name and he would literally pull out a gun at some point during his performance and actually *shoot* one of his homies right there, live, in front of everyone. And the people ate this shit up! They'd come from all around to watch Big Killa on the mic, rapping about bitches, hoes, fuck the police, and all that poetry of the streets stuff, then whip out his strap and BAM!—shoot some fool who was dancing and flailing his arms with him. Big Killa offered \$5,000 to anyone who would agree to perform with him. Kids from the streets, aspiring rappers, artists, students, even actual gang members jumped at the chance to score five Gs and be up there with Big Killa, even though they all knew they might get shot. I mean, this was nuts! I couldn't believe it. Who would do that? Who would allow this? Where were the police?

Turns out, the police were after Big Killa. Right? The dude was shooting people, after all, with like, hundreds of witnesses all around. Forget Fight Club! This was Murder Incorporated, live at the Shoot-em-up Rap Festival! Big Killa's sick fans would pay \$1,000 a ticket to go see someone get shot on stage. And no one snitched on him. No one told the cops where Big

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Killa was, or where he'd play next. Everything was deep, deep, deep underground! Like a gore-mongering Roman citizen of old, jockeying for the best view in the stands at the Coliseum, I had to know more! I had to see this for myself to believe it. I had to score a ticket to Big Killa's next show.

I had the money. I had the stomach for it (so I thought). I was pretty pro-police, so who knew if I would turn Big Killa in to the cops or not, once I found out where he would play next, but, man, I just had to know! Was this guy for real? More importantly for me, at the moment was, where would I get a ticket? How would a Wall Street, financial dude like myself, white, privileged, driving a Mercedes, gain entry into one of Big Killa's kill fests? Did they even let rich white dudes into his shows?

Well, surprise, surprise, come to find out that most of the people going to Big Killa's shows were rich white people. How do you like that? The Man was paying big money to see Black people killing other Black people, up on stage no less! How do I know? One of my financial colleagues, clearly "in the scene" asked me to go with her to see Big Killa. You should have heard this lady, Hannah Zipp, with her short, auburn bob and bright red lips: "You like rap?" I played coy: "It's okay." Hannah's blue eyes slid around under her eyelashes like a hockey puck. You would have thought the CIA was coming up behind her the way she was looking around. "Ever heard of Big Killa?" Playing dumb, I went along: "Nah, who's he?" Her eyes widened as she said: "He's the big

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black guy that shoots people on stage.” I thought Hannah was going to wet her shorts. “Sounds pretty sick,” I replied, “I’m in.”

“Meet me at Union Square at 8:00 tonight? Outside Coffee Shop Bar,” she practically whispered.

“He’s playing at Union Square?”

“No!” she snapped. “They give you the location later, along with the code word.”

“Speakeasy style.” I got it.

I couldn’t wait until work was over. What was I getting myself into? I was going to a concert where the bullets would be flying! Wait a minute? Did Big Killa ever miss?

Did I need a bulletproof vest? Should I tell my mom where I was going? Make out my will? Ours was a sick culture, but I couldn’t resist it.

Finally, the time had come. It was raining and I was without an umbrella, but I sacked up and made my way on the train to Union Square. I found Hannah arguing with some homeless guy. Was he the Big Killa connection?

“Hey, what’s going on?” I asked. I thought she was gonna take off one of her Jimmy Choo’s and throw it at him.

“Bastard wouldn’t take the food I was offering,” Hannah huffed, throwing a McDonald’s bag into the trash. “He just wanted money! He’s just gonna drink it all up, or get high.”

“You’re going to go see someone get shot and you’re

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complaining about some hobo's morals? I wouldn't have taken that McDonald's crap, either. Maybe he wanted money for Whole Foods?"

"Maybe you'd like to find Big Killa's show all by yourself!" Hannah retorted.

I put my hands up.

"Awright, awright! My bad!"

Hannah got the code word, and soon we were in a cab headed to a dark, off-the beaten-path part of the Lower East Side, where there was this large, brick warehouse, with big, burly, Russian-looking security guards outside. Hannah told me I would have to turn in my cell phone at the door. No cell phones allowed. No one was permitted to make calls, text, take photos, video, etc., for obvious reasons. I played along, turning in my cell phone, which they checked to make sure it was a real, working cell phone that was mine—I had to like show them my photos, Facebook, and stuff. I totally did...But what I didn't tell Hannah or anyone, was that I had smuggled in another, smaller smartphone—that belonged to my niece, a junior at NYU—in my shoe (we were patted down and had a metal detector wand waved over our junk). I had to give her \$100 bucks to borrow it for a night.

It was dark as we walked through several doors. I hadn't seen this many white people in one place since a family reunion in Ocala, Florida. You would have thought we were all about to see Hamilton the way everyone was dressed. I was aghast at all the privilege I was surrounded by. I was white and I felt

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oppressed, micro-aggressed. I never knew there were this many people like me, seemingly good people, with college degrees and families, that were this cruel, bloodthirsty. We were going to potentially see some poor, underprivileged soul get shot for chrissakes! Well, I wasn't gonna just stand by and watch this idly. I had a college buddy who was a Detective with the NYPD. Yeah, that's right! I had secretly stiffed in a tip with the cops. I was turning Big Killa in! I was gonna do the right thing and save a life tonight! My "tricky" cell phone's GPS was up and running, and I knew that the cops would be raiding the joint at any minute.

I hoped Hannah wouldn't notice how nervous I was, looking toward the doors and exits, while also sneaking glances at her cleavage. Damn, I didn't know her boobs were that big.

Anyway...

The lights turned down low. Then a bunch of other, colored lights started flashing, and a chest-thumping beat silenced the room as the stage was illuminated, revealing a bunch of homies filling the stage from behind a dark curtain like they were coming out of a clown car. My heart nearly skipped a beat as I breathlessly looked for Big Killa. What would he look like? Would he be decked out in baggy, gangsta clothing, a Kangol hat at a jaunty tilt on his head? Did I even know what gangsta clothes looked like? Would there be bicycle chain-like gold jewelry swinging from his neck? Would his teeth be gripped with bedazzled jewels and gold letters spelling KILLA, as he whipped out a MAC-10 and

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started blasting on fools?

I started to get queasy and had a bad feeling that this wouldn't end well.

Then... he emerged in all his criminal glory: Big Killa!

He was big... and menacing! But there was no gold jewelry, no Kangol hats, bling in his grill, powder blue sweat suits, baggy clothes, thousand-dollar Jordans he had jacked from some kid on the streets, no... Big Killa came out in an all-black, three-piece suit: black shirt, black tie, coat and pants, with a NY Yankees cap on. He was a darker-skinned brother, with an intense gaze and an etched scowl. There was no flash, no cussing or bitches and hoes. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. Who was this Big Killa?

I was gripped.

"NEW YORK CITY!" he shouted into his mic, throwing up in his arms. "WHITE New York City! Welcome to my show! Big Killa is in the house, SUCKAS! And I'm here to get you WOKE! I got rappers on my stage! Artists and performers tryin' to come up in the Man's world. I'm gonna have fine ass African Queens shaking their big, black booties on stage! But that's not why you're here, is it?"

"NOOOOOO!" everyone shouted, jumping and screaming in joy and ecstasy.

"You all want to see another BLACK MAN pull out a STRAP and SHOOT a BLACK BODY!"

"YESSSSSS!" People were jumping up and down, cheering and screaming like the Yankees had just won the pennant.

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Then... the music started bumping, and the beats started thumpin,' and the lights started blaring, and the women started staring, at the black women pouring out from behind the curtains. The rappers started singing, their jewelry started blinging, and my phone started pinging!

But wait...

This wasn't what I expected. I wanted to hear what Big Killa had to say. He was a force bigger than life. He took to the edge of the stage like a man about to jump from the Brooklyn Bridge onto the gentrified concrete of DUMBO down below.

"We wasn't invited—we was forced!" Big Killa started. "Brought us here to instill FEAR! Break our bodies, break our souls, or so you thought! Didn't know we secretly FOUGHT! Spoke our language, sung our songs, formed families you never thought, grew our leaders in the fields, and wrought, the future you left us for naught! We rose above, learned your lingo and grew our minds, raised our children in a new America, newly free, we got Booker T., W-E-B, Malcolm, who didn't live to say, neither MLK! We fought your wars and hoped for more, told no, got Jim Crow, pushed through Selma, Little Rock, Detroit, Chicago, LA, and Crack, you think we just about RAP, guns, and killin' fools, some of us do, the world is cruel, but for white America, the only rule is know your place and suffer through, the schools we left for you, never leave your hood, buy your weave, and struggle for food, well I've got news for YOU..."

That's when Big Killa did what I realized I had forgotten he'd do. He pulled out a GUN! He started

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shooting at his fellow band mates!

POP-POP-POP!

NO! I thought. But wait! I suddenly realized that the gun was firing blanks! The band members were all in on it! What? Big Killa had given us a clue earlier...

Performers!

NO! This was a performance art piece! All along, it was a statement! The gun, the legend of Big Killa shooting people...it was all a show! How could I not have known?

“Someday this barrel might be pointed at YOU! Not the barrel of a GUN, but the barrel of accountability, responsibility, for the loss of aspirations, the dream of reparations...”

That’s when, to my utter shock and horror, the black helmet-clad SWAT team members of the NYPD burst in through the doors of the underground club, cutting through the stunned onlookers with their AR-15s as they advanced on the stage, shouting for everyone to get down get down.

Big Killa, staying true to himself and to his message, stood defiantly on the edge of the stage. With his outstretched arm, he pointed that gun at the cops, at us all, as if an accusatory finger...

...and we all looked on in horror, as the American tragedy repeated once again.

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Simon/Simone

Elizabeth Bedlam

Simon and Simone had to take turns in the mirror. It was only wide enough for one and half of them. Simone took the longest, painting her face, drawing on eyebrows that otherwise wouldn't exist. "What do you think, brother?" she'd ask, her eyes unmoving from the reflection. "Do you think I look old?"

Simon would sigh, Simone asked these questions nearly every morning. "We're the same age, sister."

Simone would pout and finally glance to her right, "but you look old. Your hair is thinning, see right there." She'd attempt to reach over and point out a spot, always in a different place, but Simon would jerk his head away.

"No, no, you're not old. You're beautiful Sim, you know that."

"I love it when you call me that." Simone would lean over and kiss her brother on the cheek, before shuffling three steps to the side, letting him have the mirror to shave. There was no way she'd let him have a beard. It would scratch her when they kissed, while they slept.

After the bathroom, the two would turn sideways to fit out the door, walk down the wide short hallway,

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and then turn again to go into their small bedroom. They had their clothing made special, a blue suit coat and a blue dress. A black button-down shirt, and a black silk blouse with lace. All patched together, just as they were.

The two never looked at themselves below the shoulders if they could help it. The place where their bodies smeared into each other. A full breast, a flat nipple. A small cock and a puckered cunt. No one had ever derived pleasure from the twins, except the twins themselves.

Lying in the dark, side by side, Simon would feel, hear, Simone's breath quicken in their chest, as she massaged her clit. Soon she was begging him to put his hand into her cunt. "Please, just touch me. We'll do you after, like always. Please, brother," she'd moan in desperation. Both would feel a spark igniting deep within their shared pelvis. Simone glanced over, seeing her brother stroking his own flame. "No, me first, *please*, Simon!" she gasped, the urge to be penetrated as she orgasmed was overwhelming.

Simon sighed, as always ignoring his own pleasure to assist his sister. He leaned his hand over and thrust three fingers hard and fast into Simon's moist cunt. She went rigid, and rubbed faster, gasping, moaning, a bitch in heat. "There, there..." she trailed off, falling down the other side of orgasm, finally relaxing. She turned her head to her brother, her breath still rattling through their shared chest cavity. "Now you go, love."

His fingers lubricated with Simone's white mucus,

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her wet gash, Simon pulled on his knots and strings. Simone kissed his tense neck beside her. "Yes, brother, like that," she said, the words hot and wet in his ear. At the end Simon grunted, leaking white lust on his hand. "There, brother, there..." Simone whispered. Simon, knowing what she wanted, gave her his hand. She sucked on his soiled, salty fingers, crusted with her sap and his. They tasted the same, different meals made from the same scrambled ingredients.

When they had finished, both looked up at a splinter in the ceiling. "Good sister."

"Good brother." Then silence as they dropped off to sleep. They knew they would always lay beside one another, even in death. Their insides so entangled, so as never to be undone by surgeon blade or God himself.

After dressing, the twins sat on the bench in their kitchen. Next Thursday would be their fortieth birthday. They saved their pennies all year to buy a gift for the other. Whatever the other wanted.

Together, sitting side by side, the twins browsed through a cheap glossy booklet. "They're getting younger and younger every year." Simone clicked her tongue. "She looks like she could still be in high school."

"Maybe we're just getting older, sister." Simon said, his voice flat. Simone shrugged, and the two continued to shop. Simon picked a redhead, tall and thin. "She's probably not natural, but I don't mind so much anymore."

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Simone shrugged, looking over at her brother's selection. "She looks real enough to me. Just check her cunt."

"She probably shaves. All the girls do these days."

Simone giggled into her coffee cup, "Then check her asshole, Ha-ha."

Simon grinned at this. "You are wickedly filthy sister. You get worse by the year." The two sat in quietly, waiting for Simone to pick out her gift.

"Her. She looks fine enough." Simone circled the profile of a pale brunette with black hollow eyes, wrapped in the lust of buckles and leather.

Simon nodded his head, "She looks like she'd give a good tongue lashing alright. Think she's pierced?"

"I don't think that's a trend anymore." Simone said without emotion.

Simon shook his head, "I just can't keep up with these things," he muttered. In his youth, girls were clean. Then a few years older they became gradually infected with more tattoos, more metal in their faces. But that seemed to be winding down as plastic surgery took hold. Pumped up tits and sucked in hips seemed to be the thing now. Simon didn't care, as long as they kept their cunts open and wet, that's all he needed. Simone always had higher standards, but she was a woman, Simon expected as much. Her prostitute always cost more than his. But it was their birthday, so he didn't complain.

The two girls, Lennon the redhead, and Cori the brunette, giggled in the elevator up to the third floor

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of the shabby apartment complex. They hugged their nondescript coats around their frames. Only their heavy make-up and higher than average heels hinted at their profession. In the long, silent hallway they turned a corner and stopped at the door in the middle of the wall, 36C.

Lennon and Cori had never been here before, but Misty had. She remembered 36C. She told them what to expect inside. Not just a brother, not just a sister, but a distorted mesh of flesh and bone. Three legs and forth curled down the middle, a misshapen serpent. The apartment, and a sickening smell of turpentine and butterscotch.

“Do you want to do it?” Lennon asked. At least she was getting the brother. She felt worse for Cori. Cori sighed and pressed the buzzer. The women waited in silence, hoping Misty had been lying. They heard a chain slide across inside, then the door open before them. A dim triangle of yellow light stretching out into the hall.

“Welcome ladies.” Cori and Lennon stepped inside. They tried to look anywhere but at the twins. The brother, red and beaming. The sister with a sour look on her face. Both had the same black beads for eyes, resembling more fish than humans. Faces round and pale.

Simone’s eyes moving up and down Cori. “Take those coats off,” she said. The prostitutes looked at each other, then back the twins, slid their coats off. Simone took them in her sweaty hand. The pair shuffled over to hang the coats on the back of a chair.

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“Cake?” asked Simon. He picked up a fork, pushing a spongy hunk into his gaping mouth. A smudge of brown frosting littered with yellow crumb sat at the corner of his lips unnoticed. He smiled.

“No thanks,” the two women echoed each other.

“Of course they don’t want cake, brother. They’re paid professionals on the clock. They’re here to fuck, not eat.”

Simon dropped his fork onto the plate. “My sister is right, as always. Apologies, ladies. Shall we go into the bedroom?” The pair limped just slightly down the hall. Their feet heavy on the thick green carpet. They turned sideways and entered, standing in front of the bed.

Simone was already unbuttoning her trousers, struggling to push her side of the pants down. “Come on, brother, we don’t have all night. I’m sure these girls have other appointments.”

“Oh right, right. I was just so transfixed by their radiant beauty.” The prostitutes were good at forcing smiles, but found at the moment it was harder than usual. “Maybe you can give us some help?” Simon asked, eager to feel a hand that wasn’t his own or his sister’s.

Cori had been working longer. She took the lead and stepped forward, helping slip Simone’s pants over her narrow ass. Lennon moved forward, doing the same. Neither woman wanted to look at the leg. But there it was glaring up at them, twisted around a middle of a well formed third leg. A misshapen toe with a cracked yellow nail wiggled, making Lennon

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turn away and gather herself. "Something the matter?" Simon asked from above her.

"No, no, just fine. Can we turn off the lights?" she asked.

"No, I like to watch," Simone snapped. Now undressed from the waist down, the twins sat on the bed. The old metal frame cracked as they wiggled and laid back, each spreading open a leg to expose their underdeveloped sex. "Just lick, none of that fancy stuff," Simone told her hooker.

"Same for me, darling. Well, maybe a little sucking as well, Ha-ha." Simon laughed at his own joke. Lennon swallowed, kneeling between his legs. On the other side, Cori did the same.

"We don't have all night." Simone grunted, lifting her head to watch the pale brunette come closer to the angry mouth of her gash. "We paid for an hour. That's ten minutes wasted while you look at my cunt. I wait all year for this. Your ad said you do women, so are you going to look at it or eat it?"

Cori put her nose into the sour, musty hole between Simone's legs. "That's it, lovely little thing, that's it...." Simone gasped. The sound of the prostitute's tongue lapping against the folded skin of Simone's sloppy cunt made Simon grow harder still.

Lennon didn't have to be asked. She watched the man's undersized sex inflate, a slight bend to the left, among a sparse nest of wiry hair. If she thought about it, she'd gag. The smell of sweet sweat inflamed her nostrils as she moved closer. She pinched the cock between two fingers to hold it in

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place, more a slippery noodle than an iron rod. "Yes, put it in, please. Use your tongue, lots of warm wet tongue." Simon gasped, leaning his head back and sighing. He waited all year to feel a woman's mouth engulf his cock. He wanted to revel in it.

Beside him, he heard Simone's pleasure ragged and quick on her lips. Inside their chest he felt her heart beating as rapidly as his, their lungs in sync. The room hushed but for the wet licks and sucks of the whores devouring their sex, the moans of the twins. "I'm close, brother, I'm close." Simone gasped.

"Me too, sister." He reached across their wide chest and grasped for her hand. Simone interlaced her fingers with his.

"The leg, please.... kiss the toes," Simone told her prostitute.

Cori stopped and looked up. "What?" she asked, realizing now there was something worse than the pucker old cunt she'd been eating.

"You deaf girl? The leg. Right there." Cori looked over to see the elongated toe, the small webbed ones glued down to the skin, as if melted by summer heat. They wiggled at her, and she fell back. "Lick it, now...." Simone's voice ached for the finish.

"You too, honey. Touch it, run your... tongue down it." Simon fought to get the words out. His cock fell from the hooker's mouth. He was on edge. "Now." His word carried heavy urgency.

Lennon nodded at Cori. Both women moved to either side of the gnarled limb. Lush lips running

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over skin, sucking, taking the salty brine taste of the underdeveloped biology. “The toes!” Simone wailed again, feeling herself at the top of orgasm, ready to plummet down the other side, harsh and fast.

Simon turned his head to Simone, “Sister,” his words hot and damp in her ear, “happy birthday.”

Simone wailed, feeling the brunette whore plunge her tongue between the stubs of toes and splintered nails. “Brother... oh.” As Simone exhaled her pleasure, Simon felt his dribble from between his legs, smearing in Lennon’s fox pelt locks that brushed against his skin.

“Happy birthday,” Simone finally managed to gasp. She turned her face to her brother’s, kissing his mouth with a quick flick of her tongue. He tasted like chocolate frosting.

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Canis Interruptus

Zane Castillo

When John's old beloved dog died, he decided it was time to make some changes in his life. He was a natural loner who always had a hard time making friends, but when he got Lancelot five years ago from an animal shelter, the beagle had brought so much missing joy into his life. Now that Lancelot was gone, he did not know how he could go back to a life of absolute loneliness.

After a few weeks of grieving, he began scanning personal ads on Craigslist, hoping to meet someone online. There were a lot of senior citizens seeking friends or romantic partners as well as dominatrices looking for new clients. Failing to find anyone suitable, he decided to write his own personal ad and formulated a brief description of himself:

Single male, late twenties, 6'0, average build. Enjoys movies, music, and books. Also, a dog-lover. Seeking new friend for possible romantic relationship.

He posted the ad and went to bed feeling hopeful for the first time in days. When he checked his email the following morning, he found that he'd received several messages from a variety of women. He weeded through them until he came to one that sparked his interest. Her name was Melanie and she was a makeup artist who was looking to meet a nice

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guy.

She stated that she loved dogs and had recently seen the death of her own a few months prior. This completely drew John in, and he wasted no time in giving her his digits.

Not long after hitting Send, he answered a call from an unknown number. Sure enough, it was Melanie.

He was surprised and nervous but found himself talking to her for over two hours about a variety of common interests, especially their love of dogs. She had lost a Collie a few months ago to cancer and it had completely devastated her. John told her about Lancelot in kind, and they decided to set up a meeting later that week. He got off the phone feeling completely elated.

The meeting was at a coffee shop, so John arrived early and grabbed a latte to await Melanie's arrival. He looked at every woman who entered the establishment, trying to guess which one was her.

Eventually, a short, thin, dark-haired woman walked in and looked around the place. She had eyeglasses on and was wearing a light blue summer dress with white flower prints on it. She spotted John across the room and walked over to him with a smile on her face.

"John?" she asked as she approached his table.

"Yes. Melanie?" he said, rising to extend his hand.

"Yes, it's nice to meet you."

She shook his hand and sat down across from him.

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John's nerves gradually went away as they talked. Melanie was both easygoing and had a great sense of humor. They sat and talked for the better part of the afternoon before making plans for dinner at Melanie's place that weekend.

Melanie remained constantly on his mind as he dragged through the rest of the week. He was amazed at how easy it was to talk to her and that they had so many things in common. Needless to say, he was feeling enthusiastic about their prospects together.

When Saturday rolled around, John showed up to Melanie's apartment with a bottle of wine in hand. She kissed him on the cheek when she opened her door, causing him to instantly blush.

Her apartment had many framed photos of a Collie scattered throughout. There were shots of Melanie and her dog in various settings. John gazed at the pictures with a slight grin on his face.

Clearly, she'd cared as much about her dog as he had about his.

Together they cooked and enjoyed a nice pasta dinner. When they finished eating, they sat close on the sofa drinking wine. John desperately wanted to kiss her but felt that he'd be rushing things. And he really didn't want to mess this up.

After some time, Melanie fixed her gaze on him and set her glass down on the table.

She leaned in and kissed him softly on the lips. He kissed her back somewhat timidly. She took him by

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the head and kissed him hungrily, pressed herself against him. John groped her ass and breasts, found himself getting hard. He went to get on top of her but she took him by the hand instead, rising from the couch and leading him down the hall.

Reaching her bedroom, they kissed like wild beasts, eagerly exploring each other with their hands. As they moved towards the bed, John bumped into something furry in the dark. He looked down and saw a stuffed Collie staring back up at him.

“Whoa!” he shouted in surprise.

“Oh, I’m sorry. It’s just Delilah,” Melanie said. “I’m sorry she scared you, I should have told you about her beforehand.”

John stared into the blank, beady eyes of the stuffed dog before him, feeling somewhat unnerved.

“Ah, it’s ok,” he said to ease the moment. “Guess she should have barked.”

Melanie laughed and pulled him down onto the bed.

As they had sex, John noticed that Melanie would often stroke Delilah’s fur. No matter what position she was in. John didn’t know what to make of this and tried to simply ignore it. When she finally came, she was vigorously scratching Delilah behind the ears.

They spent the night together and shared a lovely breakfast in the morning. Despite the strange episode from the night before, John went home feeling quite happy with the way things were progressing.

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He returned to Melanie's apartment the following Friday to pick her up to see a movie. Letting himself inside, the first thing he saw was Delilah, watching as he entered the living room.

"Looks like Delilah came out from her hiding spot," John said with a nervous laugh.

"Yeah, she wanted to meet you with your clothes on," Melanie laughed just as nervously.

He wasn't sure if she was joking.

They went to the movie theater and watched a romantic comedy that they both enjoyed. Afterwards, back at Melanie's place, she brought out a bottle of wine.

John sat on the loveseat facing away from Delilah's vacant stare. They chatted as they drank their wine, John trying to ignore the dog's presence all the while.

A couple of bottles later, John found he had to piss, so he got up and excused himself to the bathroom. She told him to meet her in the bedroom when he was done in there.

John felt happy as he peed. Melanie was amazing and he couldn't seem to get enough of her. Zipping up, he exited the bathroom and returned to her in anticipation.

As he reentered the bedroom, John saw that Delilah had been returned to her usual spot beside the bed. The sight of her made him somewhat uneasy, but he got undressed anyway, quickly joining Melanie beneath the covers.

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Same as before, Melanie seemed to stroke Delilah constantly while they fucked. John felt himself getting annoyed at last but did his best not to show it. Sometime after they'd finished, he thought to finally ask her about it, but she was already sound asleep, her hand resting contentedly on Delilah's head.

They made plans to go to a Farmer's Market the following weekend so that they could make dinner together at John's place. He cleaned his apartment thoroughly in preparation. She arrived to pick him up Saturday afternoon. When he walked out to meet her, he saw her sitting behind the wheel with sunglasses on and a huge smile on her face. John thought she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen.

As he walked toward the car, he thought he saw another figure in the backseat. He squinted his eyes to see more clearly in the sunlight.

Sure enough, there was Delilah staring back at him.

John faltered in his step but quickly regained himself as he got in the car. Melanie leaned over and gave him a kiss. As she backed out of his driveway, John peered through the side mirror at Delilah seated behind him.

"So, Delilah wanted to come along for the ride?" he asked.

"Yeah, she needed some fresh air," she replied as she put the car in gear.

John gave a small chuckle. He looked over at Melanie

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as she drove. He was trying to figure out if he was dating a crazy person. Other than the stuffed dog, there didn't seem to be anything wrong with her. No red flags or anything were calling his attention.

Just the goddamn dog.

They arrived at the Farmer's Market and stepped out of the car. John glanced at Delilah in the backseat, staring blankly from the passenger side window.

Melanie came up and wrapped her arms around him, giving him a long kiss before leading him toward the vendors. He decided to put Delilah out of his mind and focused on having a good time with Melanie. They picked up some produce and sampled many locally sourced foods while they browsed the various stalls.

Heading back to the car, Melanie leaned against John's arm as they walked along. John had completely forgotten about Delilah until he saw her again in the backseat. As usual, he tried to ignore the stuffed dog as he piled the groceries in beside her.

John hopped in the car and closed the door behind him. Melanie drove to his place and they began unloading their groceries. After all they had everything, John began to head upstairs while Melanie lingered behind him.

He turned his head to see her taking Delilah from the car.

"Oh, you're bringing her up, too?" he asked.

"Yeah, she can't spend the night in the car," she said. "She'll suffocate in there!"

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John watched as she headed up the stairs with Delilah in her arms. He stood there for a few seconds feeling bewildered.

He followed Melanie inside and watched her set their bags on the kitchen counter. Glancing into the next room, he saw Delilah on the couch staring back at him.

“Hey, where is your skillet?” she asked as she worked her way around the kitchen.

John grabbed it from the cabinet and handed it to her. He leaned against the counter and watched her with an anxious look on his face.

Suddenly she turned in his direction.

“What’s the matter?” she asked. “Is something wrong?”

He knew he had to say something. It was now or never.

“I have to ask,” he said, “what is with the dog?”

“What?” she asked. “Delilah?”

“Yeah, why did you bring it here?”

“Well, I couldn’t just leave her alone at home.”

“You do know that she’s not alive, right?”

“Now, where are those plates?” she said, resuming her search of the kitchen.

“Melanie, you can’t ignore what I just said. You treat Delilah as if she were still alive.”

Melanie laughed.

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“Well, she likes you and wanted to see your place for a change.”

“Come on, Melanie. Enough of this, she is not alive.”

“She is alive!” Melanie screamed, slamming the skillet on the stove.

John slowly took a step back.

“Don’t you see?” she continued. “Yeah, she may be dead physically, but in spirit, she is still alive. Why can’t you see that?”

Tears began streaming down her face as she leaned over the counter, sobbing.

“I thought you of all people would understand!”

John felt guilty and ashamed. He reached out to try comforting her.

“No, don’t touch me!” she snapped at him. “Don’t you dare try and pity me like I’m crazy!”

“Hey, I didn’t mean...”

“I thought you would understand. You lost your own dog, but no, I was wrong. You’re just like everyone else!”

She pushed past him and stormed out of the apartment.

“Wait!” he cried as she slammed the door behind her.

“Melanie, wait!”

John ran out after her, catching only her taillights as she sped off.

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With a heavy sigh, he went back inside.

Delilah sat waiting on his couch.

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Here's to New Friends

Anthony Dirk Ray

Harold was planning on making homemade bread, which he loved to do, but was about a cup short of flour. He used a recipe that he found online with 298 reviews, with an average of 4.9 stars. The loaves had always turned out well for him, so there was no need to deviate from this tried, tested and true recipe.

Harold would normally ask his neighbor Molly, but he knew that she was out of town at her mother's for the weekend. His only other option was the new neighbor Gary. Everyone in the neighborhood knew that Gary was on the sex offender's list, because they were notified when he moved in, but no one knew exactly why he was on said list.

Harold wasn't one to judge, and believed that everyone needed a second chance. He wasn't going to pass judgment on someone that made a mistake in the past. Harold thought to himself that it was more than likely a huge misunderstanding between an old girlfriend or something, with only their word of events taken into account.

Harold locked the door behind him and walked over to Gary's. As he approached the porch, he recognized the colorful day lilies and camellias in the front flower bed. Harold thought to himself that Gary had extremely good taste and was a master of

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color coordination. The swing on the porch, beside an elephant ear plant in a large pot, gave it a homey feel. Harold thought that Gary just might be his new friend.

He opened the screen door and knocked.

"Just a second. I'm coming," Harold heard from inside.

He then heard footsteps approaching, and the door opened.

"Well, Hello. Can I help you?"

"Hi, I'm your neighbor Harold. I live in the blue ranch style house right next door."

"Oh, yes. I've seen you out in your front yard weeding your flower beds. My name is Gary, but you probably already know that."

"Nice to meet you Gary. I see you have some beautiful flowers yourself there."

"Thank you very much. I have a young Latino man at the market that has been a total godsend. He has taught me so much."

"Well, the way you have them arranged is just brilliant. I may get your assistance someday if that's okay."

"Of course. I'll do what I can. Lord knows, I need all the friends I can get. It's been really trying lately, but thankfully, all of that legal stuff is behind me."

"Well, that's good. I can't imagine how hard it must be."

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"Believe me, you just don't know. What brings you over?"

"Goodness, my apologies. I am about to make some bread, and unfortunately, I am a hair short on flour. Would you happen to have a little to spare?"

"Of course. I believe I can scrounge some up. Come on in."

Harold followed Gary into his living room. It was so pristine and organized. The tidiness almost made Harold jealous. There was absolutely no clutter, with seemingly everything in its place.

"Wow, you keep a spotless home," Harold said, as he marveled at the immaculate neatness that surrounded him.

"Thanks. It's mainly just me in here for the most part. I'll have guests in here on occasion, but it's extremely rare. Let me get that flour. Make yourself at home. Would you like something to drink?"

"That would be nice. What do you have?"

"I have water and a few sodas, but I also have some imported beer and a great wine selection."

"Well, if you'll have a glass too, I'd love some wine."

"I couldn't think of a better time to open a bottle than right now with my new friend. Which do you prefer, red or white? I have a luxurious Malbec from Argentina that's a must if you like reds."

"That sounds tremendous. I love reds."

"Excellent. I'll be right back. I keep the wine in my basement."

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Gary took out a set of keys and unlocked a padlock on a door near the hallway. Harold thought that it was a little strange to have the door locked with a padlock, but he just assumed that he had an expensive wine collection, and possibly other valuables down there. Harold just sat on the couch and looked around, still in awe of the uniformity of everything.

Gary was gone for about 5 minutes when Harold stood and walked near the door. He thought he heard Gary talking, mixed with other muffled noises. He couldn't make out the sounds clearly, but they closely resembled a rustling mixed with whispers. This sparked his curiosity.

Harold took a few steps down and called for Gary. There was no answer, and the mysterious sounds suddenly stopped. He descended a few more steps down and noticed what looked like cage material. Only the bottom portion of the cage-like structure could be seen, but Harold swore that he saw what appeared to be feet.

"Gary. Are you okay?" Harold inquired in a slightly cracked tone.

"Yes, I'm here. I decided to grab two bottles instead. I have them right here." Gary said, as he came around the corner and swiftly up the stairs, as if to usher Harold back up.

Once both were out of the stairwell, Gary shut the door and went to the kitchen to open the wine. Harold could hear Gary opening the bottles and getting down glasses. He was confused, yet intrigued

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by the previous events. Harold wondered what the strange sounds were, why Gary was talking, and what exactly that was that he had seen.

“You are going to absolutely love this Malbec,” Gary said, as he entered the room and handed Harold a glass.

Harold swirled, sniffed, and sipped the red.

“Wow, you weren’t kidding. This is spectacular.”

Gary put on some light jazz, and the two sat enjoying their drinks. They made small talk about the neighbors that lived close by, the local farmer’s market, and the different cafes in town. Both realized that each were vegans, and the conversation flowed effortlessly between the two.

Halfway through the second bottle, Harold got up the nerve to ask about what he had heard and seen earlier.

“Gary, what were those sounds that I heard from your basement? I swore that I saw what looked to be feet behind cages. What was that?”

Gary shrugged, shook his head from side to side, grinned, and in a nonchalant tone said,

“Oh, don’t mind them. That’s just my suffering suckboy stash.”

Harold took a long pull from his wine glass, placed it on the table, and casually made his way down the stairs to the basement.

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Mystic Marvin Master of Illusion

Judge Santiago Burdon

A psychic had been considering renting the storefront next to the bar I owned at the time. She came in and asked my opinion as a business owner about foot traffic in the area, specifically whether I thought it was a good idea to rent and if she would be successful. She wasn't sure if it would be a wise investment.

"I'm somewhat puzzled by your question," I answered with a surprised tone in my voice. "Being a psychic, isn't that something you should know already, having the ability to see the future?"

She just looked at me with a loathing expression, threw her hands up, and with a disgusted tone called me a smart ass and turned to walk away.

The space remained vacant for three months and was eventually rented by an extremely pleasant guy named Marvin from Boston. He opened a magic shop next door and claimed to be related to Harry Houdini. He became a regular at the bar and drank Sam Adams with a shot of Old Grandad. He was a gifted story teller, always entertaining customers with humorous tales of his career as a magician in his younger days.

Occasionally he'd do magic tricks for patrons,

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although almost exclusively for good-looking women.

I realized an opportunity to book his act in the bar. I asked "Mystic Marvin Master of Illusion" if by chance he'd be interested in performing once a week with payment to be negotiated.

The bar had a small stage and I let a local musician host an Open Mic on Wednesday and Sunday evenings. On Friday and Saturday nights, comedians performed, hosted by a local radio personality and city councilman. He didn't possess much charisma and lacked audience appeal, however. Neither he nor the comedians he booked were very funny most of the time and didn't draw much of a crowd as promised either.

Mystic Marvin was excited at the opportunity to perform his magic. We arranged his first performance for the upcoming Friday night at nine o'clock, as an opening act before the so-called comedians.

The word spread quickly around the pueblo and I did a small bit of advertising, putting posters outside the bar and passing out flyers to everyone that entered.

My novia (girlfriend) at the time was a gorgeous young woman whom I was fortunate to be able to afford. She was a vixen in bed with a voracious sexual appetite. I found it necessary to increase my testosterone dosage to keep up with her. She was also a thief and pathological liar, minor character flaws I chose to overlook in light of her other qualities.

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Marvin and Veronica seemed to get on well together, despite the language barrier. She spoke little to no English and Marvin was one of those “I know enough Spanish to get by” type of people. Which I’ve discovered usually translates into, “I don’t know shit.”

He asked if it would be possible to have Veronica act as his assistant for the magic performance. There wasn’t any reason that I could think of not to grant his request. Veronica appeared thrilled at the prospect of being onstage without having to take her clothes off. Besides, our relationship had been been on the wane as of late, and I’d been trying to come up with some way to terminate our arrangement. I was pleased she would be occupied and not always hanging around, constantly getting in my way. She was suppose to be working as a waitress at the bar but never quite caught on to exactly what the job entailed.

They took their gig very seriously, practicing twice a day and sometimes into the early morning hours at the magic shop. After five days, Veronica came to me and asked me to purchase a costume for her to wear for the performance. The sequined costume she wanted cost one hundred and twenty- five dollars.

“Are you serious? I’m not laying out that kind of cash for a costume. That should be Marvin’s expense. You tell him what I said.”

“You are so mean to me. You never want me to look nice because you’re jealous other men look at me.”

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“First of all I am not the jealous type. If it were so, I would’ve kicked your ass out of here long ago. I’m well aware of your flirtatious nature. Secondly, this was Magic Marvin’s idea to have you perform as his assistant. This falls under the responsibility of the talent. Don’t make it my problem.”

Marvin walks in at the height of our heated discussion, standing behind Veronica with an apologetic look on his face. Having finished my oration, I turned to walk behind the bar when Marvin decided to add his commentary.

“I know you think there’s something going on between Veronica and me. You have a right to feel that way. I know I’ve been monopolizing a lot of her time.”

“Marvin, that’s not at all what our conversation was about. If there’s something going on between you two, well that’s something I haven’t considered and honestly don’t give a shit.”

I knew he was banging her and it honestly didn’t upset me. I’d been getting more sleep at night anyway.

“The disagreement was over her wanting me to pay for a costume for your performance,” I continued. “And I believe this is an expense you should be responsible for, not me. I find it interesting, however, you assumed our disagreement was about me being suspicious of you two.”

“She’d mentioned that you were jealous she was spending so much time with me. That’s why I thought that’s what you were arguing about.

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Anyway, I bought that costume for our show yesterday. She tried it on and modeled it for the customers. You were gone, went to pay some bills I was told. Strange that she would ask you for money when she knew it was already paid for...”

I look around the bar, check the kitchen, bathroom, and office, and Veronica is nowhere to be found. I call out for her but she still doesn't appear. Then I'm told by one of the customers she'd left shortly after Marvin's arrival.

“It's not strange at all, Marvin. As a matter of fact, it's her *modus operandi*. She's a con artist and a pathological liar. Don't try to make sense of it, that's just the way she is. Are you ready for tomorrow night? There should be a good-sized crowd from what I've heard.”

“Yes, I'm good to go. My act will last about forty five minutes to an hour, is that okay?”

“Just fine. I'll see you tomorrow night, then. You go on at nine, so be sure to get here around eight thirty or so to get set up.”

“You bet, Santiago. I'm going to try to find Veronica now. She may be upset. See ya tomorrow.”

“She's most likely at the bar in the casino. Catch you later.”

Can you believe that insensitive snake, trying to shake me down for money, knowing it was already paid for. She thinks I'm a dipshit gringo and it's my first experience dealing with women and their underhanded ways. After all I've done for and

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tolerated from that stripper prostitute. But, her dishonesty goes with the territory.

The night of their performance, the bar was jam packed with standing room only. I was a bit upset with myself that I hadn't thought to charge a few bucks a head. I did up the prices on drinks, however.

Mystic Marvin and the Lovely Veronica put on an entertaining and professional show. Got more laughs than the comedians ever did, that's for sure. They even included an audience participation segment, which received thundering applause as well.

After a few weeks, the crowd dissipated and his act became less amazing. Although he did perform one of the most mystifying magic tricks I'd ever witnessed. It was a disappearing act that ended with both him and Veronica vanishing completely. The next morning, I noticed the magic shop empty, and Veronica's clothes had disappeared from my apartment along with some cash as well. She'd left no note goodbye.

I was actually quite elated there hadn't been some long, drawn-out break up. As a replacement, I hired Melissa, a gorgeous and personable young woman that same afternoon.

That night at the bar, I bought a couple of rounds in tribute to my newly single status. The comedians even seemed funny to me, although I'd heard the same jokes for months.

I bumped into Marvin about eight months later, on a short vacation I took with Melissa to the beach in Guanacasta. He was sitting alone at the bar, looking

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unhappy, overweight, and disheveled. When he recognized me, his expression revealed both fear and surprise. I waited for him to initiate conversation, which he did with uncertain confidence.

"Hello Santiago, it's Marvin. How ya doing? It's been a while..."

"Doing just dandy, Marv. Man, you look like you've been tortured by Jehovah's Witnesses who beat your ass with Bibles. Are you still with Veronica? You two left together, so I was told."

"Yeah, well, that's right. I should apologize for how I acted, after you giving me an opportunity to perform at your bar."

"Okay, go ahead."

"Go ahead what?"

"Apologize for being a backstabbing prick."

"I'm truly very sorry," he whimpered.

"I really don't fucking care."

"She blindsided me, Santiago. I got all caught up in her web of deception and couldn't get out."

He just went on and on, his voice cracking as he spoke.

"I thought she loved me. I did everything for her, and she pulled the rug right out from under me. Took off with some surfer bum, but not before cleaning out my bank accounts and stealing anything of value I had. Even took my little dog, Abracadabra, too..."

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I wanted to say how sorry I was, but I wasn't.

"Well, you know what they say."

"No, what do they say?"

"Love is great until the magic wears off. See ya around, maybe."

Never saw the guy again. Soon afterwards I began learning a few card tricks of my own. Eventually, I graduated up to some elementary sleight of hand tricks as well. Though I never did develop a quality trick, always screwed it up somehow.

HORROR SLEAZE TRASH

The Rat King

Ronan Cartwright

‘Campbell. You’re late. Sit.’

As I listen to my boss snap at me like I’m some sort of Pavlovian poodle, I slip into the chair opposite his desk and watch him gulp his coffee. He savours it, loudly, licking his lips with his reptilian tongue.

‘I tell you, that’s a fine cup of joe,’ he grins. ‘Shame you’ll never get to enjoy it. They save the real stuff for senior management, see. You pencil pushers only get capsules. They practically piss in them. Hey Campbell, wanna know what success tastes like?’

He leans forward and holds out his coffee cup at full stretch, letting it waft under my nose.

‘Sir, I wanted to check in with you about the Paris promotion? I was told that we’d hear back last week and—’

‘Paris?! You?!’

He rocks back on his chair legs like a conquering warlord and screams a hellish wail of laughter.

‘Word on the ninth floor is you’ve screwed up the Henderson deal, Campbell. Just when I thought you couldn’t sink any lower.’

‘Sir, I did no such thing!’ I protest limply, scrambling my brain to remember who the fuck Henderson is

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and what exactly is his deal.

He clenches his fists and grits his teeth, as if ready to launch himself across the desk and smash me to smithereens. And right on cue, I feel it: the faint stirring of an erection in my underpants. Now this isn't one of those unwelcome hard-ons you get when sharing a glass of wine with your fiancée's better-looking sister. No — this is a pump of full-bodied adrenalin reserved exclusively for those sweet, sweet moments of unfathomable humiliation.

I brace myself for the torture to come:

'A weakling who lets people trample all over you. That's what you are, Campbell. Hell, you're not good enough to shine my shoes.'

'Be that as it may, I believe myself to be an integral cog within the company's—'

He slams his fist down on his desk, sending a battalion of corporate plaques, trophies, and commemorative busts flying my way.

'Little baby Campbell wants me to give him the Paris promotion — too hard for you here, is it? Too tough a boss, am I? You're a cubicle rat, Campbell. A stinky little cubicle rat.'

He bites his teeth against his bottom lip and makes gnawing rat noises, doing his best to eat away at my self-esteem — but as I watch the veins in his neck bulge with testosterone-fueled rage, little does he know that I'm absolutely rock hard down below.

'You know why I don't belong in a cubicle? How I took one look at that fucking infestation out there

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and said ‘Sayonara’? It’s because my big balls won’t fit in them. And the way I’m going — they’re going to have to build a bigger building for them too.’

‘So...I’ll wait to hear back about Paris?’

‘Paris is strictly BBO, Campbell. Big. Balls. Only. Now piss off and do some bloody work for once in your miserable life. Au rev-fucking-oir.’

He dismisses me with the flick of a finger, and off I trudge to my desk, listening to the water cooler gurgle its pity at me. I stare at my computer and think of ways to turn it all around — how maybe, just maybe, if I claw back the Henderson deal, Paris could still be on the cards...or failing that, promotion to a slightly bigger cubicle.

But I can’t suppress it. My groin still burns from the glorious smackdown he just gave me. I need to unload. So I do what I always do in times of trouble: I rush to the toilets, lock myself in, immediately drop my pants and jerk off to memorised porn videos, faithfully reconstructed with precision-engineered accuracy.

There’s only one problem: every time I picture myself with a girl — be it a pornstar confused by my presence, the argumentative barista down the road or Racist Cathy from Accounts — my boss bursts into the fantasy, ripping off his clothes to expose his Herculean torso and testicles the size of bowling balls. The women rejoice with feverish delight, of course — as if Superman has just flown in to save them from my over-eager touch. Then he beds them mercilessly as I stand in the corner and watch, wide-

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eyed with arousal and fear.

The plot thickens. Now it's just me and him. Mano a mano. Giant dick versus shrivelled slug. Without a single word of instruction, I turn around, squirming uncomfortably as he enters me. I wince at his disapproving grunts — I can only assume he's disappointed that I surrendered so easily. I try to stop but can't. Instead I listen to him tear into the loves of my life one by one — how it was too easy to bring them to orgasm when he was banging them in the boardroom behind my back — until I finish with a mad flourish, splattering the wall like a squirt gun loaded with cottage cheese. I stare at my weird graffiti and think about what I've done. Just like he'd want me to.

I leave without washing my hands, rubbing my gummy residue between my fingertips. I'm on my way back to cubicle purgatory, ready to zonk out on Minecraft when I see it: my boss's mythical coffee cup, unguarded by the kitchen kettle. While his assistant searches for milk in the fridge, I tiptoe over and peer inside his chalice of power, filled with a brown swamp of boiling water. Without giving it a second thought, I stick my crusty finger into the cup, feeling the water scold me as I stir in my sticky essence.

Moments later and I'm back at my desk, watching him through the reflection in my monitor while he patrols his office behind the great glass walls that keep the vermin at bay. His assistant brings in his coffee. I hold my breath. He takes one look at the cup — sniffs at it suspiciously — then swallows. He

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licks his lips and smiles.

The taste of success...

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Failed Aesthetic

Kiki Von Kristmass

Dave was asleep on the studio floor in a nest of soiled porn mags and empty lager cans. His face lay drooling into the polystyrene box of a half eaten kebab.

His brain was yet unaware of the hangover awaiting it caused from a heavy night of absinthe and 7up cocktails.

A sickly smell emanated from one of the corners of the studio where a pile of vomit had been lazily mopped up with someone's still life studies.

The door of the studio creaked open.

It was Mike. The only other person Dave shared a studio with.

There had been others but they had soon requested a transfer on the grounds of the duo's intolerable 'loutish' behaviour.

They were quite the double act having already earned a reputation as *enfant terribles* and it was only the second week of term.

Mike and Dave had decided in the pub one evening to become artists. Not because of a sudden flash of inspiration or a desire for self-expression but because of a post they had just seen online.

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It concerned a female artist who knitted jumpers for child refugees from wool she had stuck up her vagina beforehand. Some of the jumpers were even embellished with splatters of menstrual blood.

Of course these jumpers were not given to the refugee children.

The piece was intended as more of a catalyst for debate as opposed to a direct aid donation. No, the jumpers were in fact brought by art collectors for several thousands pounds a piece.

“Seven grand for a jumper smeared with fanny blood!” Mike exclaimed over his pint of lager. “It would take me half a year to make that!”

The next day they got a book on contemporary art from the library and proceeded to laugh their way through the entire thing.

Colourful dots, unmade beds and childish scribbles. It was without a doubt the greatest con of the 21st century, and they wanted in.

Though they didn’t have an academic qualification between them they managed to get into the prestigious Slagg School of Art by merit of a promising portfolio alone.

Dave submitted a film titled *I Like England and England Likes Me*. It consisted of filming himself for three days while he laid about on his couch smoking weed, eating kebabs, and wanking whilst in the company of a Staffordshire bull terrier.

It was a directly inspired by Joseph Beuy’s 1974 performance *I Like America and America Likes Me*,

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although the Beuy's original had far less wanking in it.

The tutors viewing the work considered it a highly sophisticated and ironic comment on the original. Though they couldn't quite agree on what exactly the comment was, it was no doubt something very clever to do with Beuy's penchant for self-mythologising and its modern equivalent seen in the creation of idealised avataristic selves on social media.

Mike went for the minimalist angle. By taking a series of photographs of piles of breeze blocks on a building site he had been labouring on during the summer.

The tutors were sceptical at first, but then someone suggested the photos must be in reference to Carl Andre's 1966 work *Equivalent VIII*, whose controversial acquisition by the Tate in the 1970's had provoked nationwide ridicule and had brought into question the very value of modern art itself.

One of the faculty suggested that by reverting the positioning of the work from the white walled gallery space of the original to the more proletariat setting of the common building site he was creating a tension between two discourses, an encounter which subverted both of them.

Their admission into the Slagg School of Art was also helped by the fact that they were both working class and had regional accents. This alone fulfilled the art schools diversity quota for that year.

Now that they had successfully blagged their way

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into art school they planned to spend the next three years pissing their grants up the wall while banging their way through an endless line of eager and willing art fanny.

“Oi” Mike shouted

Dave opened a bleary eye to see Mike standing above him armed with a water pistol.

He squirted it into his face. Dave sat up sputtering, there was a foul but familiar taste.

“Bastard!” he shouted. It was unmistakably piss.

Dave jumped up and swung for him but he deftly dodged the clumsy swipe and gave Dave another squirt in the face before dashing out of the room.

He ran down the stairwell and into the one of the 3rd years studios on the ground floor.

Dave was close behind.

As he swung the door open Mike was lying in wait firing another shot of warm piss straight into his eyes.

Dave charged blindly at him tackling him to the ground, they fell back knocking over an easel and landed in a mess of oil paint and turpentine.

There was a scream.

“What are you doing! You’re behaving like hooligans! This is an artists studio not one of your common building sites!”

It was Genevieve. A notoriously stuck up 3rd year. Her shrill upper-class voice cutting through the air.

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They stood up, red faced from their scolding and helped to righten her easel.

She screamed again. A tube of red oil paint had burst and had leaked paint all over the surface of the canvas.

“My painting! You’ve ruined it!”

Dave hurriedly fumbled with a rag trying to wipe off the paint but only proceeded to smear red across the entire thing.

She burst into tears.

Dave and Mike looked helplessly at each other.

She sat back on her stool. Staring in horror at the ruined canvas.

“I’ve been working on that thing for weeks!” she said “I’ve been so busy that I haven’t had a decent shagging in ages, not that I ever get one. My boyfriend may be 9th in the line to the throne but he’s hung like a sea horse and can’t seem to get that harder than an over cooked baby carrot”

She dried her eyes and looked up at them.

“Maybe I could do with something a bit... rougher” she said her eyes falling on the large bulge in Mikes joggers.

They looked at one another.

Genevieve may have been an up stuck up toff but she was also a quality piece of art gash with a cracking set of knockers!

“You two can make it up to me by taking it in turns

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to eat out my cunt”

Mike jumped to work and within seconds had whipped down her jodhpurs and had her toff art twat in his mouth.

Dave's large hands fumbled clumsily with the tiny buttons of her paint smeared smock. She grew impatient and ripped it open for him revealing her large milky white breasts. Taking one in his hand he suckled at the pink nipple, taking it between his teeth and nibbling at it. She moaned as Mike lapped eagerly at her cunt while Dave gnawed away on her tits.

After a few minutes they swapped places, Mike manning the nipples as Dave got to work on her slit.

He reached onto her desk and pulled down a handful of bushes. He worked the thick handle of a palette knife into her pussy while he rubbed her clit with the soft hairs of a Winsor & Newton No. 7 sable, which was also good for fine line work in watercolours and acrylics.

He juicy twat was now so wet it was dripping onto the paint splattered studio floor where it had begun to form a puddle.

“I want some of that filthy oik cock!” she said after several orgasms. She pushed them off and on her knees. Unzipping them in turn and pulling out their meat.

Mike's penis was long and thin, pale white with a shiny red helmet in contrast Dave's was short but thick, dark brown and crowned with a purple helm.

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They nodded in approval at what each of them were packing.

She gave them each a quick blow job before bending over the stool. She grabbed Mike's buttocks and pulled him towards her. She licked his balls while she worked his shaft with her hand.

Dave went behind. Gobbing on her twat and getting it ready for a pounding.

"Yeah, give me that filthy common cock! You proletarian piece of shit!" she said looking back at him.

She was so tight it took him a while to slide it in. The tip of his helmet stretched open her beef curtains before it slowly entered her depths.

She gasped as she felt her shores widen.

"Call me a whore!" she demanded.

"Whore!" he said

"No, no, with a dropped h!"

"ore" he repeated slamming it up her

"Talk dirty to me, tell me something... common!"

He thought for a moment.

"I sometimes dip oven chips into hummus"

She wailed like a banshee as she orgasmed.

"More... more" she pleaded.

"I mix absinthe with seven up..."

She came again, even harder.

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“I pronounce the German artist and influential member of the Bauhaus School Paul Klee’s second name *Klee* instead of *Klay*.”

Her pussy tightened gripping his rod as she shot off several simultaneous orgasms at once. Warm art slag cum trickled down her legs, like the clear juices from when a roast chicken is safely cooked.

She now took Mikes cock into her mouth. Working the entire shaft down her oesophagus as expertly as a sword swallower.

As he fucked her mouth he squirted the piss filled water pistol into her face.

“Fub my arfl!” she said gagging on the cock thrusting in and out of her mouth.

Dave pulled his cock out of her wet twat, his purple helmet glistening with pussy juice. Spreading open her pale ass cheeks he looked down at her tight little arsehole.

He tried to stuff his helmet into the hole but it wouldn’t go. He was far too big and she was way too tight. His guess was that she had never had anything up there before. Or if she had it had been so insignificant that it hadn’t loosened it up for anyone else. All the girls Dave had ever arse banged from back home had had gaping purple sphincters from years of taking it up the shitter from an early age.

He looked around and finding a bottle of linseed oil he poured some on her tiny hole while he oiled up his shaft.

Grabbing her shoulders he forced himself in.

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She let out a shriek and surging forwards she eclipsed the entirety of Mikes long dong down her throat so his balls were squashed against her chin. She gagged and pulled back to avoid suffocating, leaving a string of slimey mucus trailing from her mouth to his nut sack.

As she retreated back she impaled herself onto Dave's thick cock forcing it half way up her guts which pushed her forwards again onto the cock rammed halfway down her gullet. She slid between these two extremes, being stretched and gagged at either end.

She really was caught between a rock and a hard place!

Dave looked at her painting. He tried to make out what was underneath the smear of red.

"So, what's your work about?" he asked.

"The failed aesthetic in painting" she said taking the cock into her cheek so she could speak.

"So, deliberately shit painting?"

"Mm hmm" she mumbled her mouth full of sausage once again.

"That's really clever" he said, "I wish I'd thought of that."

She mumbled a few words which the laymen wouldn't have been able to decipher anyway. Luckily Dave was an expert in translating gagging-on-cock into English. He took the words to mean: "Get back to work!"

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He returned his attention to the job at hand and the vice like sphincter gripping his cock.

Her anus was the tightest thing he'd ever been inside. It was so tight he imagined himself pulling out to see his knob transformed into solid diamond by the extreme pressure of her sphincter.

He wondered how much that would sell for.

Damien Hirst's 2007 diamond encrusted skull sculpture *For the Love of God* had sold for \$100, 000, 000.

Imagine all the lager, porn mags and kebabs I could buy with that! He thought to himself.

The idea of a priceless shit smeared diamond phallus was enough to send him into orgasm.

"Shit, I'm going to cum!"

"Do it on my painting!" Genevieve screamed.

He pulled out just in time, the tip of his cock smeared in steamy hot shit.

He emptied his balls all over the painting and then scraping the shit from his cock he applied it to the canvas with a palette knife.

After a few more violent thrusts Mike also pulled out and made his contribution to the work.

For good measure he also squirted the remainder of the piss onto the canvas.

The dark umber hues of the excrement complemented the lighter tones of the almost lemon yellow urine. While the semen had mixed in with the

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red oil paint to create a subtle range of mid toned pinks.

They stood with their arms around each other looking admiringly at the canvas.

“Wow,” said Mike who wasn’t much of an admirer of that abstract painting bollocks but *this* one he really dug.

“It’s... wonderful!” Genevieve agreed.

At the graduation show that year, a famous wife beating art collector acquired the work for several thousand pounds.

A few days later Dave and Mike found a gift wrapped bottle of vintage Pernod Et Fils absinthe in their studio.

The promptly downed the bottle in pint glasses with 7up and went into town where they banged a couple of local fisherman’s wives under the jetty.

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Vice Grip

Kevin Brown

The beginning of the end begins with a tit-flick and a cantaloupe, and Mike's wife, Kalli, flipping on the light, dropping the groceries on the floor, and saying, "Oh. My. God." Saying, "You son of a bitch."

Behind him, on the big screen TV, this Asian chick's taking it in the out way. Her palms pressing her tits together, her hair cinched in roped pigtails. Mouth O'd the way Kalli's is now. Mike stands and says, "Babe, this is not what it looks." Noticing the shadow of his prick on the wall, he holds a hand out mime-style and says, "At least I'm not cheating," and she says, "Yeah, at least there's that."

He sets the cantaloupe down, embarrassed by the size of the hole in the rind. His fingers spread, he looks around for something to clean himself up with. "Thought you were going out with Caroline," he says.

"I think I'm gonna be sick," she says.

On the screen, the girl's reclined back in the guy's lap, her legs spread in a full split. Mike stares a second, then blinks away. The shadow of his dick arches over, bowing as if ashamed. He dusts a few pulpy clumps from the tip and moves toward Kalli. She steps back, a hand at her throat. Eyes on the

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screen. He stops, leans down to pick up the groceries, and she says, “Don’t touch that.”

He sets the bag upright, wiggles his fingers, and says, “Don’t worry, this hand’s clean.”

From behind, the cantaloupe rolls off the table and across the floor—prick-hole over bottom, prick-hole over bottom.

She shakes her head and says, “Goddamn freak.” She stomps out, slamming the door behind her, and he yells, “The Greeks were freaks, babe. And they’re legends.”

On the screen, the image skips, then freezes in a twitch.

He’s in bed, drunk and waiting for her to come home.

He’d paced the floor for hours, swigging Juarez tequila and having the argument out in his mind. He visualized her sitting across from him, fingers laced, nodding her head. Listening to his side of the story and keeping an open mind.

He would speak soft and slow, ticking his points off on his fingers: First and foremost, masturbation is healthy. It relaxes the muscles and aids in sleeping. Reduces stress and releases sexual tension. It allows one to get in touch with one’s sexual responses to better communicate one’s wants and needs to one’s partner. It also discharges neurotransmitters into the brain, which give the feeling of physical and mental well-being. Second, it’s natural. Instinct. All

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the way back when we were organisms bubbling in Earth's primordial soup. When we slithered out of the oceans on our bellies, flicking our tongues for food. When we sprouted opposable thumbs and stood upright, we have had the urge to mate. It's in our cells. Our DNA. Like eating, it's a need. There's a feeling and we react to it. You're hungry, you eat. You have to shit or piss, you shit or piss. Now I know what you're thinking: that we have minds and intellect and that's what separates us from the animals. But I say what separates us from the animals is the ability to fantasize. Think about it, fantasy is the combination of intellect, creativity, and instinct, all of which have allowed for many avenues toward a better quality of life. Example: with this combination, we have better, healthier foods. We have indoor plumbing. We have the ability to construct elaborate fantasies. Babe, we can't lay stencils over the wild inside us. We have to use it. Blend it. Focus it. It's not shameful. It's not perverted, not deviance. It's as natural as a snake's slither. It's human.

You're right, he saw her saying. I see your point, he saw her saying.

It's late when her headlights finally fill the window.

After he'd finished off the tequila, he'd masturbated twice and went to bed. Now, a pearl of cold semen sticks his boxers to his thigh. He hopes she didn't tell Caroline. She tells Caroline, then Caroline tells Bobby and Bobby tells Art and... He shakes the thought away and listens. She bangs around in the

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kitchen and his body seems to constrict an inch and hold. She slams things in the living room. Kicks and stomps through the bathroom, then comes to bed and yanks the covers up.

“Is it me?” she asks.

And Mike is immediately up on and elbow, saying, “No,” saying, “It’s nothing to do with you. You’re perfect.”

“Then why then?”

“Cause it’s healthy,” he says, but his argument’s jumbled in his brain. “It’s instinct, you know. Natural like a snake...”

“I’m sure what you’re... doing... is healthy. I’m sure it’s instinct even. It’s instinct I want to fuck my boss too, but I don’t. Because when someone else’s feelings are involved, there’s also morals to factor in. There’s right,” she says, “and there’s wrong.”

“I was just getting in touch with my—you wanna fuck your boss?”

“And you promised to love me ‘til death do us part, not the fruit aisle at Walmart.” She sighs. Clears her throat. “What all *have* you done? I mean, besides the melon?”

“Cantaloupe,” he says.

“Mike?” she says, and he feels the heat from her face. “What all?”

“I... (right hand, left hand, rubber bands to restrict forearm circulation, blow-up dolls, Pucker Suckers, prosthetic vaginas—big one’s, hairy ones, shaved

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ones, tiny ones: ‘Tiny ‘Giny’s with the New and Improved Itty Bitty Clitty’s,’ a technique he invented called four-play, where you thumb-rub the penis-tip while massaging your balls with your other four fingers, prostrate stimulation with an electric toothbrush, though he didn’t go A-T-M and brush his teeth afterward) ...just the melon,” he says.

Silence.

More silence.

Then, she rolls over, facing away from him and says, “Well, it stops now or I’m gone.”

And she goes to sleep.

He wakes up the next morning to a wet dream. He’s still thrusting his hips and twitching when he opens his eyes. She’s standing over him, arms crossed, dressed for work. Watching.

His chest going in, out. In, out. Feet taut as rebar.

“You’re off to a really bad stop,” she says, shakes her head, and walks out.

At noon, Mike leaves the office and eats in his car. He’s tried calling Kalli several times but it goes straight to voicemail. Usually at lunch, he’d sit in the car leafing through one of his books. He’d gone down to the Porn Warehouse and bought *Love You Some You: Hands On Techniques To Masturbatory Enlightenment and Whack On, Whack Off: How To Switch Hands For A Little Strange*.

But now.

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He tosses the books in the backseat. He's terrified. She wants him to quit and he'll try for her, but it won't be easy. He was feeling it two or three times this morning. Out of habit, he went to the bathroom to fire off a round around ten and had to stop himself.

He'll miss it. That freedom to reach down and take hold. Grab a few minutes of pleasure. To recharge his batteries. Capitalize on a beautiful face or rack or ass he'd seen earlier in the day and placed in the top drawer of his mental "pull-box." It's magic, really, the control to speed up if you want to go faster. Slow down if you want it slower. Get tighter, be looser. And the confidence you get after it's over, and your hand doesn't roll off, brow m'd, and say, "Is that goddamn it?"

He's diamond hard just thinking about it. He unzips and slides his hand in.

Quitting'll be harder than he thought.

When you love food, it's hard to diet.

On the way home, Mike can't shake the feeling Kalli told Caroline. He calls Bobby.

"Caroline tell you me and Kalli got into it?" he says.

"She might have said something," Bobby says. "Why?"

Shit, he thinks. "No reason."

"We're grabbing a few beers tonight. Wanna come?"

"Better pass," Mike says. "Got damage control to

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do.”

“Suit yourself,” Bobby says. “Handle your business.”

Mike hangs up. Wonders which business Bobby was telling him to handle.

When Mike gets home and walks in the house, he knows he’s screwed. He hears the hum of the computer as he steps in and can see without seeing what Kalli’s looking at. He’d seen this scene play out in his head several times. There was no way around it. He’d hoped if he forgot about it, it would go away.

It didn’t. And here it is.

Since he’d started masturbating, he’d used the Internet for a good deal of his porn. It started with nude celebrities—Pamela Anderson, Angelina Jolie. Then old Marilyn Chambers movies and *Deep Throat*. Now, it’s Brianna Banks and more amateurish stuff.

And though he knew how to get off on the sites, then get off the sites, he could not figure out how to get the sites of the computer.

She’s crying.

“Those are old,” he says.

She looks at him, her face cinched in the center. Mascara stains under her eyes.

“Christ, Michael,” she says. “Spitnsplit.com? Warmnwoolmilfs.org?”

“Those aren’t your better sites,” he says, and wishes he hadn’t.

She looks back at the screen, shakes her head. “This

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isn't right. This is so not right," she says.

He walks toward her and she puts a hand up, closes her eyes, and turns her head.

"All guys have some," he says, and she runs down the hall and slams the door.

Her stares at the site. "Tic Tacs To Whales: Big Chicks Blow Little Dicks."

And his middle begins to tingle and tighten against his pants.

But he doesn't feel ashamed.

Once you get caught with you dick in produce, there's no more shame to feel.

That night, he gets drunk and passes out. He sleeps on the sofa. No wet dreams.

The next afternoon he comes home from work. The sun broken-yolking into the horizon. He hadn't touched himself all day. He loves his wife. He's gonna give this stopping a go.

He'd bought flowers and a Hallmark.

He pulls in.

The house is dark except for a flame orange glow in the living room window. He goes inside.

"Babe?" he says.

On the floor, rose petals are strewn from the door through the kitchen. He follows them into the living room.

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“Kalli?” he says, peeking around the corner.

And there she is, tiger-striped in peach scented candle-flicker. Leaned back on the sofa, legs spread. High-heels in the air, she’s dressed in a red and black mesh camigarter, so tiny there’s more cotton on a Q-Tip. She’s moved the thronged crotch to the side, and with her middle finger, she’s rubbing herself in baby circles.

“Hey,” he says, smiling. “What’s this?”

She raises a hand and slips a pin from her hair. Shakes her head, letting the dark curls slide down her shoulders. She leans forward, pours two glasses of wine, and takes a sip, never breaking eye contact. She runs her tongue over her glistening lips, the edges of her teeth, then leans back. Slips the thin lace straps from her shoulders and lets them slide over her breasts. She runs a hand over one of them and twists the nipple. She moans, clenches a fist, and hooks her trigger finger twice, gesturing for him to come.

He does.

She smells of honey massage oil. His favorite. He drops to his knees, breathing heavy, and kisses her. He’s stripping. Ripping his buttoned shirt. Peeling his pants off like skin. “I’m sorry, babe,” he says, between breaths. “About it all.”

She smiles and shakes her head No.

“I love you,” he says, and God knows he does. He always had. She was the most beautiful girl he’d ever placed irises on. She’d always been the one and he’d

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hurt her. With his “instinct” he bruised the heart of the only person that matters to him. He’s through with it, he thinks. He’s quitting. For this sexy, smart, funny woman he’d fallen in love with years ago, he’s going to be the man she wants. Deserves. Out of this revelation, he caresses and kisses every cell of salty, sweat-glazed flesh on her body. And for over an hour, he works and works, trying to physically convey everything bubbling in his heart.

But for the life of him...

...his dick...

...will not...

...get fucking...

...hard.

HORROR SLEAZE TRASH

The Devil and the Dude

Eric Lawson

The overpowering stench hit Daniel squarely in the face. Public restrooms were never a pretty sight and this one was no different. In fact, upon first glance, the design looked like it dated back to the Roosevelt Administration. As in Theodore Roosevelt.

Realizing that he absolutely could not hold it any longer, he rushed over to the first open stall and closed the door behind him. He dropped his pants, sat down, and then immediately stood up again. Why the hell is everything wet? His mind asked. What's wrong with people? He used what little toilet paper there was to wipe the seat down. His stomach rumbled loudly. He had a vicious turtle head poking out and he needed to give birth, pronto.

He eased back down onto the seat and settled in. He flexed his muscles and nothing happened. His stomach rumbled again. "Come on," he whimpered. He placed his hands on the walls for leverage and closed his eyes. He strained with all of his might but still the stubborn turd held fast. He was preparing to push gain when his hand slipped and he readjusted and then opened his eyes. To his horror, a large brown smear on the wall had coated his hand. To keep from puking, he repeated the phrase it's just melted chocolate over and over in his head until the

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nausea passed. Things were definitely not looking up. “Holy hell,” he muttered to himself.

“Problems, dude?” asked a voice from the next stall.

The deepness and proximity of the voice caught Daniel off guard. “Oh, hey, I thought I was alone. Just doing my business over here.” He grimaced as soon as he shut his mouth. A master conversationalist, he was not.

“Yeah, well you know what they say; it’s a small world,” came the reply. “Sounds to me like that turd’s gonna take its sweet time. No need to force it.”

Daniel rolled his eyes. Not exactly sage-like advice. “And I suppose you’re waiting for the tide to come in over there or something.”

The voice in the next stall chuckled. “‘Tide to come in.’ Good one. Between you and me, partner, I’ve been back up for over a week now. I was kind of hoping today was my lucky day, you know? No such luck so far, though.”

Daniel blinked incredulously. “You’ve been constipated for a week? Shouldn’t you see a doctor about that?”

The voice chuckled again. “Kid, I’ve outlived so many doctors. In fact, the last one had the gall to—wait a second; I think I got something here.”

A horrendous fart erupted from the next stall and shook the walls. It sounded like a foghorn coming through a stack of amplifiers. Daniel felt a strong breeze against his ankles and then the smell hit him.

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In his mind, he was waist-deep in a swamp carrying a dirty diaper while balancing a carton of rotten eggs on his head. Nausea was consuming him and he was on the verge of blacking out.

The deep voice brought him back from the edge. "Hey, dude. You all right over there?"

Daniel massaged his face. It felt warm and sweaty. "Uh, yeah. I'm here." He thought his voice sounded distant and weak. "I guess you were backed up after all."

"Just a false alarm," the voice sighed. "It was a doozy, though, wasn't it?"

Daniel laughed. "I'll say."

"Hey, since it looks like we're gonna be in here for a bit, let's shoot the breeze, huh? My name's Lou."

"Oh, um, well, I'm Daniel." Several seconds dragged by and he started to wonder if Lou had fallen asleep.

"Daniel? You're kidding me. Sorry, dude, but that's a total pansy name. Let me guess, your parents were huge Elton John fans." Lou laughed long and hard at this.

"Okay, my bad. I couldn't resist. I'm just gonna call you Dude from here on out. Let's pretend we've shaken hands and all that awkward crap already, okay?"

"Oh, right. Sure," Daniel replied. "Nice to meet you, Lou."

"Likewise, Dude. So what do you think of the carnival so far?"

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Daniel took a few seconds to consider. "It's all right, I guess. I've seen better. Back when I was a kid I was more into them, maybe. How about you?"

"Where do I start?" Lou sounded like he was winding up to tell a real whopper. "Well, the food's overcooked, the ringmaster's taking pills for his ulcer, his daughter is knocked up and she's not sure who the father is, and the mime monkeys got loose and are freaking people out," he chuckled at this last part. "But hey, I've only been here for an hour. Who knows what's gonna happen next, you know? Stay tuned."

"Wow," was all Daniel could bring himself to say.

Lou sounded like he was chewing on something; licorice, maybe. "Human drama is always more interesting than TV, I always say." He sighed heavily and then was silent for a while. He sighed loudly again.

"Everything all right, Lou?" Daniel prodded.

Lou stumbled over his words. "Well, it's just—aw, forget it, Dude."

"What is it?"

"Nothing. A big, fat nothing, okay?" Lou sighed again.

"Aw, come on," Daniel pleaded. "Sometimes telling a stranger is easier than telling your best friend. I'm not going anywhere." He tapped his foot on the floor as if to prove a point.

"Maybe you're right." He sighed again. "It's just...it's

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just Julia, Dude.”

“Who’s Julia?”

Lou cleared his throat. His tone of voice changed. It was almost as if he had been rehearsing the story in his head before he even uttered a word. “She’s my ex-girlfriend. She supposedly moonlights at this high class jazz club downtown now.” He drifted off momentarily before sighing and continuing the story. “Anyway, she’s here at the carnival today with her new fella—I call him the A #1 Douche Bag—and when I saw her, she just looks amazing. Dude, I gotta tell ya I was drooling, man.”

He was silent for a few moments. When he spoke again, the confidence seemed to have drained out of him. “It was a mutual breakup, okay? I mean, I’ve grown a lot. A hell of a lot, you know? Dude, are you there?”

Daniel snapped back into the moment. “Yeah, I’m here. That sounds pretty rough, man.”

Lou plowed through. “Rough indeed, man. I’m trying my heart out to improve myself. I’m at the bookstore every other week checking out all the self-help books I can find. I’m making myself over. I’m a changed guy, you know? I quote that shit to anyone who even doubts my sincerity, bro. If she could only see the strides I’ve made. If she could see me doing good deeds out in the wild, I know she’d come back to me.” Anger crept into Lou’s voice and his confidence returned with it. “Oh, and A #1 Douche Bag—his real name is Kevin—really gets under my skin. Just the way her friends talk about

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him like he's the sweetest guy who ever lived. Lame! I mean, I've never seen him in person. Not yet, anyway. I guess he's some kind of video game tester or something. Who knew that girls thought that was a turn on."

Daniel decided it was time to interject. "Professional gamer? I didn't think that was a viable career. What a tool." He laughed nervously.

Lou laughed long and hard and seemed to perk up a bit. "'What a tool.' That's hilarious! You know, Dude, you're all right, man. I mean, you are one cool customer."

Daniel smiled in spite of himself. "You're not so bad yourself, Lou. In fact, you know, you're surprisingly easy to talk—"

The door to the restroom was suddenly flung open. Harsh daylight barged in. A drunken voice bellowed: "I said I'll be right back, man. Huh? 'Cuz I gotta use the can, that's why. Don't you dare drink my beer, amigo. I said hold it for me. Just hold it! Does that compute, nimrod?" The door slammed shut and stumbling footsteps stopped in front of the two occupied stalls.

As soon as knuckles touched his door, Daniel chirped out a weak, "Occupied."

The persistent drunkard knocked on Lou's stall door but Lou didn't make a sound.

Daniel thought of saying something to come to Lou's defense, but resisted the urge. His stomach felt like it was doing back flips. He wasn't going anywhere.

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The drunkard made some annoyed, guttural noises and pounded on Lou's stall door again. There was no response.

"Hey! I know you're in there, fella," the drunkard slurred. "Come on, man. What are you doing in there; giving birth to the Anti-Christ?" Apparently, he thought this was hilarious and laughed uproariously at his own trite joke.

Seemingly from below the floor at first, and then moving into (or coming from) Lou's stall, came a deep, animal-like growling. A bright yellow light shined from underneath the stall walls. The humidity in the room suddenly went tropical.

Daniel was about to ask him if he was okay, when Lou's door flew off the hinges and hit the far wall with enough force to dislodge several bricks. He saw the boots of the drunkard shaking. Water begins dripping on the floor. Or was it urine? Was the guy pissing himself?

"Oh my God," the drunkard whined repeatedly. He was frozen to the spot.

"Hardly," came Lou's reply. "Didn't your mother ever tell you it's rude to interrupt? My new friend and I were trying to have a serious conversation, clown shoes."

The drunkard's speech fumbled into desperate mumbling.

Daniel blinked and was astonished to see that the man's boots had been replaced with actual clown shoes. Or had he always been wearing them? The

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lighting was almost non-existent.

“Please don’t kill me,” the drunkard managed, barely above a whisper.

Daniel strained to see, but his stomach clenched again and he sat back up straight on the toilet. What was this guy seeing?

“Kill you?” Lou stated, almost playfully. “Nah, I’m not gonna kill ya. Where’s the fun in that? I’m gonna do you a favor, clown shoes. You see, you’re just one of the mindless herd. A bottom feeder, if you will. You might as well join my flock. It’s fairly safe to say you’ve peaked already, my friend. We both know it’s only gonna go downhill from here, bro. Now, hold still, this is going to hurt. A lot.”

A blinding red light emitted from Lou’s stall and the drunkard screamed and clutched at himself in anguish.

From his vantage point, Daniel saw the drunkard disappear. He rubbed his eyes in disbelief. When he focused again, he saw a goat, wearing a bell around its neck, chewing on the drunkard’s khakis. It bleated, but seemed otherwise indifferent.

Daniel bit down on his hand to stifle a moan and something unclenched in his stomach. He was vaguely aware of a distant plopping into the toilet. When he got his breathing under control, he came to the conclusion that he had literally been scared into moving his bowels. The familiar voice from the other stall refocused his attention.

“Hey, Dude,” Lou offered in a jovial tone. “Sounds to

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me like you sank the old battleship. Everything okay?"

It will be as soon as I'm out of here, his mind screamed. "Um, yeah. Just finishing up here, Lou." He reached for the toilet paper and was mortified to see only three lousy sheets were left. I can't even die clean, he thought and rolled his eyes. He could just wipe his hand off in some tall grass outside. But the smell... The smell would linger for hours. "Damn," he muttered.

"Remember, Dude," Lou piped up. "If it breaches the surface, you have to name it. He tittered like a naughty teenager raising his hand with a question about uncontrollable boners during Sex Ed.

Daniel sighed. If he made a run for it, he thought Lou probably wouldn't let him leave. Not in one piece, at least. His last moral shred pushed him to be honest if only for life-prolonging small talk. "Looks like they forgot to stock the TP today. Just my luck, huh?"

"Is that a fact?" asked Lou. "Well, I just happen to have an extra roll right here. Hang on a second." Sounds of shifting were quickly followed with: "Okay, incoming."

Daniel felt something hit his ankle and looked down. A red tail ending in an arrow-shaped tip was wrapped around a perfectly normal roll of toilet paper. He was petrified.

Lou sighed dramatically for effect. "Yeah, it's a tail, okay. Deal with it. Just take the roll, already, Dude. This is an awkward angle for me here."

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With that, Daniel took the roll and began wiping while looking up at the ceiling. He was barely aware of the tail uncoiling and sliding back under the wall.

“Whoa!” Lou cried. “Something shifted!” He made several pained grunting noises. The walls of the stall began to rattle. Lou screamed between deep breaths. Then what sounded like a cinder block being tossed into a swimming pool splashed into the bowl and Lou panted like he had just climbed a mountain. “Whew. I think we have a multi-flusher here, Dude.”

By this time, Daniel was already washing his hands. He felt the goat brush past him a few times before it went back to nibbling on the drunkard’s tank top.

He knew that with the door against the far wall that Lou was watching his every move, but he focused on washing his hands and then drying them. “Thanks for the TP, Lou.”

“Don’t mention it, Dude,” Lou said while zipping up his pants and buckling his belt. “Sorry if things got a little weird in here for you.”

Daniel bit his lip. “That guy was a tool. You just did what you had to do.”

Lou smacked the stall wall in agreement. “That’s what I like about you, Dude. Nothing fazes you. You’re one cool customer.” He took a few steps toward the sink.

Daniel walked briskly towards the door. He had his hand on the handle when Lou called after him.

“Hey, I can trust you not to tell anyone how badly constipated I get, right?” He actually sounded

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somewhat worried.

Daniel's eyes locked in on the door handle. "Of course, Lou. One good turn deserves another." He opened the door and light came pouring into the room. He had one foot out the door when Lou yelled out from behind him again.

"Hey, check out the girl at the funnel cake booth. I heard she already gave her number to two guys today. And one of them didn't even ask her for it!" Lou's laughter filled up the entire room. "Later, Dude!"

Daniel closed the door behind him and leaned against the wall around the corner. When his heart rate was under control, he flung the door back open and peered inside. The bathroom was empty. The destroyed stall door was back on its hinges as if nothing had happened. He sighed and scoffed at his own overactive imagination. He closed the door and turned back towards the inviting sounds of the carnival. He turned the corner and tripped over a goat wearing a bell around its neck. The goat seemed to know him and rubbed its head playfully against his legs. He opened his mouth to scream but nothing came out. He leapt to his feet and ran headlong for the parking lot. He lunged into his car, peeled out, and never once looked back.

Since then, he has never been to another carnival or circus. He removed all the mirrors from his apartment. In fact, he removed the bathroom door entirely. And for the finishing touch, he legally erased his middle name. This depressed his fiancé, Julia. She liked his middle name so much she always

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called him Kevin instead of Daniel. She said it sounded youthful, masculine, and confident, unlike her self-help-book-obsessed ex-boyfriend, Lou.

To this day, Daniel routinely wets the bed for fear of going into the bathroom at night in the dark, alone.

HORROR SLEAZE TRASH

Sucked Into the Cult

Matthew Licht

Harry Doss was in a foul mood when he got off the flight from Houston. Fat passengers had crowded him from both sides. Infants shrieked in the rows ahead and behind. A stewardess spilled coffee in his lap. Aside from the pain and the un-businesslike stain, his cell-phone was ruined in the accident. The plane landed nearly two hours late.

He fumbled his pockets outside a phone booth in the Arrivals zone. He didn't have enough change to make an urgent call. Harry was about to miss the most important meeting of his career.

A hooded figure swathed in sunset hues chose this moment to approach.

Out of the corner of his eye, Harry Doss saw someone shove a book in his face. He wanted to lash out, or at least be verbally abusive. But when he saw her, he was paralyzed and struck dumb. He forgot his business appointment. He forgot his struggling electronics corporation. He wanted to kneel, surrender his soul and devote himself to the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen.

"Have you accessed the godhead today, sir? For a small donation, the Ultimate Truth can be yours. If you would only give me a few minutes of your

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valuable time, I can explain...”

Oh Hell yes. Harry Doss put down the germ-laden receiver he'd intended to use as a bludgeon. Instead of telephone change, he pulled business expense cash from his pocket. Twenty, forty, sixty bucks was a small price to pay for Ultimate Truth. Each additional banknote made the woman who was proof of God's existence to shake and jiggle in surprised delight.

Harry Doss went from harried businessman to horny Everyman, eager to cheat on his wife.

Betty-Sue Doss was a good homemaker. He'd kept his promise to forsake all others, but the godhead had given a sign that his fast must end.

Harry and the cult woman went to sit in a quiet spot. She opened the book Harry had so expensively bought to a picture of a bald-headed, prune-faced gentleman with flowing gray nose-hair.

“This is Swami Vishnaswoti.” She sighed at the name, pulling back the hood of her orange sweatshirt.

Harry looked to see whether she was blonde or brunette, and was shocked to discover she was as bald as the dude in the picture. He pictured her nude, being shaven by other saffron-robed figures in some initiation ritual, with muted drums and a droning chant.

If there was a God, Harry wondered, why should some codger with excess nose-hair get to stare at, and probably fondle, his most glorious creation.

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Harry's previous attempts at infidelity were a history of failure. Women he met on business trips and at conventions always declined his invitations to come back to a hotel room for meaningless, wonderfully mechanical adultery. One of them, when he asked her why not, said, "Oh, come on, darling. You're the kind who always says, 'I can't do this. I love my wife'."

What followed was a kiss that made Harry Doss wonder what might've been for months.

'This time,' he thought, *'it's not going to go that way.'*

He dropped his voice to interrupt the flow of Swami-blab.

"What's your name, young lady?"

"Kryst...I mean, Davadip."

"I'm Harry. Listen, what you're telling me is just what I wanted—needed—to hear. Our meeting is no coincidence, it's synchronicity. I'm in a spiritual crisis. I'm lonely, Davadip. Lonely and scared of what lies ahead. Perhaps you and Swami..."

"Vishnaswoti."

"...can relieve a troubled soul."

Sales meetings be damned. Hello, bankruptcy court. Goodbye, wife and kids. Harry Doss, minor-league business manager, was gonna nab himself some cult cunt.

They exited the airport and got into a cab.

"Kranepool Hotel," Harry told the turbanned,

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bearded taxi driver. "Step on it."

Harry's head buzzed with visions of nude Davadip in a hotel shower stall.

"Wait a minute," she said. "Oh my God mister, I didn't say I was going to a *hotel* with you." Davadip sounded like she was about to cry.

Harry Doss felt his spirit drain. "Oh I'm sorry. Of course not. But I swear I only want to talk to you. Tell me where we could go instead."

"Driver, take us to the Ashkanoma Ashram. It's at the end of Crapper Boulevard."

But the driver refused to go to that outlandish address unless he got extra cash up front. Harry took out his wallet and was bled further. He'd have a tough time explaining these additional expenses, on top of the missed conference.

They entered a bad neighborhood. Texas Prisons looked more inviting than the Ashram. Davadip, however, sighed happily when she saw her home.

"Hurry up and get out," the cab driver said. He threw the car into reverse and was gone.

On the dirt driveway, Harry was surrounded by hulking men in orange hooded sweatshirts. Their faces boded ill.

"Rama-lama, brothers," Davadip said. "I've passed out all my tracts, gathered my donation quota, *and* I've brought a new truth-seeker to visit. Uhm, mister? I forgot your name."

"Harry. Pleased to meet you guys, but I think I gotta

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go...”

He stuck out his hand for shakes that never came. Gruff voices muttered words of friendship and welcome. Strong arms embraced him, and dragged him towards the tumbledown shack made to look like some hillbilly’s idea of the Taj Mahal.

In a candle-lit darkness that reeked of incense and sweat, Harry Doss was relieved of his briefcase, then his clothes. “Hey! Knock it off!”

He stopped struggling when he saw he was being lightened and stripped by Davadip and several of her cult Sisters. Davadip looked into his eyes. “Relax,” she said. “Let go. Let it happen.”

She unzipped her sweatshirt. Harry’s mouth hung open at the sight. There was even a trickle of drool. Here body was a milky white expanse, like a glimpse of the distant Himalayas.

“Oooh look, sisters. He’s in need,” one of the cult women whispered.

“Wouldn’t he like to join with us,” said another, pushing her bosom together.

“But he’s not ready yet.”

“Aw, poor guy. Let’s give him a taste.”

Eyes can only open so wide, but Harry’s tried to break the World Record. Davadip’s squeaky voice split the air.

“Wait, sisters! *I* found him. That means I get to minister to him first...”

Her eyes glowed with spiritual love and bliss.

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Harry Doss thought he'd died and gone to Heaven, or Nirvana, whichever was heavenlier. His brain turned itself off. He reverted to a primitive state.

"Glaah...Baaah....Phlurgle..."

Davadip eventually moved aside and let her sisters join in. What was left of Harry's brain exploded. He saw pink visions of the Holy Ecstasy Beyond.

"That's enough, for now," said the senior shaven-headed Den Mother, zipping up her sweatshirt. Harry nearly broke down at the assertion.

"Bluh! Duh! Noooo!" He felt a hooded sweatshirt being pulled over his head.

"Time for you to grovel before Swami Vishnaswoti, o luckiest brother."

"Oh it'll blow your mind." Davadip planted a chaste kiss on Harry's cheek.

The men of the cult dragged him away with his orange drawstring pants around his ankles.

They dumped him on the rough floor in a dungeon rank with body odor. He heard a low hum, felt himself observed through the blackness. Someone struck a match and lit a candle, then several others. Harry saw the face of Swami Vishnaswoti.

He was even more wizened than in the photo Davadip had shown him. The Swami had grown a white mustache, Harry thought. Then he saw it wasn't a mustache at all, but the most luxuriant nose-hair in the history of the world. The Swami's eyes were hypnotic.

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“Uh, hello,” Harry said, and instantly felt a sharp smack to the back of his head.

“Silence before the Heavenly Master.”

The Swami regarded Harry placidly. “You seem like a no-nonsense kinda guy,” he said, with a heavy New York accent.

“Uh, sure. I guess.”

“OK, I’m gonna level with you. We’re on a holy mission here, but it’s a business deal too. You start at the bottom and work your way up, through prayer and devotion to the cause. You hip?”

“Yeah. But...”

“Here’s the deal: for every hundred bucks you bring in, you get five minutes with one of the girls—your choice. I mean, it’s up to *her*, of course. You gotta get a sister’s consent and approval first, but you’ll find most of your new sisters to be quite *receptive*.”

Harry was about to say, “But I’ve got a wife and kids and a job and...”

Another thought occurred. “Business, huh? What’s in it for the girls? If this is some kind of brainwashing scam, I’m gonna call the cops.”

“Relax, hero. They’re in on the deal. For each C-note a sister brings home, she gets a personal worship-session. And for every dupe... that is, for every new *devotee* a girl converts, she gets to enjoy Holy Communion with the Master. And that’s me, baby.”

Harry snorted.

The Swami chuckled, his nose hair twitched.

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“How 'bout a little demonstration? Been a slow day. Brother Hasham, go fetch Sister Davadip. This dude's not official yet, but let's say he counts.”

“Yeah, o master.”

The Swami slowly unwound himself from his lotus position. “Feel free to join in,” he said. “With the chant, I mean.”

The drone grew louder. Harry's eyes adapted to the eerie candlelight.

A sitar twanged. Muffled drums beat. Harry Doss thought of the business conference going on without him, of his wife Betty-Sue living out her daily routine. Then Davadip entered the basement and Harry thought no more.

“O Divine Teacher, thank you for this most sublime opportunity.”

The Swami gave a curt wave. “Shake it, baby.”

Davadip began to dance. Her sweatshirt fluttered in the air as she leapt and flew all around. By the time she finally bared it all, there wasn't much left of Harry Doss besides a pile of volcanic ash.

Dewy with sweat, Davadip approached the Swami.

Vishnaswoti leaned back against a brocade cushion and let his devotee have her way.

The chant grew louder.

“Rama-lama! Looba-gabba!”

Harry Doss joined in like a zombie.

“Rammalamma! Loobagooba!”

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The show was disappointing. If Harry Doss had been in his ordinary state of mind, he would've thought, 'big deal'. But Harry Doss wasn't in his ordinary state of mind. He was chanting at the top of his lungs.

You might see Harry Doss—he goes by Hare Das these days—at an airport or a street corner near you. His eyes shine with missionary zeal. He is a forceful proselytizer. The first time he brought a hundred dollars back to the Ashram, Davadip told him she knew he could do better. So he's working on bringing in a cool thousand. He knows he'll get to Heaven one of these days. The Master told him so.

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Remnants

Judson Michael Agla

It was just before the dawn of the end of the world, and what a better way to shake things up than an extinction level event delivered right to your doorstep like a paper bag full of steaming shit. This inevitable catastrophe was of course due to the eventual onslaught of an abrupt climatic clusterfuck, caused by people, because people are fucking stupid. Having no way to stop or slow this from happening, people turned to their only historically respectable advantageous of behaviours, which were alcoholism, ferocious recreational drug use, and murder without discretion or empathy.

Our city planners were tasked with arranging a huge party to celebrate the event, which would begin as soon as possible, and end when everybody was either dead or on a spaceship, the latter being less likely. After all, our city boasted one of the most glamorous of venues just outside of it's limits; a gigantic estate that was just recently dubbed both an historical landmark and an architectural death trap. This venue was chosen partially because of its multicultural heritage; Once owned by rich white people, built by enslaved black people, and situated on the burial grounds of first nations people. The ballroom in the main building could accommodate five thousand rich people or ten thousand normal

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people, although, those numbers were most likely outdated as the entire structure had been sinking on the west side since completion, apparently building codes at the time viewed sand and dead bodies as an acceptable foundation.

The party was essentially for the most elitist of the elite citizens of the world; billionaires, movie stars, professional athletes, and anyone rich enough to purchase, cage, and eat poor people. Rich and famous cocksuckers were to be flown in from the four corners of the globe, however, those flights would not be returning, as surprisingly to most, a globe does not have any corners. However, there was a plentiful stock of fuck-heads who fit the bill within driving distance to overflow the joint with thousand-dollar party gowns, hairdos, and purse dwelling over-inbred rat-dogs.

This celebratory atrocity was going to be holding the largest herd of dull, egocentric, narcissistic, oppressive, second amendment spewing, right wing, slave trading, pedophiliac, oil pumping, tax evading cocksuckers collectively wearing more plastic implants than actual body parts, ever to soil a single venue, and I was going to crash the fucker.

I had nothing to wear that cost any more than free, so I put together my old clown suit that I used to wear when I lived underground beside a gas station (they were dark and cryptic times), I'd be arriving posing as the entertainment, and the bright, sickening, and somewhat blinding colors of the costume would surely camouflage my grenade belt, as well as take notice away from my bag of angry

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rats, that was in fact clearly labeled “Bag of Angry Rats” (the dark and cryptic times never really quite ended for me).

So, the glorious day finally came into fruition, and playing my part as accurately, and believable as I could, I rolled up to castle douche bag on my pink tricycle, just fucking loaded up on P.C.P., vodka, and a shitload of prescription pills that I liberated from a dumpster about a year and a half ago. After a short period of dry heaving, and pissing out of my ass in the bushes, I bravely staggered up to the main entrance, ready to defend myself against expulsion, I was heavily armed, and the rats were real fucking hungry, but I managed to walk right in without the slightest incident, some plastic rich bitch even asked “who” I was wearing.

Once inside, I couldn’t help but notice the wretched stench, comparable to that of stewing hot rigor coming from a discarded oil drum, haphazardly dumped on a Florida beach. The music stage had already been sacked by a madman with a tenuous mortal coil, half dead, and seemingly possessed by a very fucking pissed off alien entity, he was spewing a continuous entourage of obscenities at the guests through the thick rancid clouds of cigar smoke, and the ever-present fumes of the original lead-based paint that blanketed the entire estate.

The nicotine-stained windows that covered the ceiling revealed an untimely imposing blackened sky, like some ethereal force had parked its ass overhead, and was ready to blow a wretched form of damnation out from its bowels. An overwhelming

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feeling of impending doom abruptly came over me, as I sensed the undeniable presence of torturous unrest, and a distasteful wrath of god like vengeance. It became quite obvious to me that the guest list was expanding; the dead were here, and I was beginning a crash course covering the true nature of the machinery of dying.

As I staggered through this awesome nightmare, I already knew that bat-shit crazy was the pre-determined destination, and things hadn't even hit the on-ramp yet. The chaotic mess continued as some assholes let the guard dogs into the ballroom, who immediately sniffed out the over in-bred purse dwelling smaller rat-dogs, and ripped the fuckers apart with ferocious ease, and malice that even I had never seen. Usually, blood spray on the walls evidenced that a party was going well, but this was much different, and these devil dogs had only begun to sooth their famine. The guests, like gazelles on the Serengeti, began to sacrifice their own, by tossing smaller, weaker, and less popular individuals into the epicenter of the slaughter, until the dogs' stomachs finally burst open from the inside out, and fell into a long horrific multitude of death throes.

I've seen my share of horror, and sick human born atrocities, I've even committed some, but this venue, on this night, had yet to show me the true meaning of darkness. Some of the spectacles were Russian roulette, played with fully loaded revolvers, twisted versions of traditional cock fights, pitting poor blind children against each other, with razor wire wrapped around their hands and feet, experimental

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surgeries, both rearranging, and exchanging appendages, and organs, bowling with babies taped to explosives, the consuming of cleaning products, gasoline, and lighter fluid, and the accusing and burning of those believed to be witches. Things were really getting fucking medieval in there.

Superseding the feelings of horror and disgust, a strange sense of disappointment surfaced, I had come with the intensions of protest, to be the voice of the meek and disenfranchised, seek vengeance for economic discrimination and the child sex trade business. I wanted to kill people with a rusty meat cleaver, set off a few grenades and bring down the ceiling, set loose to my angry bag of rats and witness slow death with ring side seats, convince people that god was dead and heaven had been sacked by reptilian aliens, but none of this would hold any meaningful viscosity or potency. I was a snake with no venom, a crusader without a sword or any belief in misguided fairy tales, these sub-human monsters had already long ago fallen from the grace of their gods.

I realized that despite my best efforts, I couldn't commit any atrocity that these fuck-monsters weren't already doing to themselves, I'd lost all propulsion driving my hateful disgust for humanity, they'd even began horrific acts of cannibalism which I was planning to provoke as my grand finale, I'd be the one man to actually get the rich to eat themselves.

My bloody insurrection was a total failure before it ever began, and there was no way I was going to let

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my rats eat their way through this party, it was far below even their standards, if you can even believe it, I had to feed them cooked food, which confused the fuck out of them. So, I grabbed a bottle of vodka from the bar and sat down to do as much P.C.P. as humanly possible, but you know, it just didn't taste quite the same.

As I sat there, snorting my way towards destiny and damnation, with bloody nose and freshly soiled clown pants, a woman sat down beside me. She was modestly clothed, and obviously shared no union or compliance with the goings on of this insipid mortal hell spinning unbridled all around us. She was blessed with a calming beauty and noticeable empathy, and somehow, sensed my distress, and incontinence. She took my hand in hers and spoke from a star-lit wisdom that far surpassed any fortune cookie I'd ever read. She went on to say, "There are two kinds of people in this world my friend; those with loaded guns, and those who dig", I was so gloriously surprised to hear my favorite quote from the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly, my distress began to dissipate, and a new enigmatic form of understanding washed over me. There wasn't going to be any heroes in this story, only the bravery to accept my own tenuous mortal coil, the clockworks behind the machinery of dying, and the detonator she pulled from her purse, that I was privileged to press, my hand over hers.

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Totem

Tim Frank

After they'd fucked, Eugene drank in the experience with all his senses by wallowing in the damp patch, swaddling himself in the sweaty sheets. Sitting on the edge of the bed, Shelly strapped on her bra, collected the money from the nightstand and stuffed it into her purse.

"Hey," he said, "let me take you to dinner. I want to treat you like the queen that you are."

"Mister, you know the rules," she said, rising to her feet.

"Fuck the rules, we belong together. You just took my virginity; we have a special bond now. In fact, come to Bali with me. I'll buy the tickets now. We can make love on the beach, drink cocktails from coconuts, leave this world behind."

"You're sweet but please, be realistic."

"I am being realistic, you're the love of my life. I've never felt this way before."

"Promise me, the first girl you shag in real life? Don't marry her. You're a sweet guy, don't sell yourself short."

And with that, she tramped out of his room, adjusting her G-string as she made her exit.

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“Shelly!” Eugene called after her.

But she was already gone.

Eugene thought about her all day at work. He was twenty-seven and a successful lawyer. He had the odd fair-weather friend, but love had always eluded him. Now he'd been hit by the thunderbolt. However, he wondered if he could ever defile Shelly again – she was just too perfect. But he couldn't resist visualising the sweat dripping over her porcelain skin – slowly down her neck and onto her pendulous breasts. No, he had to see her again and have her once more. After just one taste, he'd become addicted to her moist lips and creamy thighs. Clocking off from his job in the city, he decided to pay a visit to Shelly's massage parlour in Soho, after first shovelling down a heavy Chinese buffet followed by several pints of cider.

As he entered the parlour there were a few men seated in the waiting room, perusing hardcore porno magazines, glazed expressions on their faces. Eugene approached the reception desk, occupied by a middle-aged woman wearing varifocal lenses. Eugene asked for Shelly.

“Sorry,” she said, “she's busy. But...”

“I'll wait,” Eugene interrupted.

“...we have many other beautiful young ladies for your delectation. Here are some photos.”

“That won't be necessary. I'll wait for Shelly.”

Eugene squeezed himself in between two of the other customers. One of them, with a pencil thin

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moustache and a cravat, leaned in conspiratorially and whispered in Eugene's ear, "Shelly's really something else, isn't she?"

"What?" Eugene said, "What did you just say? Who the fuck are you?"

Shelly's pimp overheard the conversation and, wanting to avoid any drama, appeared at his office door and motioned for Eugene to join him.

Inside his office, the pimp leaned back in his swivel chair, reached for a chewed-on cigar, and said, "I hear Shelly has made quite an impression on you."

"I guess," Eugene said, all cagey, wringing his hands.

"Listen, it's fantastic you like her so much, it's what we're here for. However, we encourage our clients to spread the love around and not get too attached to any one of our girls. We've had problems in the past with some, let's call them, *insane* clients, you see."

The pimp smiled devilishly, his teeth all jutting out at random angles.

"Hmm," Eugene said, "you're her pimp, right?"

"You could call it that."

"I've been wanting to talk to you, because the thing is, I want Shelly."

"I understand, I do."

"I mean, I want her to be all mine. Forever."

"Oh. Well, now..."

"Hear me out. I can make it worth your while, I have plenty of money and I'm willing to splash the cash.

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I'll treat her right, I promise. The truth is, I'm in love with her and I want to marry her."

"Well, Eugene, your experience is quite common. Shelly is a lovely girl. All our girls are lovely, however. I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I just can't give you what you want. Simply no way. How about this, why don't you try Jasmine, seeing as Shelly is otherwise occupied? Give her a test run tonight, and I promise your obsession with Shelly will be cured by sunrise."

"I don't need a cure. I don't want a cure."

The pimp sighed and said, "Let me do you a deal. Have Jasmine tonight and I'll fix you up with Shelly tomorrow. Then we'll see how to proceed at a later date."

"I think I'll pass and just see Shelly tomorrow."

"Why don't you at least meet Jasmine and see how it goes? You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. You don't even have to do anything; it will be a way of passing the time until you see Shelly again. Trust me, I know about these things."

"Well, I guess it can't do any harm. Just this once, mind, seeing as I have nothing else to do. Because I warn you, I won't give up on my Shelly, she's burnt into my soul. Do you have a picture of this Jasmine?"

"Of course," said the pimp, flicking through a laminated sex menu and then sliding it over. The page was labelled "Jasmine the Exotic Girl of your Dreams". Despite the elaborate lighting and a loose red slip draped over her body, Eugene could tell she

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was pretty much anorexic.

“She’s lost a lot of weight recently,” the pimp said, “used to be over two hundred pounds. Some guys go for that, other guys go for the opposite. Either way she’s a real firecracker. You like her?”

Eugene analysed the photo, squinting.

“Yes, yes, I think I do.”

Jasmine’s room was located on the third floor of the massage parlour, and he was welcomed by the scent of strawberry lube and cinnamon incense as he entered. Jasmine was seated in an armchair in the corner of the room wearing a satin dressing gown with her crossed legs exposed. There were the soft sounds of whale song playing from the Echo Dot.

Eugene took a seat on the bed and played with his pocket pen knife.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “I don’t really know what I’m doing here, my heart belongs to another.”

“Relax, I don’t want your heart. I’m just here to show you a good time.”

“It feels wrong.”

“We can talk for a bit if that makes you more comfortable?”

“I’m in love with a girl who works here, Shelly.”

“Ah, Shelly,” she said, “popular girl.”

Jasmine stood and slid her gown off, stepping out of it as she approached Eugene. The light hit her in such a way the loose skin hanging from her belly

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was revealed.

“Let me take your mind off her...”

She straddled him, loosened his tie and unhooked her bra. Her tits were somehow floppy and shrivelled at the same time.

After a period of fumbling around, Eugene finally said, “Stop. I’m sorry, but I can’t get it up. This wouldn’t happen with Shelly. I don’t know how I could have betrayed her.”

Jasmine rolled off Eugene and wrapped herself back up in her gown.

“What the fuck is the deal with Shelly, anyway, huh? I mean what’s she got that I haven’t?”

“Well, she’s just so beautiful and kind and gentle. She’s just the perfect girl.”

“Really.”

“Yes, and I feel we’re made for each other, you know? Soulmates.”

“Right. I get it, I get it, you’re hooked. What do I care? I didn’t lose all the weight for your approval. I’m sure you’re eager to see her as soon as possible, then.”

“Of course.”

“I think I can help you, because if you love her so much, it’s only reasonable I tell you where she is right now.”

“Would you?” Eugene said, unable to contain his excitement.

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Eugene followed Jasmine's directions to a run-down motel on the edge of town and booked himself into a room. He didn't have a plan and decided to let instinct guide him, knowing the love between him and Shelly could not be denied.

It wasn't long before Eugene picked up on the loud moaning sounds, which seemed to be coming from several doors down. With some sense of trepidation, he went off to investigate, following the noise as it grew in intensity.

Creeping along the balcony, he finally arrived at its source.

"Oh, Shelly!" a man's voice called out.

Eugene peeked through the gap in the curtain. Two men were kneeling opposite each other on the bed – old men with turkey necks and balls hanging low, slapping back and forth as they both laid into the woman on all fours in between them. It was hard to make out in the dimness of the light, but one of them had something tattooed upon his wrinkled, saggy old ass.

...S

...H

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...Shelly?

Despite all evidence that this was in fact his Shelly, Eugene had still yet to see her face. Maybe there was still hope that it wasn't her in there. Maybe it was just some other whore who also happened to be

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named Shelly, presently getting shish-kebabs by a couple of geriatrics.

Several sustained groans later, the old men rose from the bed and staggered off into the shower together. It was only then that Eugene was able to verify the identity of his beloved, who was now busily wiping their combined loads off her face.

He bent over double and puked up his Chinese buffet right there on the spot, retching with brutish force.

“Hello?” Shelly called out. “Anyone there?”

She covered herself with a sheet as she rose to crack the door.

Eugene wiped his mouth and tried to compose himself before she could undo the chain. Slowly standing up straight, he was confronted by the sight of a horrified Shelly standing there before him.

“Shelly, we have to talk...”

Half an hour later, police sirens blared through the neighbouring streets as they advanced towards the motel. A smattering of customers loitered in the parking lot. They maintained a frosty silence and gawked at the old man sprawled upon his back, stomach gutted, innards unravelled in a bloody mess. Two policemen arrived on the scene and rushed to his side, one of them quickly reporting the grisly scene into his radio. They reached for their batons and followed the entrails, leading them through the open door of the motel room.

The room was pitch black and the lead officer flicked on his torch, methodically sweeping it back and

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forth through the darkness. Quickly he zeroed in on a pair of bloodied feet upon the floor.

Moving the light up the man's body, the officer gasped at the sight of his mangled crotch before finally reaching his face. Stuffed in his mouth were his own cock and balls, blood and cum mingling in a gory pink froth as it dribbled down his chin.

The officer took a deep breath as he reached for the wall switch and flicked on the lights.

Eugene sat up from the blood-soaked mattress with a ghastly smile upon his face. Beside him was Shelly, lying naked on her back.

The girl had been completely decapitated.

"Hello officer..." Eugene said, holding her head on top of his like a totem pole.

"...have you met my fiancée?"

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Pindick **Stuart Stromin**

When the Dwarf Queen first brought Pindick to the island, everyone thought he was an idiot. No-one imagined a fool like that could be a mastermind. He had a glassy stare, and spoke in monosyllabic mumbles, and he quickly became the object of ridicule, which was exactly what the Dwarf Queen intended.

The Dwarf Queen, it must be explained, was not the monarch of a pygmy tribe, but she was five feet tall on high heels and she did have dwarfish features, as a result of a premature birth which allowed her hands and feet to grow in the womb before the full development of her arms and legs and torso. Her spine curved outwardly at the top and bottom (like parentheses), making her buttocks pert and round. There was something provocative about her odd shape, and she was an insatiable flirt. She had thick raven hair, and alabaster skin, and, if her charisma could not captivate every man on the island, there was no doubt that Pindick hung on her every word.

From the very beginning, they were rarely apart. With a slight stoop, he always followed a few steps behind her on the promenade, where the island gypsies sold their trinkets; in a crowd, she held his hand. They were both in good physical condition.

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They made a handsome couple, even though there was about a ten-year age difference between them, and his hairline was receding. She liked to play hot and cold with his emotions to keep him off-balance. She seemed to read him like a fortune teller, but even the Dwarf Queen, who knew how the intricate cogs were turning in his head, could not have unraveled his scheme to take over the entire show, and, eventually the entire island.

The show was, to put it mildly, an adult themed circus. There were exotic dancers, acrobatic contortionists who performed simulated sex numbers in the nude, and a bawdy Ringmaster, and there was a decidedly perverse edge to the program. There were acts with cracking whips, and a girl who did rope tricks, but the stunts which the Dwarf Queen performed with Pindick would shock the audience, and keep them coming back for more.

The theater was attached to an exclusive couples-only resort on a white sand beach. It had begun as something of a rundown striptease attraction, in a musty old burlesque house, but it became a glittering success when the Dwarf Queen put Pindick up on stage. The Dwarf Queen loved the limelight, and, even, in the end when it was apparent that Pindick was the real star of the show, she accepted that fact just so that she could be the one to stand beside him.

Pindick was the circus clown, a sad-faced clown with a droopy mouth, a Bozo wig, and the ubiquitous red nose. He always looked like he was about to break into tears. He wore purple pantaloons with a ruffle,

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and flapped around in clown feet that gave him a bandy gait. The premise of the act, which changed every night, and became more and more abusive, as the audience came back with a bloodlust that turned into a frenzy, was to improvise ways to torment and humiliate Pindick.

At first, it was just about throwing pies at him, while he stood helpless with that mournful look on his white painted face, but the Dwarf Queen knew no limits. She slapped him around, beat him and whipped him, the lash cracking against any part of his body or his head. She put a bit into his mouth, and gave him a donkey tail, and rode him around the stage, using a crop and spurs to make him trot. Dressed in fishnet stockings, top hat and tails like Marlene Dietrich in the Blue Angel, which was her favorite picture, she drizzled honey and chicken feathers over Pindick, and invited onlookers to aim raw eggs at him until he was dripping with yolk and eggshells. She handed out tomatoes to the first three rows, and, like a medieval mob, they hurled rotten fruit at him while he sang in a falsetto voice. She forced his jaws open with a metallic dental device, and allowed members of the audience to pour surprise fluids into his yawning orifice. It could have been a shot of Vodka or a glass of liquid soap, or sour milk, and, after a while, she would encourage them to shoot spitballs through a straw into the target, and then, there was a squirt gun apparently filled with urine.

But, since this was an adult-themed show with plenty of nudity, on private property, where no-one

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was policing them, the highlight of the performance was to expose the clown's genitals. Some nights, the Dwarf Queen would de-pants him unexpectedly, creeping up behind him with a wicked smile to the spectators while he was trying to juggle, and jerk his pantaloons down with the elastic around his ankles; some nights, she would have him perform a clumsy striptease, while the men and women of the audience cawed and chanted. As the drums rolled, there he stood shell-shocked under the probing spotlight, with his tiny shriveled penis on display for jeers and cackles, and, ultimately, brutal silence.

This was what they had all paid for tickets to witness.

The Dwarf Queen led him off triumphantly, as he pulled up his trousers and bunched the waistline in his fist. She always had to be attentive to him afterwards, like a mother with a child, or, if the mood was right, she would keep him going as if they were still on the stage, handling him harshly and pushing his face into a backstage corner to wait for her while she went to get a drink. She knew that after the performance, his head would be wobbling like a china plate on a bamboo pole, and she had to bring him down slowly.

By the time they were alone together in their room at the end of the long night, they spoke freely, discussed the reactions of the audience, and thought of ways they could improve the act, or new tricks to perform. Pindick was always brimming with suggestions. She always admired how clever he was, but no-one would have imagined it. Even the Dwarf

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Queen did not realize the levels to his manipulation.

Of course, any man who called himself Pindick and who revealed his undersized member to the world had to have a sense of inner security that did not depend on factors about which other men were sensitive. In fact, as the Dwarf Queen knew, because of how he had been raised, and because of his intellectual abilities, Pindick the clown was vain and arrogant. He felt so superior to the spectators who paid money to snigger at him that their mockery meant nothing. In a way, studying their responses, he was the one who was mocking them.

The customers did not see it that way though, and word of the outrageous act spread through the island, and around the globe. People came from other hotels along the beachfront, and from towns on the opposite shore, and in the hills, and then from distant lands. Guests returned annually to the resort, bringing new guests in tow, and business increased rapidly. Tickets for the show were sold out months in advance. There were masks, postcards, souvenirs and posters for sale, but the Dwarf Queen was adamant that Pindick could not be photographed on stage. The act had to be experienced in person. On rare occasions, before the evening performance, when Pindick was in full white-faced make-up, wig and costume, she led him along the boardwalk, and visitors flocked for photographs with their arms around him. They always tried to pinch his nose, but she prevented them. Little did anyone realize the sinister secret that the red spongy nose was concealing.

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If anyone were paying attention, they would have noticed how alarmed the clown became when a giddy fan reached for his nose. But the Dwarf Queen always made sure that his nose was safe.

Pindick became so popular that a second scene was added. The clown usually appeared late in the program, just before the finale, because there really was no-one to follow him. He was what they had all come to see, and it was the climax of the show. The Dwarf Queen negotiated an additional fee for a sort of a warm-up teaser early in the presentation. This kept the impatient spectators calm, and whet their appetites for what would come later. The Dwarf Queen would not appear in the teaser, and it would be performed wholly between Pindick and the Ringmaster.

The Ringmaster was a big-bellied foreigner in a scarlet topcoat with a booming voice, and a collection of vulgar jokes and songs, which he would belt out into a microphone in different languages. The ruse that they worked out was that he would ask for volunteers from the audience, and Pindick, making his entrance from the back of the hall, would be the one that he selected.

The Ringmaster was a natural to play the part of the bully, and he found new ways to abuse the clown each night. He made him wear a dunce cap, used a whip to crack a playing card from between his teeth, and tricked him into sitting on a cream pie. The clown always seemed terrified of the Ringmaster. One night, when the crowd was insatiable for it, he hypnotized Pindick to copulate with a stuffed sheep.

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He did not like to tell Pindick before the show what he was planning, but he always consulted with the Dwarf Queen in advance.

The Dwarf Queen did not care much for the Ringmaster, but she was envious of how much the spotlight shone on him, as the centerpiece of the show. There were always allegiances and jealousies among the performers. There were the strippers and chorus girls who idolized the Dwarf Queen like infatuated schoolchildren. There was Jumba the circus strongman, with hairless, oily muscles, who felt deep sympathy for Pindick, and stood up for the clown long before he became so celebrated. Jumba was always bewildered by the way that Pindick was maltreated. There was Wanda the man-girl, who rivaled the Dwarf Queen, but they kept an easy fellowship between them. She was called the man-girl, not because of any ambivalence about her sexuality, but because of her athletic build. She was blonde and voluptuous, and dressed like a mythological goddess, and she did an act that was mostly about whip-cracking. Once in a while, when her co-star had been too soused or marked up too badly from the previous night to appear in public, the Dwarf Queen let Wanda borrow Pindick, and bind him to the post.

The whip, Pindick scoffed in private, was not his specialty, but he had trained to take the lash. What he displayed was more cerebral, the whip was mindless and barbaric. Most of it was bluff and showmanship. There were loud snappers which did not hurt, there were vipers with a silent bite. The

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trick was that as long as the coils struck the body after the crack, the force had all been shaken out of it, and, as long as the reaction of the victim was believable, the audience would think he had been stung. Of course, mistakes could happen, and, let's face it, once in a while, it was deliberate.

It was Wanda who would take Pindick to the stage on the night of his final performance.

By that time, Pindick had become such a celebrity on the island that he was not even referred to by name. At first, people enjoyed the jape of calling out to him, because his name itself was such an insult. But, after a while, they were uncomfortable about it, and he was called *Mister* Pindick, and then, it was just Mr P, and no-one dared to breathe the real name of the legendary artiste. People pointed and nodded and whispered when he was seen. His infamy overwhelmed the rabble. His antics became less about his victimization than his daring. Everyone had witnessed the show, and they all had a favorite feat which they remembered. They always wondered what he would accomplish next.

He never paid for a drink at any bar or a meal or a taxi anywhere on the island, and he was never kept waiting, and everything was complimentary. The Dwarf Queen relished it, but Mr P accepted his fame with modesty, as if it was simply his due. Offstage, he took to a stylish black pinstripe wardrobe. He started to go around without her more and more, but they always yearned for one another when they were apart. They could not stand to be apart from one another for too long.

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This was especially true before and after the performance when they were both in their roles.

They always used to have a few drinks to wind down after the show, but, on the night before what was to be his last appearance, Pindick could not find her, and he started to panic. He had been in the communal dressing room backstage, removing his greasepaint and his costume, and she was not at the pool-deck bar where they usually met. He waited until closing time but she did not come.

He went down to the beach because, on a hot night, the Dwarf Queen liked to swim in the ocean under the moonlight, and he feared that, a little under the influence, and easy prey for the seductive tides, she might have been swept away by the backwash. There was nothing but empty paddleboats and beach chairs with no cushions, and all the umbrellas were folded. He heard the sound of the wind and the breakers. The smell of salt was in the air. He was the only one on the sand. He stared into the black waves.

He checked their room on the ground floor. Their bed had not been touched, everything was neat and sterile. The soft pastel colors and the utilitarian fixtures of the hotel room made it feel like an infirmary, but for the vivid textiles of their theatrical costumes and property. Her half-finished drink was still on the table among her make-up vials and powders, but the ice had melted.

He looked all through the resort. No-one seemed to know where she was. He was filled with a sense of foreboding.

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It was almost four a.m. when, without even knowing why, he went up the steps and along the open corridor to the Ringmaster's room.

The door was ajar, and he could tell that inside the lamp was glowing, and there were muffled sounds.

He tapped on the door. "Its Pindick."

"Come in, Pindick," he heard the Dwarf Queen's voice. "I'm in here."

He was relieved that he had found her, and he let the door swing open.

The Dwarf Queen was naked in the bed, her dwarfish body across the big buttery flesh of the Ringmaster.

"You can sit in the corner, and watch us," she instructed.

"Yes, Pindick," guffawed the Ringmaster, "Watch me do her."

The clown stared transfixed, and collapsed like a marionette onto the floor in the corner, unable to take his eyes off the bed. He could not understand why the Dwarf Queen would allow a bloated bully like the Ringmaster to use her so obscenely, and, as if to make matters more hurtful, the Ringmaster was naked in every way, except that he was wearing Pindick's bright red nose.

"How many times has wormboy witnessed you with a real man?" the Ringmaster asked the Dwarf Queen.

"Actually, you are the first," she told him.

"Oh, what an honor," he said sarcastically, as if they were all on stage doing the routine.

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Pindick watched them at it, and tried to see himself from the outside, like he did when he was under the spotlight with his trousers around his feet. The Ringmaster grunted out some taunts, but they became so absorbed in what they were doing together, that they did not seem to notice him in the corner any more. The foreigner was too big to lie across her small child-like body, so she rode him astride, and then, he got behind her with the Dwarf Queen on all fours on top of the sheets. She moaned with passion as he thrust into her. The clown curled up into the corner, with his legs to his chest, and his eyes covered, but he could not stop himself from peeking through his fingers.

They finished – for the moment – and then, they half-turned their attention back to him.

He got to his feet, sliding up the wall. “I’m going back to the room.”

“I said to watch us,” the Dwarf Queen repeated, because she never liked to be defied.

“I don’t want to watch.” He stumbled to the doorway. “I said I’m going back to the room.”

“I will deal with you later,” she said sharply.

He went out, and, not quite realizing the strength of it, he slammed the door.

In their room, he could not sleep. It was not the same without her in the bed. They always slept topsy-turvy, like an endless circle, because, restless sleepers, they found they would disturb each other less through the night if they lay head to feet. He

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rested on her side of the bed, his head on her soft pillow with a trace of her scent. He knew that she had had too much to drink, but he was hollow and confused.

As day was breaking, the four walls of the room closed in like a painted cage, and he could not catch his breath, so, outside, he found a hammock between palm trees where the resort met the beach. He could hear the sound of the waves lapping at the shore, and the hammock swayed gently.

He lay in the curve of the hammock like a fish in a net, and dozed off as the breeze rustled the palm fronds, but he kept waking to the same picture in his mind of the Dwarf Queen and the Ringmaster. He memorized all the words that he would say to her when they saw each other.

After a few hours, he rolled off the hammock and went to look for her in their room again. She was not there, although now, he knew where he could locate her. He did not want to disturb her. He guessed that she was probably trying to sleep it off.

He had no appetite, but he realized that, with little sleep, he should at least try to have some food. She had drummed into him how to take good care of himself.

Lined up at the lunch buffet, where the performers were eating among the guests, he encountered the Ringmaster. In baggy flannel pants, and a loose shirt to hide his paunch, and with a plate of sardines perched on his fingertips, the foreigner did not seem so intimidating.

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"Mister Pindick," the Ringmaster took him to one side, "I wanted to apologize to you..."

"No, no, no. There is no apology necessary. The Dwarf Queen can do whatever she wants to..."

"You know, Mister Pindick," the Ringmaster said earnestly, "We all have such great respect for you. We really like you."

"I could give a damn what you think of me," the clown said fiercely.

The Ringmaster did not flinch. "I just wanted you to know that."

"Look, just give me a wide berth today," warned Pindick, "Just stay out of my way."

"Of course."

"I'll be ready for the show tonight, but keep out of my face until we get on stage." He caught a fishy whiff of the sardines, and suddenly felt queasy.

"I'm going to make you eat fire," the Ringmaster said politely, "If that's all right?"

Pindick nodded.

"There's nothing to worry about," the Ringmaster assured him, "There is no air in the human mouth, and it is full of moisture, so the flame will die instantly."

"I know how to do the trick," Pindick said, "You won't hurt me."

The Ringmaster set down his plate on a table, put out his broad palm, and beamed. He held it out until

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Pindick shook his hand, and, the burly man wrapped his other arm around Pindick in a sweaty hug.

“Thank you, Mister Pindick,” he said, with a little bow.

“Thank you,” said Pindick, “You handled it just fine.”

At around five p.m., as he approached their room from the rear across the lawn, he saw her silhouette through the bathroom window. She was in the shower, and the soapy water was so scalding that the steam fogged the glass. Even though he had practiced their conversation in his head all day, he did not know what he would say to her. He waited on the grassy walkway another thirty minutes before he went through the door.

For once, she did not seem to know what to say either, and they both mumbled hello, but they could not make eye contact. This was the time of day when they would usually start to prepare for the evening performance. He would fetch their drinks from the bar. She would do her own make-up first, sitting on a stool in front of the mirror, while he waited mutely on the mat. He would try to concentrate on his role, and lay out her wardrobe on the bed. Then, she would get him into makeup, and his costume, and, lastly, she would apply the nose. By the time they left for the theater, they would be in character.

But she showed no signs of beginning the preparations.

“Look,” he broke the silence at last, “I don’t think I can do the act tonight...”

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She glared at him. "You will do the act."

"My head is not in the right space. I am not going to be able..."

"Are we going to have a problem?" she tried not to raise her voice.

"I don't want to have a problem. We have had enough problems. I just don't want to go on...."

"You will go on. People are expecting you."

"I have never missed a performance before," he said sullenly, "They can go one night without me."

"You will not miss a performance tonight either," the Dwarf Queen said, her voice rising now, "You are not sick. You are not injured. You don't feel like going on, well, too bad. How do we know you will feel like going on tomorrow?"

"I will get over myself in a few days..."

The Dwarf Queen would never let the clown prevail. "You will get over yourself now. You are not going to let everyone down. You wanted to be the center of attention. You are the number one attraction in the freakshow. This is the price of being the star. The show must go on."

"I just don't think that I can do the show with you," he admitted, hoping to hurt her feelings.

"I am not stupid," she declared complacently, because she had an ace up her sleeve. "I have already thought of that. I know you so well."

Pindick realized she was ahead of him. "Then, how?"

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“You will do the act with Wanda.”

He liked the idea of doing the performance with the man-girl. He did not appreciate how she always tried to compete with the Dwarf Queen, but he could not deny that there had been a spark of electricity between them whenever they had appeared together before. It was not the same, but she had her own set of skills. At first, it had been easy; it was getting harder and harder to do the act. He was curious to see where Wanda might take the scene.

“I have already discussed it with her,” the Dwarf Queen continued, “And she has agreed.”

“What about the nose?” the clown asked sheepishly.

“She knows about the nose.”

“What did you tell her?”

“I didn’t tell her everything. I told her that you need the nose to get into character. She understands.”

He did not feel so isolated now. Over the years, everyone had weak moments. Intoxicated, she had followed her impulses and now she was ashamed. She had no reason to feel shame, he understood, she was a free spirit. They could forgive each other for anything. He had the feeling that despite what had happened she was still trying to watch over him. She was always so protective towards him. She had considered his feelings. It would all be easy if he was wearing the nose.

Pindick surrendered. “All right. I will do the act with Wanda.”

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The sun was setting over the ocean, and they had not yet turned on the lamps in the room. They gazed at one another in the half-light.

"I will prepare the nose for you beforehand." She softened her tone, and came closer to where he was standing. "So, you will have nothing to worry about."

But the Dwarf Queen would never see her partner again after that night.

Wanda the man-girl came to the room to get Pindick about half an hour before curtain. She was wearing a tight spangled leotard, a short cape, elbow-length gloves and high shiny boots, and she had her signature whip coiled about her. In white face paint and in costume, the clown was ready. She took hold of him roughly.

"Let's go, fool," she laughed.

Pindick blinked at her vacantly, and muttered an inaudible response.

The Dwarf Queen smiled at Wanda. "He's all yours. Have fun."

"Enjoy your night off," said Wanda.

They went out into the corridor, and the Dwarf Queen watched them leave. Wanda strode a few steps ahead, with a swing in her hips, while Pindick waddled behind her in his clown feet with his head bowed.

A warm breeze was stirring. The night had fallen, and the half-moon rose over the sea.

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It was a short walk through the resort to the backstage entrance of the old burlesque house. From a distance, illuminated, the creaky building loomed spookily against the dark horizon. It gave him that same ominous feeling in the pit of his stomach.

Pindick took his place at the back of the theater as soon as the house lights went down. He had never felt nervous before. He always waited until his cue, when the Ringmaster asked for a volunteer, someone ridiculous. Then the spotlight would sweep through the audience and discover him at the back of the hall. At first, he pretended that he did not want to go up on the stage, and the Ringmaster would be insistent. People started clapping and whistling, sometimes someone would give him a shove, as he gingerly went forward and up the small flight of steps at the apron.

But on that final night the Ringmaster thought better of it. He went through the motions, and the spotlight raked the seats, and skimmed right by him. The harsh beam of it settled instead on one of the hotel guests, a tall, thin, lantern-jawed man on holiday. The Ringmaster called him up, and egged on by his group of friends, the volunteer did the fire-eating trick while Pindick watched from the back of the theater.

Half-relieved, half-jealous, he shuffled out through the side doors, and went backstage to wait for his turn with the man-girl.

Wanda strutted up to him as he waited in a corner of the wings, getting her face so close to his face that he could count the tiny beads of perspiration on her

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forehead.

"Nobody wanted to see you eat fire," she teased, "Oh, poor little Pindick." Then she playfully squeezed his spongy nose. "What on earth am I going to do to you tonight?"

A kaleidoscope of naked bodies, feathers, glitter, scenery, backdrops, trampolines and trapezes tumbled through his mind. There was frantic circus music and laughter and applause and he imagined that he could hear the drumbeat of his own heart. His head spun like a pinwheel. His legs felt weak. He saw the blurry features of the man-girl in front of him, her white teeth gleaming in a lascivious grin, but he could not focus his eyes. He tried to catch his breath, sucking in the air through his lips. He hardly recognized where he was. Everything in the grand universe seemed pinpointed to the overwhelming image of the Ringmaster and the Dwarf Queen doing it.

Time sped up, and, before he knew it, he heard the Ringmaster wielding the microphone to announce the act which everyone had been waiting for, and then, Wanda was marching him out onto the stage, and he heard the crowd stamping their feet, and jeering in unison, "Pin-dick! Pin-dick! Pin-dick!"

The spotlight hit him, and a roar of delight came from the throng.

Wanda circled around him, in front of him, in his face, then behind him, invisible. She prodded him, poked him, and, all of sudden, she jerked his trousers down around his ankles, and he stood

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exposed.

“We’re going to do the Penguin tonight,” she declared, crossing to the far side of the stage, “Let’s see you do the Penguin walk.”

Hands perpendicular to the sides, he took a few awkward steps towards her. He saw the Ringmaster leering from the wings, his lips curved in a nasty smile. Pindick looked around, lost without the Dwarf Queen to encourage him. He took a deep inhalation, and, in his stupor, stumbled leadenly towards the bleary figure in the spangled cape.

It was not quick enough for Wanda. She uncoiled her whip, and cracked it once against the hard wooden planks of the stage so that the yellow dust rose from the floorboards.

“I’m waiting for you,” she said, with a lilt in her voice, and he tried to get his legs to work faster.

Then, as he approached her, Wanda did the cruelest thing that Pindick could have imagined.

She tossed her whip aside, and before he knew it, she reached for his face, and, in a flash, she had plucked off his nose.

“No!” cried the clown.

The audience erupted with laughter.

“You want it,” teased Wanda, “Come and get it.”

He hobbled towards her, hampered by the oversized clown shoes and his trousers coiled around his feet. She moved away as he got closer. She tossed the phony nose from hand to hand. She pretended that

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she was about to give it to him, and then snatched her hand away again as he reached for it. She tucked both hands behind her back, hiding the nose in her fist.

“You don’t understand,” Pindick stammered, “The nose is very important....”

“It’s v-v-very important,” mimicked Wanda, “Then you had better go and get it, hadn’t you?” She stepped to the edge of the stage, and, to the horror of the clown, flung the little red nose into the audience.

The spectators got into the game at once, throwing the nose like a ball from one hand to another. Pindick pulled up his trousers, and clambered down the stairs at the apron into the dimly lit hall. From the balcony, the spotlight was pointed at him. He chased the nose, as the audience members transferred it from the front rows to the back of the house, and somehow or other, as the theater ushers got into the lark, it went out the back door, and Pindick followed his nose.

It was a spectacular exit, and the man-girl took a bow on the stage to thunderous applause.

His nose, as it turned out, would elude Pindick.

About an hour after the performance ended, the Dwarf Queen hammered on the door of Wanda’s room.

“I can’t find Pindy,” she said, when Wanda came to the door. “He’s not at the bar, he wasn’t backstage, and he did not come back to our room.”

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"I know," Wanda replied, "He ran out of the back doors of the theater at the end of the scene, but then he was nowhere to be found."

"How was the show?"

"Hilarious. The audience loved it. So did I. He was a sensation."

"What made Pindy run out of the back of the theater? He has never done that before."

"Oh, my darling, you should have seen it," Wanda laughed, "He was chasing his nose."

"He lost his nose?"

"I took it off him."

The alabaster complexion of the Dwarf Queen seemed to turn a paler shade. "That nose is what puts him into his trance."

They heard the distant smash of glassware from the pool-deck bar. Someone started shouting in another language.

Wanda thought that the Dwarf Queen was about to faint. "You'd better explain."

"The sponge of the nose soaks up a special concoction which he inhales." She drew a sigh. "He is completely addicted to it." She was embarrassed to say the truth, so she spoke it quickly. "It's amyl nitrate, a little alcohol and some powder."

A gust of wind swept her black hair across her face.

There was a stamp of boots up the staircase.

Still in his circus wardrobe, the Ringmaster

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lumbered down the corridor. "There might be a problem."

"Do you know where Pindy is?"

"Jumba the giant said he saw Mr Pindick running down to the beach. The wind caught his nose, and he chased after it."

They ran through the resort, with Wanda and the Dwarf Queen striding ahead, and the Ringmaster wheezing behind them, holding onto his top hat.

Jumba, the big muscle man, was standing on the sand barefoot and stripped to the waist, and his trousers were soaked. He was shivering, even though the night was warm. He had swum out into the treacherous backwash, but he had had no luck.

As the Dwarf Queen, the Ringmaster and the Man-girl approached, Jumba shook his head somberly. There was no sign of the clown in the water or anywhere down the beach, not even a footprint on the sand. There was no shadow under the moonlight. The four performers with their outlandish physiques stood in a frozen tableau, gazing into the tides, not sure what to do or feel or believe. Nobody moved, nobody dared to breathe a word.

But then, bobbing on the dark waves, they spotted the little red dot that was his nose. Jumba and the Ringmaster had to hold the Dwarf Queen back or she would have plunged into the breakers.

"Pindy! Pindy! Pindy!" wailed the Dwarf Queen, but it was only the blind moan of the wind, which

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offered any response.

Years after, when the Dwarf Queen was no longer welcome at the resort, they said that at the half-moon, you could still hear her voice on the whispers of the wind, calling out for her old partner.

Haunted by the black cloud of uncertainty, the circus lost its popularity without its star, and the resort fell on hard times, and the theater itself fell into disrepair after a bad winter storm damaged some of the wooden framework.

Every night, it was Pindick who closed the program; that was the grand finale. On the island, after that night, there were many who thought that it was the sad-faced clown who had had the last laugh, but, many believed that he had disappeared into the salty waters as if he had drowned in a sea of his own sorrowful tears.

Whatever happened to the clown after that remained a mystery. Eventually, the tales of his lively antics for a few short seasons faded from memory to legend, and, like all legends, nobody knew for certain if any of it ever even existed. Like the shrinking spotlight at the end of his act, it all just vanished into a tiny pinhole.

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Circle of Light

James Babbs

Barlow kept seeing a tiny circle of light, over there, on the wall, up near the ceiling. He figured the light must have been coming through the window in the top of the front door but he didn't get up and check on it. Barlow just stayed in his recliner, holding a beer in his hand, taking a drink, every now and then, and watching the tiny circle of light. Barlow wasn't sure what he thought the circle of light was going to do but he kept watching it, anyway.

When he had finished the beer, Barlow leaned forward and stood up. The circle of light was still there. It, still, looked the same to him. Barlow walked over to the circle of light and touched it with the open end of the empty bottle. Then, Barlow put his hand on the circle of light. He thought it would feel warm or something but the circle of light didn't feel like anything at all.

Barlow had texted Jeannie three or four times in the last half an hour or so but she hadn't responded. If he didn't hear from her in another hour Barlow was going to give her a call. Maybe he'd tell her about the circle of light and how she needed to come and see it for herself.

Barlow carried the empty to the kitchen and tossed the bottle into the trash. He got another beer from

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the fridge before returning to the living room. Barlow walked over to the front door. He looked at the front door and he looked at the circle of light. Then, Barlow waved his hand, the one not holding the bottle, back and forth across the window in the top of the door. He did this several times but the circle of light didn't change.

Barlow took a drink of beer. He lowered the bottle away from his mouth and put his free hand on the circle of light. He pushed on it as if the circle of light were some kind of a button that controlled an unseen device. When nothing happened, Barlow made a fist and tapped it lightly against the circle. Then, he took his beer and sat back down in the recliner.

Barlow hadn't turned on the TV. He hadn't turned on the radio nor started playing any music on the CD player. Barlow just sat there enjoying the silence and drinking his beer. The silence had its own kind of music, thought Barlow and he liked the sound of it.

Barlow finished the beer and went and got another one. He didn't pay attention to the circle of light on his way back into the living room. Barlow sat down in the recliner again and looked at his phone. Still, nothing from Jeannie. Even when she didn't want to talk to him, she would, usually, text him back to let him know she was okay.

Barlow took another drink of beer and glanced up at the circle of light. The circle had grown bigger. Barlow looked at the front door. It was getting dark outside and the circle of light had grown bigger. Barlow gave a sort of laugh into the empty room and

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took another drink from the bottle.

He put his beer down on the small table next to the recliner and stood up. Barlow walked over to the circle of light and put his hand on it. The circle was larger than his hand so Barlow tried to center his hand in the middle of the circle as best as he could. Now, the circle of light felt warm and Barlow pushed his hand against it, applying pressure, before moving his hand back and forth.

The circle of light moved and Barlow moved his hand a little faster. The light grew larger. Something was happening, thought Barlow. Now, he put both of his hands on the light and slowly spread them apart. The circle of light expanded. Barlow kept doing this until the circle of light had become a rectangle and was as tall and as wide as a door.

Barlow pushed against the light with his hands. He was convinced the light really was some kind of a door and he was sure he could open it if he just knew where to touch it. But no matter where he put his hands only the rectangle of light remained. In frustration, Barlow kicked the rectangle and said, Ow, after his toe hit the wall.

Barlow's phone rang. For a moment he just stood there frozen. The phone rang a second time and Barlow went over and picked it up. It was Jeannie.

-Hey, said Barlow. He was a little out of breath.

-I'm on my way over. What's wrong?

-What do you mean?

-You sound out of breath. What have you been

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doing?

Barlow laughed. –It's the light.

–The what?

–The light. The circle of light. Well, it's a rectangle now. Some kind of door.

–What? Jeannie sighed. –You're drunk. God.

–No, listen. Okay. I've had a few beers. But there's a light.

–Oh, shit. I'm on my way.

Jeannie's phone disconnected and Barlow looked at the screen. He put the phone down and picked up the beer. He drained the rest of the bottle and then threw the empty as hard as he could at the rectangle of light. The bottle didn't hit the wall but passed through the light and disappeared.

–Fuck, said Barlow.

He went and got a hammer and marched over to the light. Barlow laughed before he gave the hammer a mighty swing. The hammer landed in the middle of the rectangle and made a hole in the drywall.

–Son of a bitch.

Barlow started pounding the hammer all over the wall, all over the rectangle of light. The hammer made holes in the wall. Pieces of drywall crumbled and fell to the floor. The hammer turned white with the dust from the drywall. The dust covered Barlow's hands and got in his hair. Sweat dripped from his forehead. He wiped it away with the back of his hand and smeared the dust across his face.

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The light was fading. Barlow had made an opening in the wall about the size of a door. He could see the two by fours inside the wall. Some of them had pieces of drywall still stuck to them. The front door opened and Jeannie came into the house.

-What the hell? She said.

She looked at Barlow. She saw the hammer in his hand. Jeannie looked at the hole in the wall. Barlow looked at Jeannie. He looked at the wall. He looked at Jeannie, again. Barlow, still, held the hammer in his hand.

-There was a circle of light, he said. Barlow tried to laugh but the sound didn't come out right.

Jeannie started crying. She put her hands up to her face. Barlow looked at the hammer in his hand. He looked at Jeannie and let the hammer drop to the floor. The hammer made a small burst of sound. Barlow approached Jeannie with his arms opened wide. He knew she would probably start screaming when he touched her but he kept moving toward her, anyway.

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Forebodings

Anthony Dirk Ray

Kenny opened his eyes slowly, but the minuscule amount of sunlight coming in from the inch of open curtains was enough to make him squeeze them back shut again. His head ached and his stomach was twisted with pain. The thirst that he felt was immeasurable. Kenny pulled himself from the comfort of the plush hotel bed and staggered to the sink for handfuls of tap water. As he sucked down copious amounts of liquid, he attempted to put the pieces of the previous night together.

Kenny was the singer of an up-and-coming band known as Winter's Dread. He remembered opening the show for the well known regional act Gloomy Forebodings, then drinking, doing blow with the headliners, and meeting some girls after the show. Kenny's band played music on the extremely heavy side, so the majority of attendees were usually young and sweaty guys looking to fight. It shocked him that a fair amount of attractive girls were at the show.

He found a towel on the tile floor and picked it up to wipe his mouth and face. The room was mostly dark, but obvious that it was littered with empty beer and liquor bottles. Kenny made his way back toward the bed. He just needed a few more hours of sleep before

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the band or their road manager would be knocking on his door. As he went to lay back down, he was able to make out a figure on the opposite side of the bed.

Kenny then had a memory of a sexy blonde in a cut off black t-shirt and short jean shorts that came on to him pretty hard. She was with the group of girls backstage, and this one had taken a liking to him. A faint recollection of the two of them snorting heroin off a guitar case entered his brain. Then he recalled getting head from her while others were in the room. He wished he could put more of the night together, but it all melded into a fuzzy blur.

Kenny crawled into the bed to snuggle up to the mystery girl. He wanted to make some memories that couldn't be forgotten. But as soon as his naked skin touched hers, he felt the cold, clamminess of death. Kenny instantly released the tit of the corpse, recoiled away, and sat up on the bed. He switched on the side lamp and slowly turned to verify: The once living, breathing, sexy blonde, was now wide-eyed, stiff, and lifeless, with dried vomit down the side of her face.

Kenny frantically began to switch on every light in the room. He knocked over bottles in his haste, which heightened his anxiety further. The room had to be cleared of any illegal activity before he could do anything else. He flushed every baggie that he found, empty or otherwise, and continued his search.

Kenny found the purse of the dead girl and looked inside. He removed her wallet to search for an ID. A

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driver's license was visible through a clear portion of the wallet. Jessica Stevens was her name, and she was only... 16 years old! Kenny's heart dropped, his breath quickened, and a feeling of despair overtook him.

Kenny thought, not only is this girl dead, but she's underage, and she died from drugs that I gave her. He fell to his knees and broke down. Kenny knew that there was no way out of this. Thoughts of gloom, sadness, and regret overwhelmed his being.

The eyes of the cadaver seemed to follow Kenny everywhere in the room. He covered her head with the sheet, sat on the bed, and put his face in his hands. Kenny knew that he had to call the police and give this girl the respect that she deserved. He was terrified, but knew of no other option than to face the dismal consequences.

Kenny picked up the phone with trembling hands, but before he could dial, there was a loud pounding on the door.

"Police. Open the door," a gruff voice shouted from the other side.

Before Kenny could do anything, the door exploded open, and large monkey-like beasts charged in at him. The largest creature opened its mouth to reveal a pair of large, jutting fangs. Just before they entered Kenny's skull, he awoke in a panic.

Kenny shot up in the bed, switched on the side lamp, and looked around frantically. He was in the same hotel room, but there weren't bottles everywhere, and best of all, there wasn't a dead girl beside him.

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In fact, there was no one there but him.

Kenny sighed deeply and let out a slight chuckle. *It was just a dream*, he thought, as he laid back on the comfy, down pillows.

However, the relief he felt didn't last long. The entire hotel began shaking violently. He had been in a few earthquakes in the past, but never over twenty stories in the air. He was about to flee his room and find the stairwell when the shaking intensified. Rumbblings, deafening crashes, and sounds of devastation flooded his ears. Screams of terrified and dying people could be heard all around. The hotel started to crumble and break apart. Massive chunks of falling debris rained down on him, and the floor began to give way from under his feet.

Kenny was awakened by the shaking of his bunk. It was lights out, and his cellmate was ready for another piece of ass.

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Mother's Day

David Thomas Peacock

Some people should never have kids, she thought, holding her baby's head underwater. If God wanted them to live, he would have made them strong enough to fight back.

The little body looked like it was trying to swim as it struggled until finally becoming still. Starlene had been kneeling on the hard linoleum floor as she carried out her grim task next to the old cast iron bathtub. Her knees hurt as she sat back on her butt, out of breath. *Jesus, that took longer than I thought.*

After a few minutes, she managed to raise her heft and stood up, dirty wet hair stuck to her sweaty face. Glancing at the little body, now floating face up in the tub, she searched for her cigarettes. *Where'd I put my Virginia Slims?*

Looking around the trailer, they were on the coffee table she'd found in the alley right after moving in. Someone had put it out for trash pickup — made out of laminated particleboard, it had a cardboard tabletop embossed with a depiction of The Last Supper. Her cigarettes were sitting squarely on Judas' face, a can of Schlitz on Philip's. You could barely make out Jesus through the dirty glass ashtray covering his sad, knowing expression. He appeared to be disappointed with the world.

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Some things never change.

Waddling over to the table, she'd no sooner reached for the pack when she heard it. A piercing cry, loud enough to wake the dead.

A baby's cry.

She froze just long enough for her endocrine system to squirt out a bolus of adrenaline. Spinning around, her slack jaw making an "O" with her mouth, she was dumbstruck. There, on the floor next to the tub, was the baby. Quite alive, thank you. Screaming like a banshee, it's little arms and legs thrashing, face angry and red.

What the fuck? Was the best her mind could come up with in response to this unexpected turn of events.

This can't be happening, This can't be happening, kept repeating in her mind like a nonsensical loop, not really a question or a statement. Kneeling down, she went to pick the thing up, but it tried to bite her, she was sure of it. It seemed unnaturally strong, not like before. The child's screams were deafening, so loud she couldn't think.

Panicked, she picked the baby up and threw it back in the tub, knocking the plastic box filled with rubber toys in the water with it. It's kicking and flailing seemed to be keeping it afloat like it knew what it was doing. The little rubber cartoon characters were bouncing up and down in the turbulent water like they were caught in a storm. They seemed afraid.

Not wanting to touch it, she grabbed the plunger

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next to the toilet and used it to hold the thrashing thing underwater. It wasn't easy, but eventually, she pinned it to the bottom and used all her strength to hold it down. Bubbles kept coming up as it screamed, eyes wide open, looking straight at her. It didn't seem scared, more like enraged. Her arms were starting to burn as her muscles fatigued — but still, the goddamn thing kept moving.

Just when she thought there was no way she could keep this up, its movements began to slow, then stop. Continuing to pin it to the bottom of the tub, she was now panting. Her whole body trembling, she was afraid to release it. The baby's eyes were still open — they appeared to be looking right at her, accusingly. Starlene felt like they were looking into her soul, threatening her.

Exhausted and unable to hold it down anymore, every cell of her muscles were on fire as she gasped for air. Slowly releasing pressure on the plunger, she slumped over, her head collapsing on the edge of the tub, spittle drooling out of her mouth as she struggled to breathe. Kneeling back on her heels, she looked down. The baby was still on the bottom of the tub, motionless, eyes open, staring.

Her panic starting to fade; she thought, *What does it take to kill this fucking thing?*

Glancing over at the TV, Celebrity Jeopardy was on. *Thank God the volume's up*, she thought, just as Burt Reynolds missed a question about Gunsmoke.

She was the female saloonkeeper who had an unrequited relationship with James Arness. Trebek

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sounded as if he was interrogating a witness on trial for murder.

“Who is Mrs. Pussy?” Burt answered after a pause, laughing nervously.

The audience tittered as Trebek said, “No, that is wrong. The correct answer is, ‘Who is Miss Kitty’.”

Jesus Christ, Starlene thought. How can you miss that — you were on the fucking show!

Her bulk collapsing onto the sofa, she lit a cigarette and took a long drag, trying to collect herself. Once this fucking baby’s gone, Tor can move back in, and everything will be alright. Two days ago, they were living together, happily, or at least that’s what she’d thought. Then yesterday, he said he couldn’t take the child’s crying — it wasn’t his, and he couldn’t stay there one more night with the thing’s incessant wailing.

They’d only lived together for two weeks, but Starlene had never been with anyone like Tor before. When sober, he worked as a strongman with whatever circus would hire him. The problem was, his alcoholism was now well-known, making it next to impossible to get jobs. When she met him, he was working as a roustabout for a carnival, sleeping on a chair in the doghouse for the Ferris Wheel. She offered him a place to stay, and everything seemed perfect until yesterday. Her plan seemed simple enough: all she had to do was get rid of the baby, Tor would come back, and everything would be okay again.

Looking at the clown face wall clock, it was almost

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midnight. *I'll just take a little nap and then get rid of the body*, she thought, stubbing the cigarette out on Jesus' face. But then, just as her eyes closed, it happened. A scream so loud she knocked Tor's .38 Special from between the cushions where he kept it onto the floor. Then another even louder. Blinking her eyes in disbelief, she saw the baby was now halfway between her and the tub — crawling towards her with what looked like murderous intent. Starlene began to feel panic-stricken; for a second, she wondered who was in more danger — her or the child?

Standing up, heart beating so fast she thought it might explode, she backed away, afraid. The creature's screams were deafening, so loud it didn't seem possible something so small could make that much noise. They didn't seem like screams of pain or fear, though. They sounded threatening, malicious even.

Knocking over an end table next to the sofa, she spotted a plastic laundry basket filled with dirty clothes. The baby was inexorably getting closer; its little hands looked like tiny fists as it pulled itself across the dirty linoleum. With each wail, its lips pulled back, exposing small bared incisors that it seemed to be snapping together with surprising force.

Desperate, she grabbed the laundry basket, emptied it on the floor, and turned it upside down over the infant, trapping it. The creature became more frantic as it tried to break free; she struggled to hold it. Just within reach was a case of Schlitz; putting her

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full weight on the basket, she pulled the beer over and placed it on top. Wanting to be sure it couldn't escape, she duct-taped the whole thing to the floor.

Having contained it, Starlene stood there, her hands on her knees, trying to catch her breath, her whole body shaking. Still, the thing screamed. It didn't seem to breathe between shrieks, unleashing its cries like a weapon.

Suddenly it hit her — Crib death! Why didn't I think of that before?

Throwing a comforter over the trap to muffle the caterwauling, she sat down, lit another cigarette to calm her nerves, and poured a shot of Jack. *I'll show this fucking thing who's boss!*

Looking over at the sleeping area, there was a white plastic crib she'd bought at a yard sale for \$5.00, its side rails blackened with the dirt of God knows how many kids. *I'll just put it in there and smother it with a pillow — no muss, no fuss!* Glancing at the clock, it was now almost 2:00 am. One more shot, and it's showtime, she thought, starting to get her courage back. Looking over at the makeshift cage still emanating muffled screams, she said, *Time for Mommy to put you to fucking bed once and for all.*

Slamming down a second shot, she went to her mattress and took a pillow, setting it on the floor next to the crib. Turning to the basket holding the still howling child, she started to pull off the duct tape. Removing each strip, the thing got even louder — it sounded like some kind of wild animal caught in a trap. Once it was all off, her hands shaking, she

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removed the comforter and, in one fell swoop, threw the basket across the room while throwing the bedding over it like a net. She wrapped it tight like a papoose, but it writhed with inhuman force, now making guttural, growling noises. It sounded dangerous.

Struggling to keep it contained, Starlene became overcome with fear. *It wasn't supposed to be this hard to kill a baby*, she thought, realizing she was losing control. Somewhere, deep in her subconscious, it felt like the tables were turning.

Her body was exhausted; the only thing powering her now was sheer terror. Forcing the swaddled monster into the crib, she grabbed her pillow and pinned it down, trying to concentrate the pressure on where she thought its face was. The power of its movements as it fought to break free was overwhelming — it was like trying to smother a pit bull. Starlene was afraid the whole cheap crib would collapse; she was putting all of her considerable weight on the pillow, and still, the thing was screaming as it fought her.

Starlene began to cry — not out of remorse, but out of fear. Fear for her life, fear of whatever ungodly power she had unleashed, fear of retribution. This was supposed to be easy, but now she felt like the one in danger. What if the thing couldn't be killed?

After what seemed like hours, its movements became weaker, then stopped. Terrified, Starlene kept the pressure on as long as she could after it stopped moving. Her body wobbly; it was hard to stand. Lifting the pillow, she watched goggle-eyed

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for any sign of movement. Pupils dilated with fear, her face wet with tears, she stood waiting, but nothing happened.

It was dead.

Somehow she made it to the sofa. Now the silence was unnerving. Leaning over to pick Tor's pistol up off the floor, she laid it on the cushion next to her. The clown on the wall clock now said it was 4:52; its leering face seemed to be laughing at her. Her body drained of adrenaline; she was crashing hard. Pouring another shot of Jack, she lit a cigarette and tried to collect herself, but it was impossible. Downing the bourbon, she poured another and waited.

Dozing off, her last thought was, *What have I done?*

If anyone was awake, they would have heard a blood-curdling scream, but it wasn't the child this time. It was Starlene, woken from her drunken sleep by what felt like something biting her left nipple. The baby had latched onto her tit like a leach and was glaring at her with unblinking eyes. Screaming as she woke to a living nightmare of her own creation, her last thought was, *It can't be killed*, as she put Tor's .38 in her mouth like a lethal cock and pulled the trigger.

Her neighbors in the trailer next door heard the scream followed by a gunshot and immediately called 911. Within minutes, the police were there. Breaking down the door, the officers cautiously entered, guns drawn, rubber-neckers now gawking safely behind.

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The scene before them showed a baby nursing the corpse of what must have been its mother, her brains now splattered across the clown face on the wall clock behind her; a fine bloody mist had settled on the last supper. The infant looked peaceful.

“She looks like an angel!” a neighbor exclaimed, peering over the officers. “Poor child. What a precious thing!”

The Home Shopping Network was blaring on the TV, selling trinkets for Mother’s Day. What better way to say Happy Mother’s Day than to give a gift acknowledging all the things mothers do for their children.

“Amen to that,” replied the perky, coiffed host. “No one knows the sacrifices mothers make.”

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Midnight Meat

Joseph Farley

The advertisement was for a loft apartment in a building that had been converted from a warehouse. It was in the fashionable Fishtown section of Philadelphia, an area where prices were always rising. Nowadays Fishtown is a hip area of restaurants, boutiques, nightclubs and galleries. Young professionals want to live there. It is only a ten minute El ride from Center City. You can walk, bike or roller skate the distance if you are health conscious or want to save the environment. Forty years ago, however, Fishtown was different. It was a working class neighborhood of factories and row homes. There were warehouses, not lofts, and corner bars instead of chic eateries and fancy watering holes. I knew the history, vaguely. I was not from out of town. I had grown up in the Roxborough section on city's northwest fringe. I guess you could say I was one of the would be hipsters who wanted to be closer to the action.

The price for the unit was reasonable. I didn't understand why at the time, but now know why the rent was lower than most of the buildings around it. I signed the lease and moved in. All was fine for a few weeks. I had time to decorate and explore the area when not at work. Maybe I was too tired from drinking and working those first few weeks, but with

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time I began to notice things. At first it was strange sounds, always after midnight. It would evolve from there.

One night I was woken by what sounded like mooing. I looked around, thought it was part of a dream, and went back to sleep. A few nights later it was a persistent clucking as if I were surrounded by chickens. Again, there was nothing to be seen and I chalked it off as a dream. Then there was the oinks and shuffle of trotters. This was not every night, nor happening in any fixed pattern. I began to suspect delivery trucks for a halal butcher shop several blocks away, but, when I asked the owner, he said he didn't take deliveries until 5 AM.

I wondered what this meant, but not too much because the nights were quiet for a while, or quiet enough for Fishtown. There was always the normal rumbling of the El and the noise of cars. Then the music started.

I was laying in bed when I heard the rumba like tune, monotonous, reminiscent of the Muzak that used to be played in elevators and shopping malls.

Da da da. Da da DA DA DA. Da da da. Da da DA DA DA.
Da da da. Da da DA DA DA.

It was low at first, but grew louder. I looked out of my apartment window to see if a passing car was blasting its radio. There was no car outside. I banged on the ceiling thinking it was coming from my upstairs neighbor's apartment, then remembered she had moved out the previous weekend. The unit was empty. That left the downstairs tenant. I banged

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on the floor, then remembered he was visiting California. After twenty minutes or so the music stopped. I could not get back to sleep. I kept thinking about the music and where it could be coming from. I managed to fall back asleep right before my alarm went off. It was a weary and bloodshot day at work.

The next night was safe from music, but the night after that it began early, around 11 PM.

Da da da. Da da DA DA DA. Da da da. Da da DA DA DA.
Da da da. Da da DA DA DA.

It lasted on and off for over an hour.

During my lunch hour at work I went to a drug store and bought a jar of foam earplugs. This should solve the noise problem, or so I thought. That night it was quiet at 11 PM and at midnight, but around three in the morning the music started.

Da da da. Da da DA DA DA. Da da da. Da da DA DA DA.
Da da da. Da da DA DA DA.

I took my earplugs out and out them back in again. The sound was the same whether I had the ear plugs in or not, as if the sound was in my head and not in the room. I tossed and turned, and finally shouted, "What do you want from me?" The music stopped. I was finally able to get some sleep.

Being an optimist, I thought that was it. Whatever spell I was under had been broken by confronting it. I was wrong. The next night the real trouble began. Around one in the morning the music began, lower than before, but still audible. It was as if whoever or whatever was the source of the music was trying to

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be at least a little considerate. I might have been able to sleep in spite of the sound if not for the animals. They came one after another floating across the room, just below the ceiling. They came out of one wall, crossed rug and bed, and disappeared into the wall above the headboard. Cattle mostly. At least this night. Though there were other animals near the end of the parade. A few pigs. Some sheep. A stray cat. They all moved in tune with the music, as if on a conveyor belt of some kind. Start start start, Stop start Stop start, etc. I hid as best I could under the sheets. I buried my head under the pillow. But every time I looked out they were there. Once I pulled the sheets down and stared directed into the eyes of a somber steer who hazed down at me, nose so close to mine that we could have nuzzled.

I went to see a doctor and obtained a prescription for sleeping pills. I slept well for a few nights, then the noise and the visions became my dreams. The same thing every night. After a month I gave up on the pills. I might be getting more rest, but I was not getting away from the problem. I was also afraid that I was be getting addicted. It was taking more pills each night to make my body sleep through the animal show, but my mind could never rest. The animals were always there, inside my head, every night whether I was awake or asleep.

I went to a psychologist. She asked me to talk about what was bothering me. When I told her she gave me a referral to a psychiatrist. I saw the psychiatrist once. He offered me more pills. I knew that would not help any more than sleeping pills. Plus, once I

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saw the bill I knew I could never afford to be sick in that way.

Without sleeping pills the animals occupied my apartment most nights. The music came at midnight or just after. The animals came out of the wall and danced across the ceiling. Cows, pigs, chickens, sheep, and the rare household pet. They spun and pirouetted. They slid and shuffled. They tapped and twisted. All in time to the music. Da da da. Da da DA DA DA. Da da da. Da da DA DA DA. Da da da. Da da DA DA DA.

My hair began to fall out. Maybe I had caught the mange. Maybe it was just the lack of sleep. Maybe it was the coffee and chemical assistance I had been using to stay awake and alert through the work day. I was tired and itchy. I needed rest. I needed peace. I needed my mind back. I needed my life back. I needed my apartment back.

The dancing continued. Nearly every night. Then one night all the animals crossed over my head. The room was quiet for a minute. Then the conveyor belt reversed. For the first time the animals came out of the wall over the headboard and crossed the room towards my bureau. They were no longer whole beasts. They were pieces. Chopped. Bloodied. Decapitated. Skinned. Plucked. Dismembered. They crossed the room in bloody bits and sometimes in shrink wrapped plastic and foam packages. Da da da. Da da DA DA DA. Da da da. Da da DA DA DA. Da da da. Da da DA DA DA. The music. The music. It could not calm the savage beasts. It could not calm the docile herd. It could not calm me or my stomach. I

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vomited.

I did some research online about the building where I lived. I found the name of a company, but not much else. I went to the Free Library of Philadelphia, the Central Branch, the big one at 19th and Vine Streets. I asked for information in the Business and Science Department. A librarian referred me to dusty volumes of old city records and phone books. I learned the business name was for real estate holding company. That was not what I wanted. I wanted to know what was there before. A librarian referred me to the Social Science and History Department and the Map Collection. On a fifty year old map I found my apartment building, the name of a business and the term “rendering plant”. More research in old City Directories, reverse directories, and phone books showed the history of the building. For most of its history it had been a slaughterhouse or a rendering plant processing animals into meat and other products. Skins, bones, hooves and hair all had their value.

I wanted more information. I had the names of several companies that had been housed in my building over a century. I was sent to the Newspaper Collection. I went through indexes and scanned microfilm of newspapers that no longer existed. An article on music to keep man and beast in better spirits at a local slaughterhouse leaped out at me from 1971 edition of the Philadelphia Bulletin. It was one of those peculiar stories, a mix of business and human interest. Later I read about the history of the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act and other

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environmental laws, how they were passed, and how the laws eventually led to the closing of many factories including rendering plants in Philadelphia. The stench and runoff from slaughterhouses and animal processing plants had become unacceptable in a closely packed urban area. Health. Disease. Death. Music. After the plants closed years of vacant buildings, poverty and unemployment characterized the neighborhood. Then rebirth. Fishtown was reborn in the new century. It was a mix of quaint old buildings and new construction. It was clean, modern, hip, desirable. Underneath, the past was still there.

I thought I understood. That night I cried out to the dead. "I'm sorry for what was done to you. I am sorry for the slaughter. The torture. The maiming. The mockery." I heard music and a noise in the kitchen. Slowly I walked towards the noise. The refrigerator was open. Both the fridge part and the freezer. All the sausages and bacon, the hamburgers and spareribs, the steaks and eggs and scrapple from both the fridge and the freezer had been cast on the floor.

"Is that what you want?" I shouted. "Is that what will bring you peace? Is that what will bring me peace?" I listened for a response. A low moo, a baa, a squawk? Something. "I mean it."

It was a quiet night. I burned the meat in reverence and buried the ashes. I became a vegan. Not just a vegan. A low fat vegan. I lost a lot of weight, lowered my blood pressure and lowered my cholesterol. I became more flexible. I healed faster. I felt more

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calm. More at peace. But the animals did not leave. They wandered around my apartment at night gazing at me with loving eyes. It was beautiful. And creepy. When it came time to renew my lease, I chose to move.

I found another apartment in Fishtown. I tried to stay vegan for spiritual and health reasons, but it was too damn hard. Especially at barbecues and Thanksgiving. I still ate much less meat than I used to. On most days. But that was not good enough. It could never be good enough. They came for me one night while I was still awake. Not into my new apartment. They stayed outside, floating in the air next to my living room window. Three stories up, the ghosts of the slaughterhouse, the cows, the pigs, the sheep, the hens, all took their turn looking in on me with sad disappointed eyes.

But they did not make any noise. I had won that much for the effort.

When I realized this, I felt like celebrating. I put on some music. A familiar piece I had found online. Da da da. Da da DA DA DA. Da da da. Da da DA DA DA. Da da da. Da da DA DA DA. And danced. I had earned it.

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The Covert Kinkster and the Embryonic Eunuch

David O. Hughes

Trevor brought his BMW X6 to a crunching halt on the gravelled driveway, killing the engine and relaxing in his seat, arching and stretching his back. "Ow!" he giggled and wriggled, a little sore still from the licking he'd taken from his mistress and her trusted assortment of whips, crops, and lashes. "Bitch is worth every penny," he said, gritting his teeth.

When he leaned forward, chest pressing against the steering wheel, he looked out of the windscreen and up at the darkened bedroom windows of his luxury home that loomed over him and his European beauty. *Shelia must be asleep by now*, he thought. *She's always in bed, snoring her fat arse off when I've returned home, no what the hour. Lazy fuck.*

He plucked the keys from the ignition, pocketed them, and opened the car door. As he walked up the short, winding path, flanked by ponds, gnomes, pots, plants and other garden trinkets and clutter Sheila deemed necessary to keep up with the Jones', an image of her snoozing in her flowery nightie, eye mask, bed socks and extravagant neck pillow exploded in his mind. *Ugh! Like a beached fucking whale*, he thought, looking down at a fishing elf-gnome wearing bright yellow wellies. He wanted to

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kick the thing it into the pond its fishing line was cast into, but decided against it. *If she put as much effort into our sex life and marriage as she does with our garden, then we'd get somewhere.*

Trevor huffed, looked up, and thought he saw a dull, gloomy flicker of light from behind the curtains in a downstairs window. *No, she can't be up watching TV this late, he thought. Surely not!* He crept up to the glass, pressed his face to it, and tried to peer through the crack in the curtains. *I can't see anything. It's dark in there. Hmm... Now what? I better have an excuse ready. She might ambush me in there.*

When he reached the front door, he eased his key into the lock and turned it. Trevor winced, pulling his lips back and exposing his gums, as the bolts thundered into place. "Je-sus," he said with clenched teeth. He depressed the handle and stepped into the inky hallway.

"Sheila?" He stood there for a moment, ears pricked, listening to the natural sounds of a home. *All quiet on the western front! he thought, smiling.*

Trevor closed and locked the door with as little noise as possible, before proceeding down the hallway to the foot of the stairs. "Sheila, are you up there?" A snort and a fart were his replies. A smile split his face. *Sleeping, sleeping, sleeping,* he thought, listening to the springs of their reinforced bed creak and crunch as she turned over. *Like a pig in a pen.*

With a snigger, he pulled away from the staircase and entered the living space. From within the guts of the room, Fluffy meowed, Trevor jumped. "Fucking

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moggy,” he muttered, turning on a lamp to find the cat curled up on an armchair like a duchess. “Come on, you — come and get some chow.” Trevor led the cat into the kitchen and poured some dried food into its bowl. “Once you’re done, you can go outside to do your business.”

After unlocking the back door and pulling it open for Fluffy, Trevor filled the kettle with water and set it to boil. *I wonder if Sheila left me some supper?* he thought, moving to the fridge for a peep inside. On the middle shelf, tucked behind a bottle of red sauce and a couple of yoghurt pots, was a plate wrapped in tinfoil with a note that read Trevor attached to it. “Excellent,” he said, plucking the china from its chilly depths.

Fluffy meowed, the bell on her collar jingling, as she fled to the outside. Instead of closing the door, Trevor left it ajar. *I’ll only have to reopen it when she wants to come back in. Hopefully, by the time I’ve scoffed this lot, Fluffy’ll be indoors,* Trevor thought, setting his food down on the kitchen table. *Did I see my protein shake in there with my grub?* He went back to the fridge, opened it, and fished out his drink. “Sheila’s a good ‘un in some respects,” he said, laughing.

She treats you like a king, said a voice at the back of his mind.

Trevor sat at the table and lowered his head. *I can’t deny it, she does, and what I do behind her back is dreadful. I’ve broken my vows time and again, but it’s the only way I can keep our marriage afloat. God, if she ever did find out though... Fuck! I’d lose everything: swanky car, fancy house, money, status...the lot. And it would*

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come out in the papers,too! The media love a good, grubby tale about a dirty politician. Sweat broke across his brow. *It won't come to that. I'm careful, and the lady I use is discreet.*

He uncovered his food and set to work on the ham and egg salad. "Mmm," he said, licking dressing from off his chops. As he devoured the last of his meal, Fluffy made her way inside, darting into the living room.

"Cold out there, puss?" he asked, laughing and setting his cutlery down on the empty plate. "Bloody lovely." With a burp, Trevor got up from the table and placed his dish in the sink. Once he was done, he took his drink into the living room and sat down. "Christ, my back is still killing me! Madam Christine went for it this time. Well, I did ask for it."

When he tried to relax in his chair, wincing, grunting and gurning as he did so, Madam Christine's words came back to him, stealing his wind. *Was she being serious?* he thought. *Sounded it, but she'd slipped out of character.*

"Trevor, are you feeling okay?" she asked. "Your ball sack has been looking increasingly discoloured the last few weeks, and I'm sure your wee man has got smaller?"

Trevor laughed. "Really, Mistress? I have been feeling under the weather, mind. Maybe that has something to do with it?"

"Perhaps. You haven't been taken my punishments like you used to, either. Also, your fantastic physique seems to be slipping. You're sprouting hairy bitch

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tits!”

“You think?” he said.

Mistress nodded, smiling.

Trevor looked down at himself. *It's true*, he thought. *But how? I've been eating cleanly.*

Yeah, but you haven't been frequenting the gym or running of recent. And it's not like you haven't noticed, is it? You've been ignoring it, thinking it was your tired mind playing tricks on you, the voice at the back of his mind said.

“I've been fatigued a lot of late, and I've caught a number of colds.”

“Has work been stressful?”

“Yeah. Well, no, not really.”

“Maybe you should see a doctor, Trevor. Get a full check-up.”

“I'm sure it's nothing,” he smiled.

Trevor hadn't given thought to what she'd said upon leaving her dungeon and driving home; he'd been too occupied by thoughts and feelings of what Madam Christine had done to him. But now, as sat in the dark living room with the effects of tonight's games fading, it bore down on him.

I have been ignoring it, he thought, sipping his protein shake. *No, not ignoring, but avoiding. My dick has gone smaller. I noticed it a few weeks ago but choose to circumvent the issue. I thought I was being silly, but then I noticed the discolouration of my nuts, too. It's time to be honest with myself.*

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"It's not just my cock and balls, either, or the changing of my physique," he said, putting his drink down on the coffee table. "No, it's bloody not, is it!"

"Trevor?" Sheila called, her voice cracking. "Is that you down there?"

Who fucking else would it be! he thought, wanting to say it, but couldn't muster it. "I'll be up soon."

"Try not to wake me again," she said, which was followed by the sound of her retreating footsteps and the slamming of their bedroom door.

"Pig bitch," he muttered with a smile, thinking of going up there and waking her with his hard cock. "That would piss her off, but she'd take, just like she always does. She's a good wifey."

Trevor settled in his seat and went back to his thoughts. *No, my privates and physical appearance are not the only things I've noticed a change in. I'm not as driven as I used to be. I was a right go-getter, and I'd step on anyone who got in my way. I've lost my bite, and I'm knackered all the time. All I seem to want to do when I'm not visiting Madam Christine (which I can barely manage now) or working is sleep. What IS going on?*

Ring the doctor tomorrow, the voice said.

With a nod, Trevor drained his drink, got up, and headed towards the hallway.

"Why do you stay with her, Trevor?" Madam Christine asked.

"Because she's a loving woman and she takes good care of me."

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“Is that enough, though?”

“What else is there? I have it good.”

When he got to the foot of the staircase, he sighed. Sheila was such an attractive woman when we got together. Smokin’ hot! But a ring on her finger ruined it all.

“I’ll shed the pounds,” she’d promised, her sex drive dwindling into oblivion.

Still, it didn’t stop him, no matter how much she protested.

If it does all come out, he thought, looking up the shadowy staircase, then the blame will be put at her doorstep. A man has needs, fantasies and desires, damn it! Trevor huffed. But they’re starting to diminish... I hope there isn’t something seriously wrong with me. Don’t be silly. Just overworked. Yeah, either that or my libido is starting to slacken with age. Christ, I’m not THAT old!

He climbed the steps and entered the bathroom. After brushing his teeth, peeing and washing his hands, Trevor left the room and went into his bedroom. With the curtains open, the moon shining through, he was able to see Sheila’s large shape beneath the duvet.

Going to snuggle right up to Sheila and stuff my dick in her, he thought, slipping out of his boxers. His prick twitched, but it didn’t come to full life. Trevor looked down at his cock and began to stroke it. “Come on,” he hissed, forcing it hard. *That’s better*, he smiled. But when he let go of it, it grew lifeless, shrivelling. *Jesus, it looks smaller again! What’s*

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happening to my larger-than-life python?! In his panic, he hadn't heard Sheila's snoring stop, as he tried rubbing it to life. But the more he tried, the less his prick co-operated. "What's wrong with it?"

"My, my, you do look ridiculous," Sheila said, giggling. "Standing there, trousers and boxers around your ankles, trying to coax you ever-shrinking maggot to its full potential."

Trevor looked up and gasped. Sweat dribbled down his forehead and ran into his eyes and mouth. "Don't laugh!" he said, throwing a hand out and sweeping the photos and trinkets off the tallboy that stood by his side. Glass shattered and pinged off his face, opening a nick across his chin.

"What did you fucking say?!" she said, throwing the duvet off her and getting out of bed, her feet pounding the floor. The timid woman he had grown to know had disappeared.

She looks... fierce, he thought, his bollocks retracting even more than they already had. His guts grew cold. Trevor clenched his arse cheeks and a fart escaped him.

"You're going to clean up that mess, loser! Hell, I might make you pick up the shards with your anus!" she giggled, stomping closer to him, her shadow swallowing his scrawny frame.

"Who do you think—?" he tried, puffing his chest out, but he withered when Sheila pressed her massive tits against him, shoving him back against the wall and pinning him in place. "Argh! There's something digging in me!" he whined, his bottom lip

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quivering. *What the fuck is going on here?* his mind screamed.

Sheila struck him across the face with the flat of her hand. "Shut. Up. Or I'll hurt you worse," she said, cupping his wrinkled ball sack. "That's if I can find them."

"What the hell has com over you? Ugh!" he gasped, her hand tightening.

"Don't play stupid, Trevor. I know exactly what's been going on."

"Argh, my balls!" A tear slid down his cheek.

"I thought you'd be able to take a lot more punishment than this, lover. I've not started yet."

"Wh-what are... ugh... are you talking... about?" he gasped, pulling his lips back, exposing his gums. P-p-please, Sheila – you're going to pop 'em!"

"They're not going to be much use to you anyway, Trevor. Shall I remove them? I bet you'd like that, wouldn't you? You'll be my little eunuch bitch."

He started to shake his head, his dick betraying him, as it grew.

Sheila smiled, but the smile wasn't full of warmth and caring as usually, he thought. No, it's cold and bitter; the smile of a twisted, scorned woman. A woman that's been pushed too far. It dawned on him, that if she knew everything, then he'd been mentally abusing her as well. *I'm a bully! But on the other hand, I've opened her—* "Argh!" he blurted, as his nuts were twisted. "Don't rip them off! Not even

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Mistress Carla is this rough. There are safe words!" he forced a smile, thinking he knew her game.

"Safe words? What do you think this is, fucking playtime, cunt?" she spat in his face and ripped downwards on his scrotum, digging and clawing her nails into his flesh. "I've been strengthening my grip, too, working on it, ever since I found out what was going on and came to terms with it. I can squash apples, Trevor, so bursting a couple of raises like these won't be an issue. Is that what you want? Your dick tells me yes. Well, I think it is, because it's not getting very hard. Is it? No, not these days. It used to stand up so proud, remember? And look, you have titties!"

Jesus, she's being serious. "I like this game..."

"Game? Game! We're not playing a game, dickhead! I've already told you that! We're beyond fun, fucker. You're about to live the real deal. Kiss goodbye to your freedom, because I'll be running the show from here on out."

"But-but!"

"But nothing. I own you now. And, if you try and wriggle out of it or say no, then I will burn your fucking life down to the ground! I'll make sure everyone knows you pay whores for sex, and that you can't get your dick hard at home. I'll even post photos and stories all over the internet! You'll never work around here again. I'll make sure of that. Unless you fold to me and become my pet," she smiled, licking her lips. "Fuck, you don't really have a choice, do you? I just wanted you to know what

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will happen if you try and fuck with me.”

“Jesus!” he squealed, as Sheila towed him across the room by his nuts.

“Come with me, bitch.” Trevor squeezed his eyes closed, tears spilling, trying to block out the pain. His hands went hers and he tried pulling her fingers loose. “Don’t make me crush harder, shit face. You wouldn’t want me to rupture something.”

“Okay, okay!” Trevor removed his hands and allowed himself to be manhandled. When the pressure was gone from his bollocks, he thought he was going to vomit as he collapsed to his knees and held himself. “What have you done to me?”

“Can’t you handle a little bit of crushing? God, that ex-mistress of yours must have been a right pussy,” Sheila giggled. “Here, have a look at this, arsehole — it’s going to be your new home,” she said, opening the door to their walk-in wardrobe. “I had it made for you, dog.”

Trevor gawked at the thing before him, which looked like an outsized dog house with a heavy wooden door with bars in its window. “Wh-what is that?!”

“I told you. Your new home.” Sheila put a heavy foot to his shoulder and pressed down on him. “I’m going to keep you in there and bring you out when I see fit,” Sheila smiled. “That cock of yours is useless now, and I hope you enjoy watching me getting fucked from in there,” she said, hooking a thumb towards the small house.

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“Useless?”

“Yes. Totally. Well, it will be, in another couple of weeks or so.”

“What do you mean?!”

Sheila grinned. “I’ve rendered it worthless without you knowing.”

“Hang on...”

“Yes?”

“Have you destroyed my manhood?”

Sheila giggled, placing a hand to her mouth. “I shouldn’t laugh, really, but I can’t help it. God, it’s made me so horny, emasculating such a powerful man.”

“It’s limp because of you?”

“Losing inches, too, aren’t you? At first, I was worried I’d give you a heart attack or kill you, but nope, it worked like a charm. You could have gone blind or started pissing blood, even, because I didn’t really know much about what I was giving you.”

“What?!” Trevor said, the veins in his neck bulging. “The fuck have you done, Sheila?”

“Relax, sissy boy. You’re still here, aren’t you?”

“I’ll fucking—” Trevor started, but Sheila flicking her hand out, her knuckles connecting with his lifeless balls. “Ooph! Bitch,” he managed from behind clenched teeth.

“Still got a bit of fight coursing through you, ‘eh? Well, my little friends will soon knock the last of

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that out of you, once they're finished closing down your reproductive system."

"No! I won't take anything you give me. You can't make me!"

"I've been lacing your meals and drinks."

"No more!"

Sheila kicked him in the guts. "You fucking will, worm, if you want to live."

"Wh-what do you mean?"

"I'll continue drugging your food. You won't know when it's coming. And, if you want to keep breathing, you'll have to eat and hydrate," she laughed.

"Bitch!"

"Miss Bitch to you, fucker." Sheila turned, bent over, and picked up a crop that lay close by. "Now, into your home, boy," she said, whipping Trevor about the face, neck, head and chest.

"Ah, fuck! Fuck!" He scrambled backwards on his arse, using his hands and feet, fleeing the torture as he entered the cage. "Please, no more!"

Sheila rushed towards him and slammed the door shut on his prison, locking it in place. Trevor watched as she plucked the key from the lock, the Yale attached to a chain, and it placed around her neck. "It'll stay right there," she said, patting the key that lay between the crevice of her tits. "Now, be a good boy, Trevor, and do as I say to a pleasing standard if you do, you *might* be rewarded."

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“Don’t do this! You’re playing, right?” Trevor said, pressing his face to the door’s bars, his hands wrapping them.

“No!” she said, whipping his fingertips. “This is for your own good, Trevor.”

“Argh! Fuck!”

“Carry on like this, and your first meal will be a Sheila shit sandwich washed down with a glass of piss. Now, silence! I need my sleep.”

Trevor crawled to the back of his home and sniffled. “Why?” he asked, watching as Sheila picked up a large blanket.

With a smile, she turned to him. “You can’t keep quiet, can you, maggot!”

“Please...”

“Okay, but once I’ve told you, I want peace. Do you understand?”

“Ye-yes.”

“Yes, what?”

“Yes, Sheila.”

“No, you fucking insubordinate mongrel!”

“Ma’am! Yes, ma’am!” he whimpered and blubbered.

“I took action against you because I was fed up. I was pissed off with your constant libido, the forced sex, constant hard-ons, your rubbing up against me, feeling my tits — you were like a fucking dog with two dicks! Always excited. And I knew what you wanted — what you desired deep down. At first, I

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knew I couldn't give it to you, so I was happy for you to pay your whores. It was a relief at first because you gave me little attention, but you soon started again, didn't you? So, I snapped, worm. There's only so much anyone can take. Maybe if you'd stopped pestering me completely, we wouldn't be at this juncture."

"I'll be good! Please!"

"Too late. Besides, I'm enjoying myself too much. You've awoken something in me."

"You could have spoken to me, Sh—Ma'am."

"No, there was no talking to you. You couldn't hear me over your pathetic horniness and erections and panting. You were like an eager fourteen-year-old who'd just seen a pair of tits for the first time."

"So you hurt me?"

"Still alive, aren't you?"

"You could have divorced me!"

"Nah, I like the lifestyle too much. I knew I had to come up with a better way to sort things out, so I started planning."

"Whore!"

"Now, now, worm. Do I have to punish those raises of yours?"

"What have you been giving me?"

"It's glorious what you can find on the black market. After I read an interesting article online about chemical castration, I went digging on the dark web

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and found drugs that had once been used by the Russian military to 'sedate' their troops by suppressing their testosterone."

"Oh, Jesus..."

Sheila snorted. "Yeah. And, as it turns out, the drug worked too well. The Russian hierarchy and scientists discovered their little creation was overpowerful. After an ex-number of doses were administrated, it closed down the generative system and shrank everything. This, in turn, however, depressed the troops and left them unable to train and fight. The project was deemed a failure."

Trevor's mouth sagged. "You're joking? Please, tell me you're joking!"

Sheila shook her head and piggy-laughed. "Seeing the drug do its thing on you was amazing. My g-spot's never had it so good."

"I'm sorry," he tried.

"I don't give a shit, faggot." Sheila stepped closer. "Now, it's sleep time. Mistress needs her rest. I'll be along in a few hours with your breakfast. How does dog food and a glass of vomit sound, shithead? I've even bought you your very own dog bowl, slave. Now, thank your Mistress, there's a good boy."

Trevor looked at her, mouth agape. "I just can't believe—"

"Don't make me come in there and thrash you!"

He eyed her, detecting the seriousness in her eyes. *This can't be happening*, he thought.

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“Well?”

“Thank you, Ma’am.”

“That’s good. Now, sleep tight,” Sheila said, raising the blanket. “Tomorrow, if you’re lucky, I’ll let you meet my stud. He’s a huge black guy, and he’s going to enjoy having you suck his prick.”

Trevor shrank further into the cage. “N-no...”

“Goodnight,” she winked, throwing the blanket over his prison.

“No!” he wailed. “No!”

“Oh, what fun we’re going to have, dear,” she said. “You lucky thing.”

“Noooo!” Trevor continued, hearing the light switch click off and the door to the walk-in wardrobe close and lock. “Ma’am! Please! Please!” he continued, his pleas falling on deaf ears.

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Steak Knives

Duncan Ros

It was a nice two-story suburban home with a well-manicured lawn and a brand-new luxury Mercedes in the driveway. The kid had been eying it for a while and had finally decided to make his move. Whoever lived there, he figured, could stand to lose a dime.

A man answered the door after a bit of a long wait. He was dressed in a dark bowling shirt, gray slacks, and had on neon-green elbow-length rubber cleaning gloves. Clean-shaven, mid-thirties, with cropped blond hair and a face that was almost impossible to remember even if you stared at it for an hour.

“You’re not Billy,” he said.

“No sir. My name is Josh Munson, and I’m out here on this beautiful day going door-to-door to see if I could interest you in a brand-new set of state-of-the-art premium steak knives.”

The man stared at Munson blankly.

“I’d be happy to give you a demonstration if you have a minute.”

The man looked as if he were on the verge of slamming the door in his face, but something shifted in his expression and he warmed up. “Why don’t you

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come in and have something to drink?" he said. "It's hot and I bet you're thirsty." Then, after a beat: "But I'm probably not going to buy whatever you're selling."

"I'll take a 'probably not' over a 'no' any day," said Munson, smiling. "And I'd love a glass of water if you could spare one."

They went inside, which smelled strongly of bleach and Pine-Sol, and went to the kitchen where he took off his rubber gloves. The house was clean and plain-looking but full of expensive furniture, electronics, and china—as if everything was out of a photo from *Better Homes and Gardens* and placed accordingly. The only thing that wasn't camera-ready was a black garbage bag seated next to the fridge, knotted rather loosely at the top.

"Just doing some cleaning since the wife and kids are gone," said the man, placing his hands under the hot water of the sink and soaping them. Then he went through several cupboards before finding a water glass and filling it. "She's always moving stuff around. I can't keep track," he said, laughing, and handing Munson the glass of water.

"Thanks a lot. I didn't get your name, Mister—"

"Just call me Howard," he said, drying his hands and shaking Munson's. "So you really are just knocking on doors and seeing who bites?"

"That's right."

"I like it. Okay," he said, getting comfortable, "let's see what you've got."

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Munson pulled out the steak knives, then he went through the pitch that he'd memorized in the bathroom mirror of his motel room the day before—tempered steel, a lifetime warranty, cuts like butter, a heck of a deal. Howard watched him somewhat bemused, arms folded to the front with half a smile.

He ended his spiel with the demonstration, taking out one of the knives he was trying to sell and a small length of rope. Then he asked Howard if he had a comparable steak knife of his own. Howard looked around.

“Will this work?” he said, pulling out a butcher knife from the sink by the blade and handing it to Munson.

Munson took it by the handle, examined it, and put it on the table. “It needs to be serrated,” he said. “Has to saw through.”

“Right. Let's see,” said Munson, pulling at a few drawers. “I don't know where she put the steak knives. I don't even remember if we have any. Let's just see how good yours is since I don't feel like tearing the kitchen apart.”

“That's fine,” said Munson, handing Howard his steak knife and holding the length of the rope taut. “See if you can cut through my rope.” Howard held the knife rather awkwardly in his slightly shaking hand, chuckled, and sawed through the rope without a problem.

“Wow, that's a hell of a knife,” said Howard. He gave Munson a toothy smile that gave him the creeps. Being a good salesman, he smiled back politely.

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“What do you say?” said Munson. “They’re usually three-hundred for a four-piece set, but I can do two-hundred if you have cash.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Does one-fifty sound a little better?”

“As I said, I’m not looking to buy anything. Do you need to use the bathroom or anything before you leave?”

Munson went down the hall to the bathroom, taking stock of all the nice expensive things in the house, noting that the bedrooms were probably upstairs and that there was a basement. He looked in the medicine cabinet but couldn’t find anything to take him up or bring him down. Then he threw some water on his face and neck to try and cool off before setting back out.

“Oh,” said Howard as they headed to the door. “Would you mind dropping this off at the next garbage bin you see? Mine’s full right now.” He picked up the garbage bag next to the fridge. “I’d appreciate it, bud.”

Munson was a little upset about losing the opportunity for some fast cash but just nodded a tad dejectedly, took the black garbage bag—which was a little heavy—and sauntered back to his car with a quiet “have a good one.” He threw the garbage bag in the back seat, thinking he’d find a dumpster somewhere in a block or two, and drove off. It didn’t take long for him to forget it was even back there.

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When Munson came by the neighborhood later in the evening, he was happy to see that the Mercedes was gone. And of course, there was no security system to speak of. It was the only house on the block without one, which was the reason Munson had picked it out of all the others.

The window in the bathroom was unlocked—he'd made sure to leave it that way. It was just big enough for him to fit through, something he had also taken into consideration when casing the place. He hopped on the trash bin, which had been heavy and awkward to push in place below the window, and pulled himself through as quickly and quietly as he could.

It was dark, and his eyes needed a moment to adjust. He sat and listened for a few minutes, just to be sure there was no movement in the house. When it was clear that he was the only living thing inside, he went to the front door to unlock it.

But it was already unlocked.

Munson smiled to himself. Either they had forgotten to lock their front door or they were just incredibly naive and stuck in the care-free habits of a bygone era. In any case, he was going to make the evening profitable, although the wasted effort on window acrobatics annoyed him.

A simple B&E job—five minutes in and out. Objective: get all of the valuables you can into the black garbage bag, which he took from his back pocket and unfolded, and get out the door.

He had it done in four minutes and twenty-one

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seconds, which he had timed, and he felt damn proud of it. He'd managed to ransack all of the best items from everywhere except the basement, which he hadn't had time to go down into. Maybe some other time.

He went back to the car and put the loot into the trunk of his stolen Honda. The take included a Blu-Ray player, two Chromebooks, an Xbox, and some expensive women's jewelry from the master bedroom. It would only take twenty minutes to get from the suburbs to downtown, and another ten to find his fence and pocket the money.

The steak knife set was just something he'd come by in a discount shop—he'd swapped the hundred-dollar price tag with a ten-dollar, with the idea brewing for a bigger scam. The cashier knew he'd swapped tags, Munson could tell, but she wasn't getting paid enough to care. The fact that the steak-knife-salesman gag worked only bolstered Munson's already elephantine ego, and he prided his ability to come off as a hard-working stand-up citizen and to get people to trust him enough to let him into their homes.

A few blocks up the smell hit him. It was pungent enough to make him want to throw up. He'd noticed it earlier and had thought it was coming from something foul outside, or maybe some curdled cream from a spilled coffee, but now he knew its source—the black garbage bag he'd taken from Howard and forgotten about in the back seat. It had been cooking in his car, in the hundred-degree heat all day, and was like a punch to the nose.

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The garbage bag was heavier than he remembered it being. He drove full-speed intending to throw it out the window—to be rid of the smell ASAP. As he pulled it up to the front, the plastic knot came undone and something fell onto his lap, causing him to panic. He didn't notice that the traffic signal in front of him had turned from green to red, and went right through it.

An SUV in the right lane plowed into the passenger-side fender, sending shards of glass flying. Munson's airbag shot out, as the car spun around counter-clockwise, knocking his cocked head violently into his seat. The lights and sirens followed at a prompt pace, as is common for the suburbs.

The two detectives—the only occupants of the third-floor hospital waiting room in the middle of the night—waited to see their as-of-yet unidentified suspect. The T.V. in the corner was muted with an air-fryer infomercial. The press hadn't gotten their hands on what would be a top story.

Jenkins, younger and fresh-faced in jeans and a tailored blazer, sat in an uncomfortable hospital chair. His partner, Fitz, older and weathered from twenty years on the job, stood with his hands in the pockets of his cheap polyester slacks. His mustache was silvering and he was beginning to show his mileage, his younger athletic physique rounding into an older man's.

"Do you think it's him?" said Jenkins as he choked down a sip of acrid vending machine coffee from a

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styrofoam cup.

“Yeah, I think it’s him. I’d like to think that finding a guy with a garbage bag full of victims’ remains means it’s him.”

“But he doesn’t fit the profile. The guy we’re looking for never robs his victims.”

“The profile. Shit, Jenkins. He probably just needed some quick cash to fund his bloodlust. Maybe he was hungry and tired of eating Hot Pockets in his mom’s basement.”

Jenkins shook his head. The third floor was quiet. Just the antiseptic dull hum that hospital waiting rooms tend to have.

“I don’t like it.”

“You don’t have to,” said Fitz. “It is what it is. I just hope that Quantico gets back to us so we can figure out who the hell he is.”

After a little over an hour, a doctor came out and greeted the detectives. He was dressed in a white lab coat, smocks, and wore thick glasses. His head was bald with long gray tufts at the edges, and his teeth were stained yellow.

“Nice to meet you, detectives,” he said, “I’m doctor William Keller.” The two detectives gave their names rather numbly, without pleasantries or any attempts at handshaking. “If you’d like to take a look at the patient—uh, your suspect, I suppose he is—you can come back with me.”

They filed into a cramped hospital room that could

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barely fit the three of them. The kid was bandaged up, his head in a neck-brace, and his leg was in a cast and suspended above the bed at thirty degrees. The pulse of the hospital machinery made Fitz think of a fast food kitchen at breakfast time.

“Will he wake up?” said Jenkins.

“Doubtful,” said the doctor. “Even after the sedative wears off from the surgery. There’s severe head trauma along with fractured cervical vertebrae and a broken tibia, not to mention a fair amount of internal bleeding. I don’t suspect he’ll live long. Even if he does, he’ll likely be in a state of severe mental impairment.”

“He’ll be a vegetable,” said Fitz, not a question, “and taxpayers will have to pay for it, to keep this, this *thing* alive.”

Jenkins looked at the kid. He didn’t look like a serial killer. He looked like a camp counselor, or at worst, a call-center employee just out of college.

“I don’t make the rules,” said the doctor.

“Yeah, sure,” said Fitz. “But the man upstairs who does, he will have something to say about this, I can assure you.” he leaned over the comatose body and whispered: “I hope you rot in hell for what you did to those people, you piece of human garbage.” Then: “I wish I could pull the plug, doc, if I wasn’t so sure you’d go and tell on me.”

“Please don’t.”

Jenkins’ cell went off and they stepped out of the room, the doctor looking over his patient the way a

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gardener does a bed of weeds.

"We got something," said Jenkins in the hall, stuffing his phone back into his pocket after the quick back-and-forth that Fitz only heard half of. "Misner has a file for us, but wouldn't tell me much over the phone. He wants us to go and meet him at the precinct."

"Alright, let's go," said Fitz.

It took twenty-three minutes to get down there, which was twice as long as it would usually take, but Fitz insisted that they go through a drive-thru for breakfast sandwiches and coffee. Jenkins made a comment about the adverse health effects from the continual consumption of fast food, to which his partner said, "What are you, my wife?" Jenkins could think of many responses, each more biting than the last, but instead chose to focus on his driving.

Misner was in the basement of the station, and its sole occupant. He was clean-cut and about the same age as Jenkins, but had an awkward and nervous disposition that made him hard to be around for an extended period of time. This was why the chief had stationed him below the ground floor, out of plain sight.

"The guy you've got at the hospital is Chris Higgins," he said, handing Jenkins a stack of papers. "Did some time in Upstate New York and Virginia. Mostly B&E, some small possession with intent charges, and a juvenile record a few pages long. It's all there."

"Anything violent?" said Jenkins.

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Misner shook his head. Fitz looked at Jenkins. Jenkins looked down at the papers and said, "It's not our guy."

"The hell it isn't," said Fitz, his voice rising. "The hell it isn't our guy, Jenkins. Even if it isn't our guy, we're making this our guy." His face was flushed red. "Jenkins, look at me. This guy had pieces—pieces—of the victims, in his car, with their stuff. Lord knows his prints are in that house, on that knife. For all intents and purposes, for the press, for the families at home trying to sleep at night, this, this is our guy."

Jenkins and Misner looked at Fitz. They let him catch his breath, and looked at each other. The room felt all the quieter without the yelling.

Jenkins finally said, after some long minutes: "But what if this isn't our guy? What if ours is still out there, and he does it again?"

"He won't," said Fitz. "Not unless he wants caught, he won't."

They quietly wheeled Higgins into the operating room with the instruments and bright overhead lights. The doctor and his assistant were gloved up and masked. The doctor cleared his throat and stretched his arms like an athlete before a game.

"You did really well. Really very good, and I'm pleased with you," he said to his assistant. "I think you have potential. You're teachable. Not everyone is like that. Teachable."

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“Thanks, Billy, that means a lot coming from someone I respect so much.”

“But just remember, I took you out of that ward, and I could just as soon put you back in. I need *live* specimens from here on out, like this one. This one has served a real and true purpose for us tonight. But hacked-up bodies do me little good. You need to remember some of what I’ve taught you and exercise some self-control.”

Howard felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand up. The doctor had a way of making him feel shame. No one—not even his own father or mother—could make him feel such heavy self-disappointment.

“I’m sorry Billy, I—”

“It’s okay, Howard. I understand that learning new habits takes time. I believe in you, that you can do it. Just remember, everything you do is a choice.” They looked down at the kid, his young incapacitated body under the white lights, the machinery whirring. “If we work together, it can be beautiful, Howard. Don’t you want it to be beautiful?”

“Yes. Yes, I do.”

“Good. You can start by handing me that scalpel.”

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The Time I Rolled With the Prince of Denmark and We Took It Right Into the Danger Zone

Charles Austin Muir

The best thing about immortality is knowing you'll never lose your edge when you ride into the danger zone.

Not that Princess Ardala, commander of the flagship Draconia, knows this fact. I never told her I'm immortal. Nor did I expose Her Highness—given her contempt for ancient entertainment—to any of my favorite old-school jams. In particular, the Kenny Loggins hit single off the *Top Gun* movie soundtrack released in 1986, “Danger Zone.”

The princess won't watch *Top Gun*, either, one of the greatest cinematic events in Earth's history. She's pretty snooty for a glorified space pirate.

And to think I called her my boo. Not only does Princess Ardala dump me in front of Tigerman, her bodyguard, she wants to kill my main man and me by ejecting us into the void.

While we wait for her to send us off—as if space can harm two straight up superhumans—I squeeze the clutch and turn on my Kawasaki Hyperspace Ninja. The newly upgraded, superluminal motorcycle hums to life.

“You and that silly conveyance.” The princess gets

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one last dig in over the airlock speaker. “Well, we’ll always have New Paris. Farewell, Pete Mitchell. Kane—you may open the outer hatch.”

It’s time. Behind me, my main man, Ham Dogg, the Prince of Denmark, wraps his arms around my waist.

“To what dreams may come,” he says.

“For shizzle, Ham-Dizzle. And in case I never told you before... I love you.”

I throttle the hyper drive engine and shift into first gear. Kane releases us to the blackness of space.

Like Kenny Loggins, we take ourselves right into the danger zone.

Speaking of Kenny Loggins, here is how I ended up on a pirate spaceship in the year 2491.

My journey to the stars began in the year 2019. I, Pete Mitchell, was riding my newly restored Kawasaki Ninja GPz900R on I-5, through Portland, Oregon, when I saw a minivan driver flip off a pickup truck driver who had cut her off. Eager to bust a cap in misogyny’s ass, I told myself, “Pete, here is someone who needs to know not all the men in the world are hyper-aggressive scumbags.”

I switched from the fast to slow lane and pulled up alongside the fuming, middle-aged woman. I meant to tell her: “Ma’am, that man is a disgrace to the International Pickup Truck Consortium for Human Decency. I’m going to place him under citizen’s

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arrest and report him to the consortium.”

Unfortunately, to my eternal shame, I flipped the driver off instead. I gave her the bird for several seconds, too, like actor Tom Cruise as Maverick flying inverted above the MiG fighter pilot in the opening dogfight scene in *Top Gun*.

“Here ya go, pig-face,” I shouted, through the woman’s passenger-side window. “LET’S SEE HOW YOU LIKE IT!!!” A *total* dick move. And decidedly not a win for Bros Against Misogyny (a campaign I supported on behalf of the International Bros Consortium for Human Decency).

I couldn’t help myself, though. I felt as if I’d been possessed by a demon that sounded like Kenny Loggins barking orders inside my head. Which humbled me for reasons I’ll explain in a minute, and disturbed me because I enjoyed Kenny Loggins’s music.

As you might imagine, my gesture did not sit well with either the International Motorcycle Consortium for Human Decency or the International Bros Consortium for Human Decency. After their investigations, I lost my IMCHD and IBCHD voting privileges, my access to IMCHD and IBCHD events and activities, and my IMCHD and IBCHD real-estate holdings. My fellow riders and even many of my fellow bros ceased to acknowledge me.

My grandfather—who was also banished for harassing a motorist, albeit before the founding of the IBCHD—used to call the highway “The Great

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Lonesome.” Now, I understood why.

An outcast, I rode across America for the next six years. Desperately, I sought an expert to cure the neurological disorder that made me flip people off and taunt them in response to an inner voice that sounded like Kenny Loggins. I had always known the condition prevailed on my dad’s side of the family. But, being told I looked like Tom Cruise all my life, I figured I was too slick to inherit such a weird, self-sabotaging disorder. Talk about a lesson in making assumptions.

My vagabond lifestyle proved a grim one-eighty from the hell-raising, high-fiving life I had once led. Thankfully, my fortune shifted when I met my main man, Ham Dogg, the Prince of Denmark. I had outrun a biker gang that didn’t appreciate being taunted by me when I ducked into a bar and saw Hamlet at the counter, staring into his beer. We were in a dusty little burg called Higgledy Piggledy, South Dakota.

Blue-eyed, bearded, and brooding, the handsome patron looked like movie star Mel Gibson with a Caesar-like haircut. I took his presence there as a sign we were meant to become the closest of homeboys. I ordered two cold ones and sat beside him.

“Thanks for the replenishment,” he said, in an English accent. “But... do I know you?”

“Nah. I know you, though. You’re Mel Gibson, right? I’m a big, big fan. I’ve seen *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* one-hundred-and-twenty-nine

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times.”

“Hmm, I’m sorry to disappoint you, sir, but I am not Mel Gibson. My name is Hamlet.”

“As in, ‘To be or not to be’ Hamlet?”

“That is the obvious quote, but yes. And you are?”

“Pete Mitchell. My parents named me after Tom Cruise’s character in *Top Gun*.”

Intrigued by the title, Hamlet admitted he had never seen the movie that inspired me to become a ruggedly individualistic motorcycle studmuffin. He had seen Tom Cruise’s earlier movie though, *Losin’ It*, one-hundred-and-twenty-nine times.

With his eager permission—and over the noise of locals discussing the upcoming International Tractor Consortium for Human Decency rally—I gave the prince a thorough plot synopsis of director Tony Scott’s turbo-charged, aviation thriller. He teared up when I told him about Maverick’s main man, Goose, losing his life in a training engagement. “Alas, poor Goose,” he said, squeezing my leg.

Hamlet excused himself to hit the head. When he came back, he looked extra brooding, like Mel Gibson giving the famous “To be or not to be” speech in director Franco Zeffirelli’s film adaptation of Shakespeare’s play about him (which I had seen, but had to watch again later to compare with the real deal). We toasted our luck meeting each other in a bar in Higgleddy Piggledy, South Dakota.

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“Pete, you’re my new main man,” my new main man said, leaning in. “So I feel there is something I should tell you.”

“Anything, Ham Doggy Dogg.”

“I am immortal.”

I almost spit my beer up. “Come on, homes, I’ve read the play. You spend all your time pondering your mortality.”

Hamlet shrugged. “I know. Stupid, right? Now I spend all my time pondering my immortality. But the reason I’m coming out to you like this is because pondering my immortality nonstop can become unbearably lonely. For centuries, I’ve been searching for someone companionable and—well, mobile enough, to join me as I wander the earth thinking about what it means to not die. On my father’s grave, Pete, I swear I would give you immortality for your company on my peregrinations. Would you accept this?”

“Hells yeah!”

“Then drink this.” The prince pulled a vial of pinkish liquid from his fanny pack. “It’s an experimental elixir I concocted to distract myself when my uncle forced me to consider killing him for poisoning my father. I thought it would help me speak with a Danish accent when thinking aloud in English... but instead, it made it impossible for me to not be. One sip of this potion, and you will not be able to not be, either.”

And that is the start of how I ended up on a pirate

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spaceship in the year 2491. Because life moves on a different time scale when you're eternally youthful and roll with an over-analytical Hamlet who unintentionally arranged it so he can't not be.

Unfortunately, my immortality did not eliminate my neurological disorder, but at least I had forever to find a cure for it, and, more importantly—with Hamlet's support after fifty years of considering the matter—to fulfill my dream of jockeying jet fighters and graduating from TOPGUN.

It took us a hundred years, but once the prince and I got the hang of flying ultra-sophisticated military investments, we gained a reputation for being hell in the air and eventually in space. I just wished we'd gotten better call signs than "Bird Spasm" (for my compulsive hand gestures) and "Weird Caesar" (for Hamlet's haircut).

For two centuries, on this world and beyond, we flew combat missions, macked on fly honeys, and whizzed around on my newly upgraded Kawasaki Sky Ninja. But finally, after the Darnivian Insurrection in the year 2390, we retired to Hamlet's underground bunker outside Chicago.

Every summer, we traveled the country on my self-repairing, fuel-recycling, flightworthy motorcycle. Other than a "bird spasm" that struck me in a biker bar in Zip-A-Dee-Ay, Nebraska, nothing much happened on these trips, although we did manage to see the Kenny Loggins Museum. I still appreciated the man's music, despite my inner voice.

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Our road trips ended shortly after the biker bar incident. My main man and I spent the next fifty-five years hangin' in the bowels of the underground bunker.

Hamlet converted the garage into a science laboratory. His experiments saved him from the gloomy meditations he had cherished before he became sharp-witted radar intercept officer, "Weird Caesar." As for me, I felt sad that I no longer had anyone to subject to my "bird spasms" except my main man and the walls of our domicile.

I got to thinking about this, because being sad about not bullying people is messed up.

After months of researching my family history, while Hamlet tinkered with a *Losin' It*-themed lunchbox that took pictures, I came to this conclusion:

I don't have a neurological disorder that afflicts men on my dad's side of the family. I have a rogue element inside me that randomly takes over and acts like a dick. From what I can tell, *all* the Mitchell men carry this rogue element inside them.

It shows up shortly before middle age. Something about this stage of life triggers feelings of inadequacy that cause us to lash out at others. To take the blame off ourselves, we turn these feelings into a sort of evil spirit that commands us in the voice of someone famous. My great-grandfather, Dr. Atticus Mitchell, took our frontin' a step further by attributing his John-Wayne-prompted outbursts to a hereditary neurological disorder. And so we've

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been framing our bad behavior ever since.

When I told Hamlet my theory, he took my picture with his lunchbox and showed me how enlightened I looked.

“Look, Pete,” he said. “Not to sound harsh, because you’re my main man and all, but I’ve always known you’re kind of a dick. That’s great you’ve finally realized it yourself, though. It looks like being cooped up in this place has been good for you. For me, too, actually. It’s funny... since we stopped our adventures, you’ve become more reflective while I’ve become more active. And now you’ve learned what you needed to and I’ve had my fill of inventing crap inspired by movies no one’s heard of. Maybe this means our work is done here.”

“So what? We join the Space Marines and—”

“Come on, Pete, we’ve seen enough war, haven’t we? I feel we should take on a creative project. And I have just the idea for it. If done well, we could fatten our bank account *and* help you get over your ambivalence toward Kenny Loggins... given your behavioral problem.”

“All right. Hit me, Ham Deezy.”

“We form a Kenny Loggins cover band.”

“Oh snap, homes. Right on!”

It took us thirty-five years to arrange our Kenny Loggins routine. But once we got the hang of harmonizing, we became hell at paying tribute to the singer-songwriter behind some of the most iconic movie songs of the 1980s. When the “Kenny

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Log Clones” hit the big time, all of civilized Earth would cut loose like in Kenny Loggins’s hit single, “Footloose.”

That was our dream, anyway. We found out the universe had different plans when we headed for Chicago.

For one thing, there was no Chicago anymore, only an urban ruins. For another, the streets teemed with badly burned, subhuman creatures that pelted us with rubble. They didn’t do much damage, seeing as my motorcycle repaired itself and my main man and I couldn’t shuffle off this mortal coil. Still, this was not how the Kenny Log Clones wanted to kick off its open mic tour.

Hamlet pointed at a city shining in the distance. Switching the bike to aerial mode, I got us to the city limits lickety-split. Outside the dome, a guard in a sky car escorted us inside.

“Perchance to dream,” Hamlet said, while we gawked at the towering spires, serpentine monorails and fountains of dancing light all around us. The city looked the way twentieth-century special effects artists imagined future cities would look.

Our escort led us to a building shaped like one end of a half-pipe. On the rooftop, we were met by Dr. Elias Huer, Colonel Wilma Deering, and Twiki, a child-sized robot. They welcomed us on behalf of the Earth Defense Directorate. They were shocked to discover we’d had no idea a nuclear war had ravaged the entire planet while we were down in

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the bunker honing our Kenny Loggins routine. Our magnificent surroundings, “New Chicago,” numbered among a handful of domed cites that had been constructed after the holocaust.

I took the news with due seriousness. Secretly though, I couldn’t help but laugh... because what a way for humanity to produce a dystopia. With a few nukes, it had recreated the premise of *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century*, a film and television show I had watched in the ancient times via endlessly syndicated reruns. It was as though my ten-year-old self were writing this story.

With that said, please don’t think I failed to see the enormity of the most devastating war in human history. I just wanted to direct my energy toward happier thoughts.

Because there we were, a Danish prince and a Tom Cruise look-alike with a futuristic *Top Gun* motorcycle, in a *Buck Rogers* future with an opportunity to introduce the Kenny Log Clones to a post-apocalyptic population. If there was one good thing about our time in the bunker, it was that we had strengthened and composed ourselves for just this sort of scenario. My main man and I wanted only one thing, now: To make New Chicago cut footloose.

Unfortunately, my inner voice still took control sometimes. It was on a luxury sky liner, popping out from behind Hamlet to serenade Wilma Deering with “That Lovin’ Feelin’”—like Maverick does to Charlie in *Top Gun*—that I told the colonel she looked like she wore a fat suit painted to look like a

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metallic, purple jump suit. As a result, Colonel Deering schooled me in the art of face-planting with her metallic, purple stiletto boots.

Needless to say, my action did not sit well with either the Earth Luxury Sky Liner Consortium for Human Decency or the Earth Defense Directorate. Captain Buck Rogers ordered us to return to the mutant-haunted, radioactive wastes beyond the dome. Rather than head back to the bunker, however, Hamlet and I decided to visit the lunar colonies. Using parts he salvaged from bombed-out "Old Chicago," he upgraded my Sky Ninja into a Space Ninja.

Halfway to Luna, the Draconian space pirates seized us during a stop on a gentlemen's star liner. Kane took Hamlet in as his drinking partner, and Princess Ardala made me her boy toy. She adored my obscene outbursts against her.

Around this time, I discovered something else about myself: I have a contrary, rebellious streak. Go figure. At the height of our romance, my Kenny Loggins voice told me to do a one-eighty with the princess. The moment I massaged her royal shoulders and said, "I love you, boo," I knew Hamlet and I were going to get kicked to the space curb.

"Sorry about that, Ham-my-man," I said, moments before the princess got her dig in about my motorcycle.

"That's all right, Pete Mizzle Dizzle."

And now we're caught up with my story, living in

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the present moment again.

Taking it right into the danger zone.

Whizzing around in hyperspace—AKA the danger zone—presents hazards unique to the adventurous interstellar motorcyclist. Good thing I'm hell with a sport bike, even a Space Ninja that has been upgraded to a Hyperspace Ninja, thanks to Hamlet's appropriation of Draconian hyper drive tech while Kane slept off his hangovers.

A spill in hyperspace won't seriously harm us, considering our unable-to-not-be status, but a mistake could kill the Faster-Than-Light-Speed buzz.

The prince and I are racing through fields of pulsating, multi-colored light. The bike's hyper drive engine sends vibrations that shoot up my thighs to the top of my skull. I am simultaneously at war and in harmony with the upholstery, handlebars, and foot pegs shaking against me with superluminal acceleration. And why wouldn't we speed up? We're riding the ultimate crotch rocket, not some dingy old space tug. With my main man, Ham Dogg, the Prince of Denmark, hugging me tight, I shift up to sixth gear and see just how close we can get to the walls of the throbbing light vortex.

God, this feels good.

For extra dopeness, I hold a wheelie on the final stretch. One click of the Normal 3-D Space button

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and we jump into... wherever we are.

And what do we have here? Looks like Earth.

Must be an alternate version. And what will we find on the surface? Armies of talking apes? Biker gangs roaming a desert wasteland? Hardened criminals in a maximum-security prison formerly known as Manhattan Island? Some other recreation of a Seventies or Eighties science-fiction movie? Whatever awaits us, the Kenny Log Clones are going to make the world a nicer place. Because no matter what Earth you inhabit, you can always use more of Kenny Loggins's music in your life.

We are descending into the planet's atmosphere, now. Thanks for listening to me, homeboys and homegirls and other homepeople. You're the best.

And in case I never told you before... I love you.

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Sometimes I Almost Feel Like a Real Human Being

David Wesley Hill

Courtney became best friends with Mary Beth in order to learn her secrets, but she didn't discover the most important one. It was Sam who found that out. He crawled from his basement tunnel and began bouncing excitedly. Dirt showered everywhere like water off a wet dog.

"I know it, I know it," he said.

"Know what?" I asked.

"What she did, Frank. What Mary Beth did."

Even when he stands upright, Sam's head barely brushes my knee. It is as round as a pumpkin and disproportionately large for his body. His eyes are the shape and color of egg yolks and his mouth is crammed with broad flat teeth. Sam has many talents. He can mimic any sound he hears. His sense of smell is extraordinary. Perhaps this is because his nose is so immense that the tip actually touches his chin.

"What did Mary Beth do?"

Except for the corner where Sam had dug the entrance to his tunnel, most of the basement is finished. The walls are paneled with fake wood veneer and the floor is covered with plastic tiles that

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imitate real brick. Against one wall are a washer and dryer and a cabinet of laundry supplies. Against the other is the old couch on which I was sprawled. I was bored. I'm always bored. Sometimes it seems like I've been bored for centuries. My whole entire life.

Sam didn't answer directly. He isn't very smart and he has trouble holding onto a line of thought.

"I was hungry, Frank. Really, really hungry. And this big old rat, he was too fast. I didn't catch him until he was inside Mary Beth's house."

Sam's tunnels lead everywhere across the neighborhood. There's not a home he doesn't have access to for at least a half mile in every direction.

"Well?" I asked.

"He was nice and juicy."

"Not the rat, Sam. Mary Beth."

"Oh, her. Well, I knew what was up right away. The stink was that strong, Frank. Even you could smell it."

"Smell what, Sam?"

"Mary Beth. She's pregnant."

Courtney said, "I can't believe she didn't tell me. I mean, what are best friends for?"

We were sitting at the kitchen table having a breakfast of cereal and toast and orange juice. We had to be at school in half an hour. Courtney was wearing jeans and a tight knit shirt without a collar. She was chewing gum and eating at the same time. I couldn't figure out how she managed not to swallow

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the gum. In many ways Courtney is as talented as Sam.

"Maybe Mary Beth doesn't know herself," I said.

"Get real, Frank. Of course she knows. She has to. Sam says she's in her sixth month."

"Almost too late for an abortion," I said.

"Mary Beth wouldn't have one anyway. They're Catholic."

"Who's the father?"

"Brad Vogel. Has to be. They've been going steady since eighth grade. Mary Beth says they haven't gone all the way."

"Maybe she's lying."

"No, I don't think so. There must be some other explanation."

"It's been two thousand years since the last immaculate conception."

"Don't remind me, Frank."

Dad joined us in the kitchen and poured a cup of coffee from the pot warming on the counter top. Dad's in software development. He used to be in armaments but he got out of that business. He was dressed for work in his usual gray pinstripe suit and black wingtip shoes with the built up right heel that prevents people from noticing his limp. If they do, he says he had polio when he was a kid. This is not the truth. Dad's always been lame.

"What are you two looking so serious about?" he

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asked.

"My friend, Mary Beth, is pregnant," Courtney answered.

"So what do you have in mind?"

"We don't know yet," Courtney answered.

"I'm thinking about it," I said.

Brad Vogel was seventeen but seemed younger. He was into computer gaming and since there is little I can't do with electronics it was easy to impress him with my expertise. We went to his house after school and settled down with a couple bags of chips before his computer and took turns playing death matches online.

"I don't think they've had sex," I told Courtney. "They were doing some heavy petting and accidentally got a little too close. I don't believe he even knows she's pregnant."

"How do you suppose he'll react to the news?"

"There's only one way to find out."

Going down to the basement, I explained to Sam what we wanted. His grin was so wide that it almost split his head in half. Using a burner phone spoofed to identify itself as belonging to Mary Beth, I dialed the number for Sam since he has stubby claws instead of real fingers.

"Brad?" Sam said in an adolescent female voice. "Yes, it's Mary Beth, of course, it's me. How can you ask if something's the matter? Yes, I'm crying. We have to talk. Now. I'm pregnant, Brad. Yes, I'm sure."

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Don't be stupid. Who do you think? Half an hour. I'll leave the porch door open."

I clicked off the phone and Sam said, "That was fun, Frank. Real fun. I did good, didn't I?"

Then I spoofed the phone to display Brad's number, dialed Mary Beth, and gave the phone back to Sam. His voice was indistinguishable from the teenage boy's.

"Hi, Mary Beth, it's me. Well, I'm OK, but there's something I've been meaning to ask. No, no, nothing like that, it's what you haven't told me.... Please, don't start. I can't bear to hear you crying. Yes, that's better. We'll talk. No, no one else knows. It's just I noticed you were gaining weight. All right. I'll be over. Leave the porch door open."

This time Sam was so excited that he got down on all fours and started chasing rats. As small as Sam is, he was still much larger than the rodents, and soon his groin was messy with blood and fur.

The squealing got on my nerves and I went upstairs. Courtney remained behind until her favorite television program came on.

Sam wired Brad's and Mary Beth's rooms so we could overhear their conversations. Brad wanted to tell their parents about the pregnancy but Mary Beth didn't. She was a big girl and she was sure that if she wore loose clothing no one would guess her condition. Brad was less certain. Neither had much idea what to do with the baby after Mary Beth gave birth.

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Dad was sitting on the couch in his boxer shorts like he does every evening after work. He was finishing his third glass of the vodka he keeps in the freezer until it becomes as thick as syrup.

Brad was visiting Mary Beth. We were streaming the microphones in their rooms to our smart TV and their voices came clearly through the stereo speakers. Brad was saying:

"Of course, I love you, Mary Beth. How could you think I don't?"

"But you want to ruin my life."

"I'm only saying it might be better if we got help."

"My mother will kill me. She'll really kill me. You don't know her."

"Let's think about it." Brad didn't sound convinced.

Dad scratched absently at the thigh of his thin leg and took a swallow of vodka. "The boy's scared," he observed.

"They're both scared."

"He needs to be able to justify keeping the pregnancy secret," Dad went on. "Otherwise he'll tell his parents."

"I think you're right," I agreed.

So the next afternoon I met Brad after school and we went to his house and slipped a game into the console.

"You ever notice—" I began.

"Notice what, Frank?"

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“Well, all the heroes, all the real heroes in the good games, I mean, there’s always something mysterious about how they’re born. Either some god was screwing around with their mother. Or else they’re foundlings. You know, left on a doorstep by their parents, who can’t keep them for one reason or another. Maybe there’s a rule about it. Like, you can’t be a true hero with an ordinary mother and father.”

Brad’s eyes became distant. They held so much innocence that I wanted to steal them from their sockets and cradle them in my palm.

“You really think so, Frank?” he asked. “There’s a rule?”

“I’d bet on it.”

Mary Beth called Brad when she felt the first contractions. The motel they’d picked out lay a couple miles down the state road beyond the town limits. Sam had wired the entire place since we couldn’t know what room they’d be given. We switched channels until we tuned in on them. It was not an easy labor but they were left alone since it was the kind of establishment where unusual noises are attributed to energetic sexual activity.

“Push,” Brad said. “One more time.”

“I’m pushing.”

The groan Mary Beth made mingled pain and effort and deep satisfaction. After this we heard the wail of a newborn. Mary Beth said, “Let me hold him.”

“Just for a little while, OK?”

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“He’s so small, isn’t he, Brad? Oh, I wish we could keep him.”

“Come on, Mary Beth. You know we can’t. We’ve gone over this a thousand times. Look, I’ll get the bassinet ready.”

I stood up and said, “I’d better leave now.”

“Can I come, too?” Courtney asked.

I shrugged and pulled on a jacket. Twilight had faded to night and a chill November wind snapped sheets of rain against the pavement. A walk of ten minutes brought us to St. Luke’s Church. We waited around the corner against the overgrown hedge that framed the rectory. The shrubbery screened us from observation while allowing a good view of the front steps. Just past nine an old Honda Civic pulled up before the church. Brad got out of the car. He didn’t notice us. He leaned inside in order to take out the cradle with his son in it.

For a moment he stared into the cradle. It was easy to guess what he was thinking. For Brad, giving up the child had mystical significance. He was ensuring the boy an extraordinary future. Like in computer games.

Brad placed the bassinet in front of the entrance under the overhang and out of the rain. Then he hurried down the steps and gunned the car away from there. I immediately went to the church and took the bassinet and brought it to Courtney in the shadow of the hedge. Together we peered at the baby.

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His eyes were so blue as to seem black. He looked at us fearlessly. There was such wonder and delight in his regard that for the briefest instant I almost felt like a real human being.

"Isn't he the cutest thing," Courtney said. She blew a huge bubble.

"Sure is," I replied.

I reached into the cradle and strangled him. Then I cut off his left ear and tucked it in my pocket.

I replaced the bassinet with the dead body before the church door and Courtney and I returned home.

"I want to report a crime," Sam said in a woman's voice. "Yes, well, I think there was a crime, but I'm not one hundred percent sure. I could be wrong. What? What does my name have to do with anything? I'm simply a good citizen, is that so hard to believe? Anyway, my point is, I was visiting a friend at the Seven Oaks Lodge, out on the state road, and I couldn't help but hear all sorts of funny noises coming from a couple doors down. Number seventeen, I think it was. What? Oh, I don't know, like crying and maybe like someone was being slapped around a little. I didn't make too much of it, that's how the Seven Oaks is. Only I started wondering if maybe I heard a child in there. Now that surely isn't any place for a child. There's all sorts of goings on."

"Very good," I told Sam. "Now this time you're a man." I dialed the police again. In a masculine voice he said:

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“There’s been a murder. No, I didn’t see it myself. Let me tell you what happened. I was walking by St. Luke’s Church over on Montgomery, and I saw an old Honda pull up. A kid got out. He was carrying a box or something and he left it on the church steps. I didn’t think nothing of it, but there was something odd about the kid, you know how it is, and after he left, I opened the box. Only it wasn’t a box. It was a cradle. There was a dead baby in it, the son of a bitch dropped off a dead baby like a God damned bundle of used clothes. Sure, I got the license plate. Let me tell you what it was.”

Brad and Mary Beth were arrested for murder. The news made the national papers because the district attorney decided to press for the death penalty even though they were juveniles, but the charges were bargained down to manslaughter. I visited Brad while he was out on bail before sentencing.

“Mary Beth is sure I did it,” he told me. We were sitting on the edge of his bed in his room in front of the computer but the machine was off. “She hates me. She won’t talk to me.”

“Well, you did plead guilty.”

“Only because no one believed my story. They told me if I said I was innocent, and was convicted anyway, I might get the chair or a lethal injection or something. So I had to say I did it. What other choice was there?”

“I don’t know, Brad.”

“That baby was alive when I left him at the church. I swear it. Why would I kill my son? Why would

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anyone kill a baby? And steal his little ear?"

"Maybe someone had it in for you," I said. "Maybe it was all a set up, Brad. They were keeping you and Mary Beth under observation. Watching you all the time, just waiting for the right opportunity to frame you both. Probably you were followed from the motel. They killed the baby as soon as you left him at the church. And after that they let the police know where you were."

Brad looked at me like I was crazy.

"Why would anyone go to all that trouble?" he asked.

"Maybe they wanted to see you suffer for something you didn't do."

Brad shook his head slowly. "You've been playing too many computer games, Frank. The real world doesn't work like that. I've learned the truth. Probably what happened is some sick bastard, some psychopath, was passing by. That's all. It was chance. Bad luck. Nothing else."

"If that's what you believe, Brad," I said, "who am I to argue?"

Mom's a terrible cook and never gets any better. I doubt she'd get any better even if she tried for another thousand years. The frozen green beans were still cold in the middle and the turkey was dry on the outside while at the same time being underdone. Sam crawled onto the table and stuck his head into the cavity and munched happily at the raw meat. Dad carved around him. Courtney blew a

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bubble and said:

“Mary Beth got two years since they said she was only an accessory. Brad was sentenced to four.”

“I spoke with him last week,” I said. “I told him what happened. He thought I was making it up.”

“Never underestimate the human capacity for rationalization,” Dad observed.

“Even now Brad doubts evil exists,” I continued. “He thinks life is all just circumstance.”

“An Existentialist, is he?” Dad asked.

“He considers himself a cynic.”

Mom was chewing deliberately at the turkey. She dislikes her own cooking as much as we do. “How will you change his mind?” she asked.

“Well, first I’m going to wait four years. Until just before he’s served his sentence.”

“And then, Frank? And then?” Sam popped his head from the turkey and wiped grease from his eyes.

“I’ll send him the videos we made of him and Mary Beth.”

“And the ear, too, Frank,” Sam said. “Don’t forget the ear. That’ll really do it.”

I took the tiny scrap of flesh from my pocket and rubbed it between my thumb and forefinger. For a fleeting instant I was reminded of that fragile second when I had felt alive. It didn’t last. I was bored again.

“The ear, too,” I said.

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Kill Sean

Sean M.F. Sullivan

There were too many Seans. Searching the name on Google loaded 870,000,000 results. Page one celebrities included Big Sean, Sean Watkins, and Sean Connery—who, to add to the overpopulated insult, owned a memorial at the top of the page in the form of a featured snippet. On Wikipedia, there were 87 entries for ‘Sean’, each of which disambiguated into additional 87-stacked entries—none of which was himself.

His name was reduced to a membership of actors, writers, race car drivers, politicians, serial killers, and bakers. ‘Sean’ was such a popular name he was basically anonymous. Was he supposed to resign himself like the Michaels of the world? No! But how was he ever going to take the name back for himself?

His goldfish leaned a fin on the rim of its bowl and said, Why not use your middle initial, pal?

He snapped, “Why doesn’t everyone else use their middle initial then? Why should I change my name, when it’s *my* name?” He picked up the can leaning against the stack of broken keyboards and swigged.

His name.

At Bottle King, where the chubby cashier never

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remembered his name, the register monitor loaded an excel sheet of every membershiped Sean within a four-mile radius of the store. At least one hundred Seans—no, one thousand, he thought—filling out the alphabet from A until his long-awaited assonanced S. The cashier pressed enter. He leaned over the conveyor belt and studied the name above his own: ‘Sean Reicher, 987 Willow Place’. Then he paid \$2.00 and brown bagged the tallboy.

The name’s origins were biblical: Iōánnēs in the Greek, Yohanan in the Hebrew, the mad seer John in the KJV, which all translated gaelically into ‘Sean’ and was supposed to mean, ‘god is gracious’. A bit too gracious of God: Sean was the 336th most popular boys name (10,979th for girls), so that one out of every 1,916 baby boys in a nursery had a crib stapled ‘Sean’. Fingering an abacus he calculated that there were up to 182,000 Seans in the United States alone. Tucked under his blankie he traced the water stains above his bed and imagined a world in which he owned sean.com by birth right. A paradise on earth.

To be fair, he had never actually, physically, in person, met another Sean. He knew of their existence only at a distance like the moon, so he was quite nervous as he donned the ski mask and black turtleneck and lifted the rickety wooden frame and snuck into Sean Reicher’s living room at half past 11, and then stood above his doppelganger snoring loudly in the rocking chair. His goldfish had told him he wasn’t ready, and now that he was here, face-to-face with the possibility of vengeance, he hesitated

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between the scissors in his left hand and the butterknife in his right. But before making a decision, Sean Reicher awoke from his nightmare and yelled, "It's you!" Then the imposter clutched his chest, and the name was no longer his own.

He nudged the husk with his flip flop. Then he kicked. He stole a bill for a Penthouse subscription bearing the fake's name, and fled into the afternoon feeling giddy that God was on his side.

He thought his heroism would kick off the anti-Sean riots, Franz Ferdinand style. He watched and waited. But the newspaper was still headlining the missing white girl, and the anchors on Eyewitness News laughed at the sunshine—didn't UPS deliver his manifesto? One murder wasn't enough, friend, his goldfish said.

More effective methods were needed. From the Swords of the East website he purchased a bushido certified katana, Nippon steel folded one thousand times or your money back. The blade was dull. Naked in front of the TV he tried sharpening the edge with sandpaper and nicked his thumb, and became nauseous at the sight of blood. He threw up. Wiping his face with an oily cloth he held the blade and vowed to try again. Just like Henry Morgan had said, "If at first you don't succeed..." Or was it W. C. Fields?

So he purchased another tallboy, and had another peak at the liquor store listicle. The cashier, this time a pregnant woman who had definitely rung him up in the past, said, "Your name is Sean? I love that name!" He grimaced and leaned. Just beneath

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his name was a Sean Tulathulumie who was, unfortunately, not in hospice care and an avid gun collector. And so, that afternoon, he was off running away from Sean Tulathulumie's mansion at the first buckshot even with the katana knotted across his back.

Maybe murder wasn't the solution.

To solve his problems he bought two more tallboys and stared at the gluesticked 'Sean' obituaries on the walls of his apartment. Even if he eliminated one Sean every day for the next year that was only 365 Seans. Even at two Seans which was impossible—since his driver's license had been lost (meaning there was some undergraduate out there masquerading as a Sean which was somehow more aggravating than being named 'Sean') that was only 730 Seans, and there were thousands, tens of thousands, in his state alone. They multiplied like flatworms: cut off the head of one Sean, and you got five more Seans, and the name's popularity was ticking up on Google Trends. He was losing before he started and all he had done was remove one Sean whose name didn't even make the obituary section of the Record.

There was no third attempt. He bought three tallboys, squeezing his eyes as he handed over the crinkled bills.

What he needed was a final Sean solution. A way to stop the parents of would be Seans before they got their dark idea. A tool powerful enough to be heard around the world, like a Tunguskan bomb that targeted all the fake Seans. His goldfish suggested a

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blog.

The blog posts were vicious, visceral, violent, and unread. He had told himself a little white lie: that the name ‘Sean’ wasn’t gracious at all but a terrible, evil name that evoked only the worst monsters of the 20th century. “nobody shuld name there kid ‘sean’,” he wrote. It was a name for sneaks, thieves, cannibals, and fiends who borrow your copy of *Link to the Past* and don’t return it. Seans weren’t people, more like husks for the Sean-DNA wormed inside.

Like the Buddha, if you met a Sean on the road, kill him.

His nom de plume was ‘John’.

What he learned putting his hate online was that there were other Sean haters, not in the general way he hated, but in particular-Sean hate ways: hate for Sean O’Malley, hate for Sean Combs, hate for Sean Thor Conroe, hate for particular Seans and their particular Sean-y B.S. He tapped their community kegs and filled his own cup and then brought more boozy hate to their hateful group parties. He learned he could kill Seans with rumor, stipulation, speculation.

“Did you know Sean emits eight tons of carbon—every week?”

“I heard that Sean worked as a caterer on Jeffery Epstein’s island.”

“Sean shares a name with serial killer Sean Vincent Gillis. What a jerk!”

“Yes, Sean is definitely a pedophile—just like Hitler.”

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The sooner he invoked Godwin's law, the better.

He cultivated a voice—sonorous and prophetic—and a following, kept blogging all day every day thanks to his imagination and disability checks from Social Security, uniting all of the internet's Sean-hate behind his Wile E. Coyote avatar. He had real power for the first time in his life to accumulate WordPress likes, but with all of that gathering potential energy, how was he to spark the bomb that would topple the Seans, send them in droves to the county courthouse to file for a change of name?

It was his goldfish once more who made the ingenious suggestion.

A conference was in order, and held at the Jacob Javits Center. An entire weekend of anti-Sean festivities and organizing, a chance for disparate Sean-haters to unite their common cause under one banner, a very large one draped over the glass entrance that read, 'Stop Hate. Stop Sean.'

He was to deliver the inaugural address as president and CEO and dictator of the revolution. In attendance were reporters from the New York Times, the Post, Highlights, and a Stanford fellow desperate to build herself into an influencer. All names were double-checked at the door.

"Comrades," he adjusted the mic down to his bow tie, "we're gathered here today to stop the most pressing matter our civilization has ever faced, the never ending horde of Seans." A few cheers. "The only way we can ever ensure the end of the Sean is by uniting ourselves. Together we can wipe the

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Seans from history.” A red ribbon hung taut across the stage with ‘Sean’ tessellated across its cheapness. He raised his katana, “And with the cutting of this ribbon, we usher in a new era.” He swung the blade, severing the ‘Se’ from the ‘an’. Applause, cheers, hand flute whistles, fireworks.

A Q&A followed.

A reporter fired her hand towards the balloons in the rafters and shouted her question. “I don’t know what to make of all this anti-Sean hate, but isn’t it true, sir, that your name is Sean?”

He fumbled at the mic. “Absolutely not. That’s slander. How dare you!” He tapped his name tag three times. “It says ‘John’ right here, doesn’t it? What’s your name? How did you get in here? Security!”

“And isn’t it true,” she ignored his question, “that the name John, is the english translation of the name Sean?”

“No, of course not. Lies!”

“I have the evidence right here.” She held up a color printout of the Wikipedia entry for ‘Sean’. “All of your anti-Sean hate is a scheme. You’re a big phony!” she shouted.

Gasps. Whispers. Someone shrieked. Another screamed, “My life is a lie!” In their anger and confusion, the various anti-Sean groups began infighting. A chair was thrown. A pop-up table flipped. The bouncy castle was stabbed 87 times. Riot police marched in single file and tear-gassed the crowd.

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He hastily retreated through the rear exit, setting off the fire alarms as he booked down the street and leaped into the Hudson with the katana gripped between his teeth, and climbed onto a passing barge hauling empty tallboys out to sea. The captain's name was Sean Rodgers.

He was defeated, dejected, constipated, sitting squat on the single folding chair in his apartment, the news flipped to another missing white girl—the anti-Sean movement yesterday's yesterday story.

The revolution—*his* revolution—had fallen apart. For weeks after the convention marauders of particular-rival-ganged-Sean haters roamed downtown Manhattan and clashed in modern dance numbers, with knives, until enough twisted ankles forced them to disband. And then there were the new anti-anti-Sean hater groups who were hunting him. The rest returned to their digital enclaves and he was back to the liquor store, looking for solutions in the dregs of a tallboy. What he found was that too many Seans wasn't news. It just was.

The katana was on his lap and he polished the blade with a Lysol wipe, wondering where it all went so wrong. New neighbors hauled a mattress up the concrete stairs, rocking the TV on its milk crate.

His goldfish asked, "Now, that you've learned your lesson, buddy, how about that middle initial?"

He was about to concede when through the stucco he heard, "Where do you want this, Sean?" He skipped to the door and jammed his eye in the peephole. What he saw was a Sean wearing

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octagonal glasses and opportunity. He finished wiping off the blade, and picked at an olive rind between his teeth. It was already late afternoon. By nightfall there would be only 869,999,998 results for 'Sean'. He finished his tallboy, winked at his goldfish, raised the katana, and charged towards his name.

On that month's rent check the new neighbor's signature was spelled, 'S-H-A-U-N'.

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Expiration

Kevin M. Flanagan

It didn't matter to Tyke or Scab that the cure for the disease that decimated humankind was unaffordable to average Americans at the time of the outbreak. They also didn't care that the building they were both standing in was once Phoenix City Hall. What did matter to both of them, standing in the dusty ruins, was the single bottle of the aforementioned medicine found in a rotting desk drawer. Scab pondered the filthy bottle of neutral-colored fluid's label, which read 'Chimerizine' in perfect sans serif Arial letters.

She was called Scab not because her entire body was covered in scab-like growths or because the elders were particularly clever. She was called Scab because she was covered in scab-like growths and also regularly oozed. Tilting her head to get a better look at the bottle's label caused her wispy blonde wig to shift clumsily.

Reclined in a high back chair that once held the posterior of the Mayor of the City of Phoenix was Tyke, who didn't know what a Mayor or a City of Phoenix was. He kicked his crusty boots up on the decayed desktop, then reached up to scratch the left foot of his parasitic twin.

Tyke Junior, as Tyke called it, dangled mostly-

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formed from the side of Tyke's face in a meditative pose.

He was called Tyke not because the elders were particularly clever, but because they were not and he was very large. He called his parasitic twin Tyke Junior because it was small and attached to him.

Tyke was also not very clever. He flicked a bit of bloody devilpede chitin off his rotund belly then immediately regretted not eating it instead.

If Tyke Junior had eyes, a mouth, or a fully-developed brain, it might have been clever. It had none of those things. It did occasionally have small psychic premonitions, but Tyke rarely noticed them.

"So, explain it to me again," the more clever and larger of the two Tykes said.

Scab looked up from the bottle and smiled, her amber teeth like semi-transparent kernels of corn. She set the bottle on the desk and tucked her thumbs into her gun belt.

"It's simple, Tyke. This stuff makes the change stop. At least, that's what the elders say." Scab strutted around the former office of the former mayor of Phoenix, taking in the ruins. A pair of flags hung, moth-eaten and unremarkable, on two stanchions across from the desk. Scab stood between them, turning to Tyke. She wasn't sure why, but standing equidistant between two flags felt strangely powerful.

"What good is that? It's only one bottle." Tyke folded his fat hands over his belly. He was trying to focus,

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but every now and then he thought he heard the screaming of a devilpede in the distance. He didn't. It was a psychic echo of the devilpede Scab had shot to death outside before she and Tyke began looting the ruins of Phoenix City Hall. Tyke Junior was picking up the echo like a radio antennae, but Tyke rarely noticed such things and certainly didn't know what to attribute them to.

Scab laughed, which was unpleasant for everyone. She supplied the brains of the operation, whereas Tyke supplied muscle and comparatively good looks. Entrepreneurial thinking was beyond him, she mused. She'd have to lay it on thick.

"We aren't going to use it on ourselves, Tyke. We're going to barter it."

As Tyke shifted, the force of his bulk caused a small magnetic executive toy on the desk to swing over a field of faded possibilities. It snapped to "Reorganize" and lingered there.

Tyke's attention was divided. Scab continued, walking from between the two flag stanchions and over to a small podium nearby. She didn't know what a podium was, but the rotten hollow pillar of wood felt nice to stand behind.

"I'm certainly not going to benefit it, so it's only worth what we can trade for it. Imagine how many dog pelts we could get for this."

Tyke lacked imagination, but he did have a thought.

"I noticed some new teeth forming on my shoulder. Would this stuff stop that?" Tyke started to reach

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over his shoulder to scratch under his greasy denim vest, but accidentally bumped Tyke Junior in the motion. Tyke Junior bobbed rubberily about for a moment until Tyke stabilized him with one hand.

Scab slapped her forehead in frustration. It oozed. She reached out and wiped her hand on a colorful rag she knew was a flag of some kind but had no meaning to her.

“I’m sure it would stop you from growing pearly new shoulderteeth, but you’re thinking too small. We could get food, water, or more bullets. More bullets mean more safety, Tyke. Who cares if you have some extra teeth? We should all be so lucky.”

Scab thumped one hand on the podium for emphasis. It creaked and a cloud of dust puffed off it in a manner not unlike the dust from a devilpede’s gossamer wings.

Tyke strained to think, which caused Tyke Junior to kick one foot gently. The gesture used to make Scab uncomfortable, but she’d decided it was a good way to know if Tyke was straining his mental faculties to their fullest. She didn’t much care for it when Tyke thought, but it was rare enough it rarely came up.

“I just feel like I shouldn’t be burdened with a Tyke III just so you can have more stuff.”

Scab had to admit, that was perhaps the deepest thought Tyke had ever shared with her.

“We could both have more stuff, Tyke. More stuff for everyone. More stuff for little Tyke Junior.” Scab considered pounding her fist on the podium, but

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decided instead to step out from behind it.

“Well, if it’s worth a lot, we should try to make more. Could the elders figure out how to make more, if we brought them this?” Tyke pointed at the tiny bottle with one massive finger, which made the bottle look all the more tiny.

Scab laughed again and something dislodged in her throat. The disease had long spread to her insides, too, but at least she couldn’t be any worse. She spit then sat on the desk in her most coquettish pose, which resembled a seductive pile of wilted grapes covered in third-degree burns. She did have pleasantly shaped legs, though beauty standards had changed dramatically over the last ten decades. Tyke was also asexual, not that anyone ever asked.

“Why would we do that? If there’s too much supply, it won’t be worth as much. I’m only interested in us, Tyke.” Scab made a face that Tyke was not smart enough to recognize was meant to be sultry.

Tyke shrugged, and the magnetic toy on the desk swung aimlessly from his leviathanic shifting. It settled on ‘Sit on It’ briefly before resetting.

“We could make enough for everyone though. Then little babies won’t grow up to have little babies growing out of them. I’d like that. Everyone would.”

“Frak ‘everyone,’ Tyke. Who cares about a bunch of stupid dogfarmers? We crawled through this ruin, we killed that mutant devilpede outside. If ‘everyone’ wants to find treasure like this, then ‘everyone’ should risk death like us. We got the juice, so we’re the ones in charge. You might be okay

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with freeloaders,” Scab motioned at Tyke Junior, “but some of us work for what we earn.”

Tyke contemplated the toy on the desk. He rested the palm of his hand on the handle of the machete hanging from his belt. Tyke Junior had no opinion, nor mouth by which to vocalize one. Scab sensed the tension growing.

“Tyke, I’m sorry I brought Tyke Junior into this. I have an idea. A great idea.” Scab smiled her signature smile and reached out for the executive toy that captured Tyke’s attention, pulling it between them.

“Let’s let fate decide, okay? Whatever happens, we’ll go by this thing’s decision.” Scab had absolutely no intention of following what the toy said unless it agreed with her, but she was sure that Tyke would believe anything.

Tyke believed her. He was always the superstitious sort. He nodded in agreement, causing Tyke Junior to jig awkwardly. Scab clapped her hands.

“It’s settled then. We’ll respect the process.” Scab hopped up from the desk as Tyke stood slowly. Scab made mystic hand gestures over the metallic toy.

“Oh mighty tool of the venerable ancients, those that came before us and we must still follow regardless of context!” Scab spoke the words as an incantation, paraphrasing the elders’ opening prayer to all such prognostications. “Should we live like fat rich kings from this find or save the stupid and lazy generations of tomorrow?”

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“Please,” Tyke interjected. “Say please, they like that.”

“Please,” Scab added, though her tone suggested it was directed more at Tyke and not the spirits of the venerable ancients. Tyke nodded solemnly. Tyke Junior twitched with extrasensory dread and a spasm of muscle tension rippled through Tyke, though he remained unaware of its source.

With a flick of her finger, Scab set the toy in motion. As the pendulum magnet swung, Tyke didn’t see Scab placing one hand on her revolver. The magnet danced briefly and came to rest over the word ‘Tomorrow’.

Scab heaved a sigh and slowly drew her weapon. Tyke didn’t see this, but Tyke Junior sensed it, and this time Tyke must have been listening.

Without thinking, he hurled his machete in a sideways arc, cleaving Scab’s neck with the force of a guillotine. For an instant Tyke became aware of his symbiote’s will piloting his actions, the two of them linked together as one. He saw a glittering river of cosmic understanding as wide as the Milky Way and heard the song of the devilpedes far beneath the earth. The lotus of enlightenment bloomed in his third eye.

He didn’t even feel the bullet as it passed through his brain.

As Scab’s headless body toppled forward, both Tyke and Tyke Junior tumbled through the shattered window behind them, leaving the bottle of Chimerizine on the desk right where they’d found it.

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In the long silence that followed, neither Tyke nor Scab particularly cared what would happen to the medicine anymore. Moments later, Tyke Junior would join in this oblivion.

They, much like the Chimerizine, had expired.

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Road Dog

Anthony Dirk Ray

John was an over the road truck driver. He had a wife of 15 years named Kim. He would be at home one week out of the month on average. Kim worked part time as a receptionist at the Douglas Firm, and as a server on weekend nights at The Starry Eye Saloon. When they first got married, it was difficult for John to leave out on a run; but now, it's as if he couldn't wait to get back on the road. That's when Kim decided to take a job waitressing on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday night at the town's most popular strip club.

Kim was getting ready to go into work at the club on a Friday night when she called John.

He answered in an annoyed tone, as if he was being bothered, "Hello?"

"Wow, you answered."

"Yeah, I'm about to lay down. What's up?"

"Just wanted to talk to you for a minute before I go in. Where are you at now?"

"Huh? Yeah, umm, I'm outside of Dallas. I have a few stops out here and a few in the city, then I'll be headed west."

"Well, okay. The club job is paying well, but Jim is

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still flirting with me.”

There was silence, and Kim swore that she heard a female’s voice and giggling.

“Hello?” Kim said, in an agitated yet concerned tone.

“Umm, yeah, I’m here. Sorry. What did you say?”

“Jim keeps saying I’m wasting my talents waitressing. That I should be stripping. He said I have too good of a body not to. It’s making me feel uncomfortable.”

“Look, if he thinks you have what it takes, I say go for it. We could use the extra money. But don’t do anything to jeopardize the job you have now. Jesus, Kim. Do I have to hold your goddamn hand through this too?”

“It’s just that I don’t....”

“I need to get some sleep. I’ll call you in a day or two,” he interrupted.

John hung up the phone, laid back on the pillows in his sleeper, and continued getting what was said would be, ‘the best head outside of Dallas’. At that moment, John could not argue with such pristine logic. She was good. Hell, she ought to be, John thought. She’s had enough practice. Plus, the missing teeth never hurt. He worked one up, and blew it right to the back of her throat. John gave her the twenty dollars she requested, and a beer for the road to cleanse her palate.

Kim was having a rough night. There was a feature dancer in town from Dallas, and the club was packed

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with horny guys with big cowboy hats and even bigger belt buckles. She was running from the bar to the stage, back to the bar, and to the private rooms all night. A fella named Jimbo in one of the private rooms offered her \$1,000 to go home with him, which she kindly declined. Kim knew that her relationship was probably past mending, but she wasn't going to be the villain in this movie.

She was out back on her only break of the night smoking a cigarette, when the feature dancer came out and asked her for a light. The two chatted while they smoked. Kim envied her confidence, and the dancer's curvaceous body made her slightly jealous. The subject of home life and men came up. The dancer told Kim that she traveled so much, that having a normal relationship was out of the question. Kim spoke of John, and how he was hardly ever home. She opened up about his infidelity as well, and the two verbally crucified the trucker. Kim returned to the grind, and the dancer to grinding.

John woke and made the few pickups outside the city and headed to bustling Dallas. He had been there before, and absolutely detested the traffic. John inched and weaved through a web of highways and exits, and made all of his pickups by 6 p.m. He was ready for a shower and a six pack. He had a long haul ahead of him to California. John liked the girls at the truck stops in California. He thought about all the good times he had with the Mexican girls out there. He hoped that he could find his favorite though. She was a stacked black girl, with big tits and a huge ass, that he had seen a couple of times in

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the past. John loved her enormous ass, and how it completely engulfed his cock in the reverse cowgirl position. He was getting hard just thinking about it.

John pulled into the truck stop around 7 p.m. It was packed, but he finally found a spot near the back. He got his change of clothes, wallet, and toiletries, and headed to the showers. After his shower, he got dressed and went into the main store area to get him some beer. John wanted nothing more than to down a few brews and pass out watching his *Gunsmoke* DVD.

As he headed to pay for the beer, a sexy blonde in a summer dress caught his eye. She was looking at the roadmap section near the register. While he was in line, they made eye contact a few times and John made his way toward her.

“Well, hey there cutie. You’re looking for a map I see. Are you and your husband lost?”

“Oh, no. I’m not lost. I have GPS on my phone, I’m just looking at these brochures of attractions and places to see nearby. I’m just casually making my way to my sister’s place in Arizona. I haven’t had the problem of a husband in quite some time. Thank God.”

They both laugh and continue small talk about the weather, how terrible fast food is, and the huge statue of a wiener out by the road. John wanted to make a dick joke then, but thought it would be inappropriate, so he put a kibosh on that. She surprised him, when she said, “If you have even half of that, then I’m going with you.”

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John gave her a devilishly carnal grin, and said, "You might just have to find out. Hell, what's your name?"

"Sorry, I'm Liza," she said, as she extended her hand toward John.

He took her hand in his and said, "Liza. That's a beautiful name."

John held her delicate hand and could not get over how soft it was. He looked down at her perfectly painted nails and back up at her flawless smiling face and said, "Hell, Liza. I have all this beer to drink, and no one to drink it with. Would you like to have a few with me and continue this?"

Liza looked around as if she was contemplating saying no, but with a burst of exuberance, she said, "Get that pint of Jack Daniel's there, and you have yourself a drinking buddy."

John got a fifth of Jack and they headed to his truck. John walked behind Liza and watched her ass sway with every stride she took. He stared at her sexy golden legs. Her sun-kissed skin shimmered in the brightness of the store's large overhead lights on poles. John was used to the company of average to below average women, but Liza was leaps and bounds above them all, and most of all, she wasn't a lot lizard.

They arrived at the truck and John unlocked it and got in. He grabbed her hand to help her up, and couldn't help but notice the absence of a bra. Her sundress scrunched up in the front, exposing her exquisite, bronzed breasts. Once inside, John showed her around his tiny, traveling apartment. She told

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him it was quaint and homey. John opened them both a beer and poured some whiskey in his coffee mug. They drank and talked about John's job, his life on the road, and his failing marriage. John found it easy to talk to Liza. He thought, she's a beautiful woman, and she actually listens to me.

With the fifth about half empty, Liza turned to John and said, "This whiskey is making me hot."

"You want me to turn down the a.c. a little?"

"No, that's alright. I know what I'll do."

Liza stood as best as she could in the tiny space, pulled her sundress up over her head and tossed it at John.

"There. That's better. You don't mind do you?"

John looked up and down the sexy, bronzed female form in front of him and said, "Hell no. Not at all. Mind if I join you?"

"I was kinda hoping you would. Here let me help."

Liza moved close to John on the tiny twin bed and began undressing him. As she unbuttoned each button on his shirt, she would kiss from his neck and down his chest. She pulled his pants down and continued her kisses downward. John laid back and Liza bobbed and licked. She crawled up toward him and mounted. Liza's warm wetness enveloped him completely as she took him all in.

Afterwards they laid there, sweaty and exhausted. He told her to stay with him for the night, and in the morning, he would get her contact info so he could

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keep in touch with her.

When John woke the next morning Liza was gone. He figured she'd just gone inside to get some coffee. He noticed a piece of paper with some writing on it, and hoped she left her number for him. John wiped the sleep from his eyes, picked up the paper and read it.

John, I had a blast last night. Thanks for the drinks. Jack makes me a little wild, so sorry if I hurt you. I have to confess that our meeting wasn't as random as you may have thought. My dancer friend told me about you. She let me know where you would be, and said that I should show you a good time. I sure hope you enjoyed yourself.

P.S. Your wife wants a divorce. Also, you should never judge a book by its cover. You might want to go get tested.
Liza

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Billy Chocolate Penis

Ve Wardh

‘No woman will ever be truly satisfied because no man will ever have a chocolate penis that ejaculates money.’

Billy snorted as he spotted the oh so familiar e-card clogging up his newsfeed again. It was almost as funny as the first hundred times he’d seen it — the first hundred times that it had delivered its brutal emotional gut punch. He scrolled up to see who had posted it.

Alas, just a generic girl from his schooldays.

Good going, he thought, eyes boring into those staring back from her profile picture, keep contributing to the misogynistic notion that women are nothing more than shallow, materialistic creatures. That will validate you.

Opening her profile he could see she hadn’t changed much from when they’d last met. Though she’d traded in her curls for a maroon bob, and her packed lunches for a bottle of wine (mommy juice) it appeared that, like most, she was yet another person whose emotional intelligence had peaked in childhood and had resigned themselves to a life of ignorance.

Billy slammed his laptop shut and knuckled his eyes.

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My differences are what make me unique, and I should embrace them. Strength lies in differences. I define myself. I am enough. There is more to me than my knob.

He took a gulp of tea as bile rose in his throat and focussed on his affirmations. His journey of self-acceptance had been a long, arduous one and he was proud of where he was today. A mortgage, decent salary, and enough leisure time to devote to both hobbies and friends, he was living beyond what he could have ever imagined possible for someone like himself.

Yet sometimes the ignorance of others was trigger enough to send him back into a spiral of shame and loathing. You see, Billy *did* have a chocolate penis which indeed, *did* ejaculate money. One may be forgiven for thinking that Billy would be a regular ladies' man, swimming in cash — if the e-card were anything to go by at least.

But you'd be wrong.

It all started during the time most people can expect drastic, often embarrassing bodily changes — puberty. Billy had endured all the typical physical developments for a boy of his age and, being a somewhat sheltered only child, had no reason to believe any were out of the ordinary, including those of a penile nature.

As his penis grew from its initial light cream colour, deepening to a golden bronze before settling on a dark brown, his heart swelled with pride.

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Finally, he'd thought, I've finally gone and grown my adult penis. Poundtown, here I come!

He paraded about with the cocky swagger of your typical teen who had just sprouted their first pube and thought they'd found water on Mars, that is, until a couple weeks later.

'Dad?' he asked, hovering in the doorway to his father's study, 'Why am I...it's all weird down there. All hard, like.'

His father froze. A moment later he turned to face Billy and grinned knowingly. 'Don't worry Billy, m'boy. It's all natural. You see, when a guy is *really* into a girl—'

'Dad, no, no! I don't think it's...sexual...'

His father raised an eyebrow.

'It's just been hard for a while,' Billy sighed. 'Say about a week or so.'

His father's grin disappeared. He motioned for Billy to stay put as he ducked out of the room and thundered down the stairs. Billy could hear the panic in his father's voice as he exchanged hushed whispers with his mother. After a few minutes he reappeared, looking somewhat paler.

'Right-o, Billy, let's get you to the hospital then. No need to panic.'

They journeyed to the hospital in silence.

After running numerous tests, the medical personnel were still at a loss as to what had brought on Billy's prolonged erection and it's rich cocoa tint.

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Billy and his father had all but lost hope. They sat wordlessly in the waiting room awaiting the results of a penile scan. Billy thumbed through old magazines while his father simply stared at the wall opposite. They jumped as the doctor returned.

‘Well doc, what’s the news?’

The doctor paused. His eyes flickered to Billy’s before focusing on the floor in front of him.

‘I...’ he swallowed ‘I think it’s best you look yourself.’

Billy watched his father snatch the scan and held it in trembling hands.

‘What the fuck is this?’ he said, his voice cracking. ‘If my only son has dick cancer–’

‘Chocolate,’ the doctor said. ‘It’s all chocolate.’

Billy’s father slumped back into his seat, letting the scan flutter to the floor.

‘You mean...’

‘Yes. Nothing but pure milk chocolate.’ A frantic laugh escaped the doctor’s lips as his eyes finally settled on Billy’s. ‘It’s hollow even, like an Easter egg!’

The next few months weren’t easy. His mother had cried for weeks, then upon entering some sort of acceptance phase made it a point to drill home the concepts of *self-love* and *body positivity* into Billy’s head. He’d ploughed through stacks of self-help books at her insistence, yet no matter how deeply he read there was nothing close to anyone suffering

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from a chocolate penis, nor *thriving* with one for that matter. He eventually sunk into a deep depression.

It wasn't until a few years later when he'd come to accept his chocolate member, more or less. Sure, skinny dipping was still out of the question, but it wasn't something he'd actively wallow about any longer. He'd even landed himself a girlfriend. All was good.

Until he finally lost his virginity.

It started out in a relatively normal fashion: her parents out, awkward small talk, a clumsy kiss that lead to even clumsier pawing, until they found themselves undressed and under the sheets.

Billy had come prepared. Given his condition, he knew he had to be extra careful, and you can't go wrong with double bagging. The lights also had to be off — complete darkness. Couldn't risk her seeing.

He suppressed a grin as she voiced her surprise at his hardness.

Forcing all thoughts of his chocolate Johnson from his mind, he focussed solely on the entry. After some fumbling, he made it in. He breathed a sigh of relief, then relaxed. This is it. This is finally it.

'Fuck!'

A white-hot bolt of pain stabbed through his groin as he pulled back with a scream. His hands shot to his crotch and his breath caught in his throat as his fingers landed in a hot, sticky mass.

His penis had melted away.

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‘What the fuck?’

His girlfriend jumped up and switched on the lamp before Billy could protest. Her eyes landed on the melted chocolate smeared below Billy’s navel, his manhood reduced to a little wet nub. She screamed as she recoiled at the sight of it.

A loud squelch silenced her immediately. The condoms plopped to the floor from between her legs. Billy’s penis, still encased in its latex cocoon, was now nothing more than a twisted, misshapen brown lump.

The last thing he saw before he passed out was his last chocolatey inch dropping off onto the bedsheets beneath him.

The aftermath was the most humiliating thing Billy had ever experienced, including the time his penis had been chipped by a rogue football to the crotch. His girlfriend’s parents had returned home not long after the incident to find their daughter crying hysterically on the floor, with an unconscious Billy sprawled out on the bed wearing nothing but chocolate from the waist down.

The hospital visit wasn’t much better. Thanks to the marvels of modern medicine, the medics had salvaged most of the chocolate and shaped Billy a new penis, albeit an inch or so shorter than the old one (‘We scraped all we could from your body, but there wasn’t much we could do about what was on the sheets, you see.’)

They’d even rescued the condoms. Billy looked on in horror as they shook out the contents onto a tray at

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his bedside. The average man ejaculates about 4ml of cum per ejaculation, whereas Billy approximated about £5.23.

‘Explains the pain,’ the nurse said.

They’d gone on to say that any chances of Billy reproducing were basically nil, given that the typical English coin rarely contained any traces of viable sperm cells, though they allowed him to at least keep the money.

‘Enough to get that girl a card to say you’re sorry,’ his father said, before bursting into tears.

They sent Billy home a few days later with a newly reconstructed chocolate wang and a prescription for a *Clone-a-Willy Ultra Realistic Penis Home Cloning Kit* should anything else like this happen again.

He’d come a long way since then. Yes, he was now celibate, but he’d gotten himself an education, a home, a career, and just an all-round wonderful life. Dare he say, he loved it.

However, he thought, as he scrolled the comments on the cruel, sadistic e-card that had so often plagued him while innocently perusing his socials, some people are just sick in the head. What sort of person would wish such an existence on someone in the first place? What a horrific life — and for what? Just a bit of validation. The cruelty of some people never ceases to amaze me.

He sighed and sipped the last of his tea. He’d never understand how someone could be so insensitive. If the original creator of this tasteless joke could

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fathom for even a second what life was like for the poor bastards with chocolate penises that ejaculated money, they'd likely think twice before making light of such misfortune. Ruthless bastards.

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Nude Dancer Loses Her Head in Tapas Bar

Jonathan Woods

Itztli loved life. He also feared the old gods. And the new.

His name in Aztec meant obsidian knife.

In the beginning, when he was three, his family crossed the Rio Grande by car over a bridge. The river flowed below them, brown and sluggish as an overfed python. On the American side they settled in Brownsville. Many aunts and uncles remained behind in Matamoros.

In his last year of high school, Itztli got his learner's permit. Two months later his Texas driver's license. A week later he dropped out of school and began running blow up to Dallas. His cousin Alberto got him the job. Dallas was a credit card with no limit—all the blow you could sell and more. Itztli made a ton of money—designer shirts, a gold Rolex, a goosed-up Camaro V8 (black with deeply tinted windows), alligator boots. Oh, and a Glock 9mm tucked under the dash. In Brownsville between runs he spent his time trying to get Miranda, his high school sweetheart, to open her legs. Miranda had sworn to Jesus that she would be a virgin when she got married. What a pain in the fucking ass.

After a while he moved on from Miranda. There

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were lots of girls who wanted a badass boyfriend. But, alas, like Miranda they had all sworn to remain unviolated until their wedding night. Only the hookers offered cold solace; laughed at his inexperience. Held him afterward while he said his prayers and burned an offering.

On a Tuesday in February, a week after Itztli turned 21, Ryo called him into his office in the back of a certain garage (chop shop) on the Mex side of the Rio Grande. Though it was a cool winter day, Itztli's forehead and upper lip, caught in the overhead fluorescent lights, glistened with sweat.

Ryo: They tell me you're doin' good, kid.

Itztli: Yeah, sure, Mr. Ryo. Everything's like copacetic.

Ryo: I need you to do something special for me.

Itztli: You got it, Mr. Ryo.

Ryo: There's two guys up in Dallas tryin' to rip me off.

Ryo drew the index finger of his right hand across his throat.

Itztli: Permanent vacation, right Mr. Ryo?

Ryo: Don't be a smart ass.

Itztli: Sorry, Mr. Ryo. I didn't mean no disrespect.

Ryo waved his hand dismissively. Itztli turned to leave.

Ryo: Do it tomorrow. And take Rita with you.

Rita? A girl! Why did he have to take a girl along?

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But he didn't say anything.

* * *

A white T-shirt tight across her distractingly verbose chest said in pink lettering: cute but unstable.

That about sums it up, thought Itztli.

Garishly painted red lips, a mole (real or fake an open question) on her right cheek, jet hair cut in a short, jagged style with a white streak down one side, pock-marked skin, deep cenote eyes, a gold nose ring, a tiny green spider tat on her neck. And the weirdest thing, a black eyepatch with a red heart over her left eye. Itztli guessed 23, 24. Somewhere in there. The rest: black leather jeans, short French-looking boots (also black leather), a small backpack at her feet. She stared one-eyed at the drab winter scene flying by outside the Camaro an hour out of Brownsville, heading northeast along the coast before turning north toward San Antonio, Austin and Dallas.

Itztli thought about asking her if she wanted to stop somewhere and fuck. But he was nervous and held off. What if she agreed?

What if she pulled a gun out of her backpack?

Any way you looked at it, having Rita along for the ride was nerve-racking as shit. Maybe even scary.

Who was she? Why had Ryo sent her along?

With his teeth he pulled a cigarette from a crumpled pack of Kools, reached into his pocket for a lighter.

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He held the cigarette pack out to Rita.

She made a face and shook her head. When he lit up, she lowered the passenger side window. At 80 mph wind noise filled the Camaro like a heavy metal band.

Itztli: How do you know Ryo?

Rita: Family.

Itztli arched one eyebrow. The one Rita couldn't see. Family!?

Itztli: Why'd he want you to come on this trip with me?

Rita: Fuck if I know.

Great, he thought. Here he was, sent to take out a pair of psycho scumbags up in Dallas. Ordered by the boss to bring some goth punk princess along to ride shotgun. A girl somehow related to the boss. Was this some kind of test?

Itztli: Do you know what Ryo wants us to do?"

No reaction. Itztli mashed out his half-smoked cigarette.

Itztli: Snuff two assholes who're fucking with Ryo's business."

Rita looked over at him. A smile snaked across her apple-red lips.

Rita: Well, it's about time somebody told me what's up. You ever kill anyone before, Itztli?"

* * *

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Around Austin, after they stopped for Popeye's fried chicken sandwiches and Cokes, Rita fell asleep. Her torpid body slumped sideways until her head rested against Itztli's shoulder. She smelled herbal. It was dark when they rolled into Dallas's southern suburbs and Rita awoke. Yawned.

Rita: Where are we?

Itztli: Just comin' into Big D.

He realized her hand rested on his blue jeansconced cock. She gave it a friendly and unsolicited squeeze.

Rita: Let's stop someplace. I'm in the mood for love.

They took a room at a Hilton Garden Inn along the highway. It was the most incredible blowjob he'd ever had. The blowjob of a lifetime! Don't stop. No, no, wait. I'm almost there. Ahhhhhhhhh. Itztli wanted more.

Rita: I can't. I'm saving myself for my husband.

Itztli kept his cool. Went down on her instead of raping her. She fell asleep in his arms.

* * *

In the backroom office of the Vampire Tapas Bar & Strip Club, Itztli hung like a smoked Peking duck in the window of a Chinatown butcher shop. Arms tied together and stretched to the rafter above him; toes of his bare feet barely able to touch the tabletop. Blood bubbled from his mouth and down his chin. His flesh screamed from the kicks and blows.

OK, he'd fucked up. But where was Rita when he

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really needed her?

Through the blurred vision of one swollen eye, he could see the three of them sprawled around the table, passing a bottle of silver tequila back and forth, their 9mm pistols and bottles of Dos Equis displayed randomly on the tabletop.

Bandido #1: Amigos, I've got to get some shuteye, so let's off this cabron.

Bandido #2: Sheeet, amigo. We got time for one more beer.

Bandido #1: Nah. Let's just do him. Then it's sweet dreams for me.

Fed up with all the back and forth and generally pissed off, Bandido #3 leaped to his feet and grabbed for his pistol. But before he could shoot Itztli, a bullet hole appeared in the back of his head. The bullet tore around the inside of his skull, wreaking life-ending havoc. He slumped to the floor. Two seconds later a pink-handled stiletto, pitched end-over-end, penetrated one of Bandido #1's eyes and deep into his brain—turning life to mush. It really didn't matter which eye—left or right. Dead was dead. Bandido #2, barely on his feet, took two bullets in the heart. As Rita cut Itztli down, Joan Jett's 'Do You Want to Touch Me' pounded through the walls from the main club room. The nude dancer on the stage, writhing to the music and the flashing red, blue and white lights, appeared in Itztli's head.

She looked exactly like Rita.

Meanwhile, on her way to the dressing room,

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another (less imaginary) nude dancer—Mayan features, heavy pagan breasts, shaved snatch—heard the gunshots. Stupidly she opened the door and stared dumbly at the three dead bodies. You don't have to be very bright to be a nude dancer.

Before she could scream, a machete sliced through her neck, sending her head sailing like a volleyball into the corner. Blood spritzed everywhere.

Itztli fell to his knees, mumbling nonsense to the gods.

Rita wiped the machete blade clean and sank it back into its leather scabbard, retrieved the stiletto from Bandido #1's eye and tapped Itztli on the shoulder.

Rita: Come on blowjob buddy, let's get out of here. Oh, and you owe me.

* * *

Next up, Rita's story.

I was sent to convent school in Leon when I was 8 years old and left after high school. The nuns hated me. My father, Ryo, being an up-and-coming gangster.

My mother (an 18-year-old prostitute) ran away shortly after I was born. She's probably dead now. Fleshless bones in a hole in the ground, so you can't see the needle marks on her arms. Ryo acknowledged his paternity and handed me to a wet nurse.

In convent school I was a regular fucking little rebel without a cause. A succubus. Over time I came to

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enjoy having my ass beaten black and blue by the nuns—absolutely amazing orgasms. I think the nun's got off too. By age ten I had my own girl gang. So after that some low-level gang-member wannabe always took the fall for whatever shit we got up to. Unless, of course, I was in the mood for a hot bottom.

I saw my father twice a year. The day school began and the day school ended. I never went home for holidays. Me and a couple of other girls stayed on at the deserted school. We smoked weed, read poetry aloud and watched horror movies. In the summer Ryo sent me to an estancia in the Yucatan. Life on the ranch fell into a routine, horseback riding, target practice with handguns and AK-47s, masturbating and fending off the horny vaqueros. I longed to be ass-whipped but none of them had the nerve. I was the daughter of a drug kingpin.

When I turned 18, my father wanted me to join the family business, which was now big business, having been merged into the Gulf Cartel.

I told him to go fuck himself and walked out.

But I stayed in Matamoros and started taking classes at the community college in Brownsville. To pay for my little apartment I got a job as a nude dancer at a club on the coast highway south of town—cement blocks painted slime green and a flashing neon sign: GIRLS, GIRLS, GIRLS.

It was a fun job. Great exercise. Good money. You had to be quick on your feet to avoid all the calloused hands grabbing at your tits and ass. And,

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OK, the management shook me down for 15% of my tips. But what's a poor girl to do? I learned how to use a switchblade to fend off the psychos lurking outside when I left work, dreaming of kidnapping me back to their adobe-brick hovels for weird sex and torture. I stuck two or three, one bled out. After that, just the glint of the blade in moonlight sent them packing. The knife had a pink plastic handle. I kept it in my designer clutch along with my lipstick, eye shadow, car keys, tissues and the antique silver snuff box for my coke.

A few years went by like snapping your fingers. Then one day Ryo found out how I paid the rent. He dragged me out of the club and beat me to a pulp. That's how I lost my eye. The club owner went into a shallow grave.

At age 22 I joined the family business. It was either that or another beating, which I didn't think I would survive.

A couple of months later I met Itztli.

* * *

In their room at the Hilton Garden Inn (not the one they'd stayed in coming up to Dallas, but another outside San Marcos, just south of Austin), Itztli sat on the bed and stared at Rita standing there, stark naked except for a pair of stiletto heels. A black bush (like a tarantula) level with his chest. Belly hard and flat. High breasts pointed and dangerous—one of them could have easily poked your eye out. Her underarms hairy and obfuscating in equal measure with her crotch. In the background floral wallpaper,

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an ordinary bedside lamp with a glass base. Everything just like in that famous 'art' photo by Helmet Newton except Itztli wasn't wearing a suit.

Rita stared back. Finally Itztli blinked and she got down on her knees and unzipped his fly.

But she again refused to let him to fuck her. Refused to engage in mutual coitus.

Itztli: I love you.

Rita: You love what my mouth does to you.

Silence. The rumble of the ice machine down the hall.

Rita: I need your help.

Itztli: What's up?

Rita: I want... I need to kill my father.

Itztli: And who might that be?

Rita: Ryo.

Ryo!

Itztli: You're joking. Ha, ha.

Rita: That he's my father? Or that I want to kill him?

Itztli looked thoughtful.

Itztli: If you'll cohabit with me, I'll help you.

Rita: Cohabitate? You mean like get married?

Itztli: Yeah. And kids.

Rita: Wow! That sounds like a major, major, major commitment.

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She gnawed on her lower lip as her brain blitzed and sizzled. Finally:

Rita: Well, what the hey, you only live once. Right, blowjob buddy? It's a deal.

They slapped hands.

* * *

Ryo sat alone in his chop shop office doing paperwork. Always the goddamn endless paperwork. He took another sip of small still mescal. His personal label.

His two bodyguards, Facundo and Angel, lounged out front, drinking Mexican

Coca Colas and catching a few February rays. Their eyelids drooped. From behind a pot of red geraniums, a green lizard darted forth. Then retreated.

Rita stepped out of a shadow, touched the gun barrels of twin .38 Colt Cobra revolvers to the foreheads of Facundo and Angel.

Rita: Rise and shine, boys. And don't make any quick moves.

Their eyes fluttered open, grew round with fear.

Itztli rolled them onto their stomachs and bound hands and feet with zip ties. Pressed duct tape over their mouths. Dragged them into the back of one of the garage bays.

Rita: Ready, baby?

Itztli nodded. They burst into Ryo's office.

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Ryo looked up, bemused, bewildered, nonplussed and bamboozled. Quickly he regained his suave coolness and, standing up, walked around his desk with a smile.

Rita: I hate you. You beat the shit out of me and put my eye out.

She shot him in both legs and both arms. Ryo lay on the floor, screaming bloody murder. Together Rita and Itztli heaved him face-up on the desktop.

Rita: Your turn.

Itztli drew an obsidian blade from his back pocket. He looked into Ryo's eyes awash with fear and pain, then spat in his face. He tore open Ryo's shirt, buttons flying, and with the obsidian knife cut out Ryo's pulsing heart and held it aloft. Blood dripped down Itztli's arms, stained his T-shirt scarlet.

* * *

Rita swiveled back and forth in Ryo's ergonomic Italian leather office chair. Nice. Very nice.

Itztli appeared, pushing the two bodyguards before him, their hands still bound by zip ties, mouths still taped shut. Their eyes bugged out as they took in the pertinent details: Ryo's corpse dumped in a corner like a piss-stained remnant of cheap wall-to-wall carpet, his now unbeating heart displayed on a Talavera pottery plate on the desk. Itztli ripped off the duct tape covering their mouths. (Ouch! Ouch!)

Rita (leaning back, feet on desk): OK babosos, your choices are: join Ryo in Hell or henceforth work for me. What's it to be?

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Facundo: You're the boss, Rita.

Angel: That goes double for me.

Rita: Bueno.

She nodded at Itztli.

Rita: You've met my fiancé, Itztli. He'll be numero dos around here. I want you boys to spread the word to the rest of the gang. Rita and Itztli are the new badass jefes.

Then she raised one of the .38s and shot Facundo in the forehead.

Rita: Está claro, Angel?

Angel (between chattering teeth): Si, si, si!

* * *

Ryo's and Facundo's bodies were dragged out and tossed in a dumpster. The day was ending. Blood-red clouds streaked the western horizon. Neon lights blinked on outside the cantinas and taquerias.

In Rita's (formerly Ryo's) office behind the chop shop, Itztli watched Rita take off her clothes and lie languidly across the \$8,000 Roche Bobois sofa residing against the back wall. She motioned to him with one finger.

Rita: You can fuck me now.

As Itztli began his assigned task, he mumbled a quick and dirty prayer to Xochiquetza, goddess of fertility. Rita stared impassively at an amoeboid stain on the ceiling. Should she have a full-blown Catholic wedding with 500 guests? Or should they just fly to

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Lake Tahoe for the weekend?

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TulipsDeluxe

Earl Javorsky

It looked like a flower, but its petals felt like skin and were warm to the touch. Kevin Peterson stood in the corner of his father's bedroom and, with his thumb and index finger, gently stroked the downy green stalk. The flower had a strange shape that he couldn't quite identify, something like a pair of lips oriented vertically, slightly parted, as if breathing, or ready to speak. The lips were pink and pouty, the outer petals more delicate and pale.

Congratulations on your purchase of TulipsDeluxe™ Model VI (v3N031206)! This genetically enhanced botanical creation is guaranteed to provide beauty and pleasure. Pheromones and other personal aspects of your loved one are represented in this unique creation by means of state-of-the-art gene-splicing techniques.

Proper feeding and care of your TD-6 must be scrupulously maintained. Please refer to the next section.

Wayne Peterson, CEO of QNET Enterprises, enters his bedroom and locks the door behind him. He pours a glass of scotch and downs it in a single swallow, but his hands still tremble slightly, his forehead is damp, and beads of perspiration have gathered on his upper lip. He stands by his flower, bending to admire the slender neck, the beauty of

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the pistil with its voluptuous, fleshy stigma. The tank is itself a work of art, sturdy plex with a polished maple veneer, filled with porous urethane beads and a constantly circulating nutrient flow. Wayne vacillates for a moment—should he stand, or sit on the edge of the bed? He chooses to stand. As he unbuckles his belt, the flower begins to stir, the slightly parted lips widening now, thickening as if engorged. Wayne drops his trousers and shorts. The flower rises and undulates like a cobra and then strikes home, suddenly large enough to accommodate all of him, his shaft buried as the plant begins to ripple in a steady peristaltic motion.

EXTREMELY IMPORTANT! It is imperative that all instructions are followed without deviation!

The next day, after school, Kevin returned to his father's bedroom to look at the plant. It drew him to it in a way he couldn't understand, as though it were calling him, and he had been thinking about it since he woke that morning. He had seen this kind of flower before; his friend Eric's father had one in his office at their home. Kevin and Eric had wondered what it was, since Eric's dad didn't care much about plants. That flower didn't have any effect on Kevin at all. Eric's mother had also died—though not in an accident like Kevin's mom—and the flower showed up about two months later. It was Eric who noticed the interesting serrated shape of the leaves and decided that they might be worth smoking. The boys were thirteen now and had been blasting reefer for almost a year.

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Kevin pinched a single leaf and stuffed it into the little pipe he kept stashed in a flashlight that he had rigged to work on one battery. He sat down in his dad's chair and fired up the pipe. He sucked in as the leaf ignited. The smoke was smooth and tasted sweet and familiar. He swayed slightly to the left, then overcorrected to the right until he was leaning at an uncomfortable angle in the chair, staring at the flower. He thought of sitting back up, or leaning on the armrest, but he couldn't connect to the action. It wasn't important now, anyway, because he couldn't see. A blackness enveloped him, deeper than blindness could ever be, his head roaring with sounds he couldn't decipher, and his penis felt like it was ready to burst through his pants; it was taking over all other sensation, it was all there was and all that mattered. Now the blackness had brilliant points of violet, like dark stars in an alien universe, and the points began to arrange themselves into a form. Kevin recognized the contour of the flower, and he understood its shape. He tried to bring his hand to his zipper, but couldn't bring the command forth with sufficient strength, and now the roaring in his ears began to differentiate into a moaning sound—his own voice, he realized, though he was powerless to stop it—and a woman speaking. First he could only make out his name, "Kevin..." and then, "No, Kevin, Oh, no, no..." It was his mother's voice, and he saw her now, sitting on the polished wood edge of the planter.

"Sit up, for God's sake."

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“I can’t.”

“Fine, don’t then.” She was naked, her breasts hanging powerfully, her lips bigger than he remembered, and her hair cut short like when he was little. “Do you want to help me?”

No, he didn’t want to help her, she was dead, killed in a car wreck that his father had miraculously walked away from, and Kevin had finally accepted that she was gone, but he couldn’t shake his head, and he couldn’t deny his mother, and his voice said, “Sure, how?” And she told him. When she was through, the blackness returned, and Kevin felt fingers deftly unbuttoning his pants, pulling down the zipper, reaching through his shorts; he felt an exquisite softness and warmth, his back arched as he thrust forward and exploded in a wet streaming rush, and then he collapsed into the comfort of his father’s leather chair.

WARNING! Feed only with AminoTD™ nutrient solution. Do not place tank near open aquarium or terrarium. Do not leave solid foods within vicinity of your TD-6. This finely tuned creation is extremely sensitive to non-prescribed organics. Your warranty will be void if feeding instructions are violated.

Kevin spent the next weeks following his mother’s instructions. Every day when he got home from school he fed the plant. When the nutrient solution was gone, he raided the refrigerator. The flower would appear to be normal in size, but each day he had to scoop more of the plastic beads out of the tank, and each day when he placed food on the smooth wood ledge of the tank the flower would

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rear up and inflate alarmingly and then swoop down upon its meal. Baloney, butter, ice cream, steak: these were his instructions, instructions given to him each afternoon as he sat paralyzed in his father's chair. And then he would be rewarded for being such a good boy. On the eighth day he was told to be a hunter.

"A hunter? What does that mean?"

"You know what it means. Get me something alive."

"That's gross, Mom." Calling her Mom was even grosser, but she seemed to require it. Of course, he was not about to deny her. He spent his allowance, then stole money from his dad, and bought mice, then rats, then a fat guinea pig at the pet store. A damaged pigeon, the neighbor's yapping terrier, and, finally, a cat with four kittens that had been offered for free (to a good home) in front of the corner market.

On Friday, at the end of a bad week at the office, Wayne Peterson storms into his bedroom, locks the door, and pulls the cork from a bottle of Remy Martin. He drinks from the bottle as he undresses, then sits on the side of his bed, facing the plant, and says,

"Honey! I'm home!"

The plant begins its slinky dance—it seems bigger than usual, but Wayne doesn't care—and snakes up and toward Wayne, suddenly enlarging and towering over him. When it strikes, it engulfs him like a boa constrictor swallowing a rabbit; by the

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time he screams he is already inside and suffocating.

Kevin's father had been missing for two days. Kevin hadn't visited his dad's bedroom during that time; his mom had told him his work was done after he had brought her the cat family, which was just as well because he was sure he couldn't bring another living thing into that room. Nor were curiosity, desire, or loneliness enough to overcome the revulsion he felt. But on the third day he heard his name being called from the bedroom: "Kevin... Kevin dear..." This after a morning of thumping and clattering noises emanating from beyond the closed door, which now opened even before Kevin touched the knob.

Inside, standing at the end of the bed, was his mother, far from the nutrient tank. She was wearing his father's striped terry cloth bathrobe, and though her hands looked right coming out of the sleeves, when Kevin looked down to where feet should be all he saw were two undifferentiated root-like masses.

"Mom!"

"I'm leaving now." She pointed back to the tank. "I left you a little sister."

Kevin looked at the tank. The plastic beads had been replaced, and there, small and frail, was a new green shoot and a flower.

He stared hungrily at the serrated leaves on his sister's slender stalk.

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Hog City Needs You

Joseph Farley

It was a slow day in Hog City, at least it was until Mickey Finster ran into the Sheriff's office.

"Sheriff Clapp. Come quick! There's trouble over at the whorehouse!"

Fortunately, Sheriff Clapp had already finished butt fucking his deputy and had already been in the process of zipping up his fly.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"There's been a major burglary," shouted Finster. "And the crook's done been seen making off with the goods."

Clapp hustled across the street to McMurty's Saloon and Pleasure House. It was the only house of ill repute around for over fifty miles. It and the railway emergency coaling station were the only things that kept Hog City going.

Sheriff Clapp entered through the swinging doors. He eyed the bar. There was the usual selection of drunk cowboys and professional gamblers. He went over to Sam, the bartender, who told him to go upstairs to see Miss Felicia.

As he climbed the stairs, he could hear Miss Felicia crying, "A three hunert dollar investment gone, just

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like that.”

The sheriff found Miss Felicia in a small room containing not much more than a bed and a stand for a wash basin. Miss Felicia had been put out to pasture as a whore after a thirty years in the sporting life. She had taken what little she had, turning tricks where and when she could until she scraped up enough money to buy into the saloon as a partner. Her role was finding and managing the whores. Now, Miss Felicia sat on the bed, all three hundred pounds of her. Tears had made her make up run in blue streaks down her face. Her gray hair, tinged with henna, seemed to have collapsed from its normal tower on her head into a tangle running down her back.

“What’s wrong Miss Felicia?” Sheriff Clapp asked.

Miss Felicia’s eyes brightened. “Thank goodness you are here. Billy Hodges done stole Nancy Jenkins right out the window. The two of them climbed down bed sheets and rode off on Billy’s horse.”

Sheriff Clapp was thunderstruck. “He did what?”

He knew Billy Hodges. He was a young layabout, a sometime cow puncher and farmhand, would be gambler, and outlaw wannabe. He’d expected Billy to wind up more or less on the right side of the law most of the time, and finish his days respectfully, drunk in the gutter just like his father. This was a big step for Billy Hodges, and Sheriff Clapp wasn’t sure he liked it. Nancy Jenkins was the youngest and best looking whore at McMurty’s, making her the youngest and best looking whore around for more

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than fifty miles around. This did not set well with Sheriff Clapp. Without Nancy Jenkins around, how would he while away his Sunday afternoons? He had just gotten her to the point where the last bit of girlish squeamishness was gone, and she would let him indulge in any activity he fancied with her, even three ways with his horse or deputy. Without her, the next best whore was Wallpaper Sally, but Sheriff Clapp didn't like the scabs on Sally's cunt. They scratched his cock when he slid it in to her. She'd pick'em if a customer complained, to make things slide in easier, but that didn't make the ride any more appealing to some folks, Sheriff Clapp included. But, Clapp couldn't let his own feelings affect the way he did his job. At least not now, while he was in town. Anyone could be listening.

"How do you know," Clapp asked. "that Nancy was stolen? Er, kidnapped. Sounds like she might have gone with Billy of her own accord."

"It's all the same," Miss Felicia said. "Either Billy stole her or she stole herself. Either way my property is gone and so is my livelihood."

"You can't own a person," Clapp said. "We fought a war about that."

"Don't give me that crap," Miss Felicia shouted. "This ain't no person. This is a whore. I know whores. I've been one near all my life. Whores just can't up and go as they please. They is owned by the madam or the whore master. They can kiss the cock or kiss the whip, but they ain't going nowhere unless their pimp or madam says so. Nancy has three more years on her contract with me, and it says right in

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there time is added on to work off her food, clothing, and medical expenses, plus and extra two years for every time she tries to run off.”

“Nancy signed a contract?”

“I’ve got a paper with her X on it.”

“Sounds like breach of contract. I don’t know if that is for me to look into, but I’ll find her to see if she went off on her own or was kidnapped.”

“Stolen,” Miss Felicia corrected him.

Sheriff Clapp left the saloon. He knew well enough what Nancy and Billy looked like, and had a fair idea where they’d be heading. He figured they would be looking for a preacher or a way out of the county, or possibly going to hole up together in the old Hodges’ cabin. That was if Nancy had gone away on her own. If not, Billy might be off raping and killing her if he’d lost his mind. If he was smart, Billy might be taking her to sell to another whorehouse or to work the streets for him in a city. But, Sheriff Clapp didn’t think Billy was that crazy or that smart. He was just dumb enough to fall in love with a whore, or think he could save her.

On the street Old Man Fletcher ran up to Clapp. “I just heard about Nancy,” Fletcher said. “You gotta get her back. She has these lips, they’re almost prehensile. She wraps them around your cock and...” Fletcher stopped himself, as if suddenly thinking this wasn’t the right thing to say. “Listen,” he continued. “You have to get her back. The economy of this whole town is dependent on that whorehouse, and without Nancy, there are really no

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whores there worth having. No Nancy, no whorehouse. No whorehouse, no town. You gotta bring her back.”

Clapp said he'd do what he could do. He had a lot of respect for Fletcher. After the war, Clapp had come west. He'd tried work as a cowboy and as a rustler. He'd worked laying track, and robbing trains. There had been no job he really liked or was good at. The only talent he had was with a gun. Fletcher saw something in him. He had given him a chance as a hired gun guarding his small bank. And later, with Fletcher's influence, Clapp had been made sheriff of Hog City. The job had got him respect, and a home. Without it, he'd have never met his wife Hilda, or gotten the chance to start a family. Law or no law, Clapp had a lasting debt to Fletcher that he meant to pay back. He would bring back Nancy. He saddled his horse.

He called to his deputy, “If I'm not back with her by sundown tomorrow, get a pussy, er, posse, and come lookin'.”

Sheriff Clapp road out of town. Both his pistols were loaded. A rifle lay across the pommel of his horse. Billy'd probably put up a fight, which was okay by him. Likely the boy would be lynched if Clapp brought him back to town alive. He never liked selfish folk. Nancy was the best lookin' and best fuckin' woman in these parts, There weren't a man or boy around who wouldn't kill to get his share of her. The nerve of that boy. He checked Hodges' place. They weren't there. So he road off towards Johnny Blog's homestead. Blog had been a preacher

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in his younger days, before he discovered the joys of whiskey and fucking sheep. Might be that Billy and Nancy had sought out Blog for a quick wedding.

Blog was in the barn with his pants down when Clapp rode up. Blog's hands were full with the back legs of a ewe. Clapp called to him.

"Just a minute," Blog shouted. "I'm almost done."

Clapp waited patiently for the man to finish. Blog came out of the barn, his overalls were back on. He was wiping his hands on a rag. "Thanks for waiting. Had to tenderize some meat before it goes to market. What can I do for you Sheriff? Been a long while since you been out these parts."

"Lookin' for a thief. Billy Hodges done run off with Nancy Jenkins."

"Why that lying bastard. He was here not an hour ago. Said he bought her fair and square. I didn't think he had that kind of money, but he said he had a real good hand at poker."

"He was here? An hour ago? What did he want?"

"What ya think? He wanted me to hitch him to Nancy. I said sure, for five dollars. He didn't have five dollars. So I said, okay, how's two. He didn't have two. So I said, Nancy's a hard working girl who knows a lot of tricks. Why don't the two of you get naked with me and some of the sheep and y'all can work it off. He cursed me out somethin' fierce and told me they'd ride down to the old Spanish mission and look up the old priest there who works with the injuns."

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"Thanks for the information." Clapp tipped his hat and spurred his horse.

Blog shouted after him, "Bring her back! We need a piece of ass like that around here."

It was dark when Sheriff Clapp reached the mission. He could see candle light in the church. He rode straight up to the door and burst through on his horse. The priest looked up in surprise. His cassock was up around his waist exposing his hairy legs and long thin cock. He was standing over Nancy who was naked on all fours giving him head while Billy did her ass.

"Madre dios!" the priest screamed and pulled down his cassock.

"You done already?" Nancy said.

Billy whirled around reaching for his gun, but Sheriff Clapp drilled a hole in his chest.

"Now why'd you do that?" Nancy screamed. "You coulda had some if you just waited."

"Murderer!" the priest said pointing at Clapp, so the sheriff plugged him too. He never liked papists.

"You're comin' with me Nancy. Hog City needs you."

He pulled the naked girl onto his horse and road back out of the church. He fucked her three times on the way back to town, once while they were still riding.

Clapp apologized to Nancy for ruining her wedding. She didn't seem too upset.

"I didn't know how boring he was until I had to

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spend all day with him,” she explained. “Guess its for the best. I’d probably have run off on him in a week or two anyway.”

“Well, I’ll see that you get back safe where you belong, at McMurty’s, where we all love and care about you.”

“That’s sweet,” she said and gave him a hug.

Clapp felt another hard-on coming on, but it would have to wait. His cock was feeling sore now, it burned when he peed and a milky substance was leaking out from the tip. He dropped Nancy off at McMurty’s. Miss Felicia gave her a good whipping and let him watch. It made his heart feel good. When he got home, he poured himself a tall glass of whiskey and soaked his cock in it. Later, he drained the glass and was ready to meet the world again.



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