

# X-R-A-Y

issue #4

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## CONTENTS

Megan Boyle ... EXCERPT FROM LIVEBLOG ...	3
Eilôt Tuerie ... CUCK ...	15
Drew Buxton ... BURL ...	22
Tobias Carroll ... WHERE WE LEFT IXIAN COUNTY ...	28
Dave K ... OH, THE MEADOWS ...	32
Gene Morgan ... XBOX VIDEO GAME REVIEWS 2018 ...	36
Rebecca Gransden ... BABY WITH A FLAMETHROWER ...	38
M.C. Zendejas ... THE MEANING OF NIGHT ...	43
Hannah Stevens ... THE CALL OF THE CIRCUS ...	49
Daniel Handelman ... HONOR SYSTEM ...	54
Toom Bucksaw ... LILLY AND THE NINE-TOED WOMAN ...	59
Christina Antonovskaya ... REVIEW OF MOTHER! ...	65
Rebekah Morgan ... DENTIST TRIP ...	69
Bram Riddlebarger ... SOY ...	74
Gregg Williard ... LUCK OF THE PLUG ...	76





**EXCERPT  
FROM  
LIVEBLOG**

**MEGAN BOYLE**

MARCH 27, 2013

1:20AM: going to change up the game. really. um. this is really going to happen. so, in grad school, my dad and his friend motivated themselves to finish their dissertations by agreeing to mail one \$100 check to the nixon administration for every day late.

so.

here is what i must do by tomorrow 12AM, this is my 'dissertation:'

-return attorney's phone call about accident settlement i'm receiving

-write and print cover letter at library

-mail apartment application binder

-mail book packages

-call dad about getting keys to storage unit thursday

-refill birth control

-pack one box

-shower

-drink kale smoothie

here is what happens if i fail to complete ONE of these tasks, this is my 'nixon fund:'

when i receive the accident settlement, i will have 50% of the bills printed and set them on fire in a trash can.

the settlement—the last i've heard—is slightly more than what i had in my savings account this fall.

i don't want to talk about how long it took to spend. the sum of money, without 50% of

its bills destroyed, is enough to 'start being a person again,' for a comfortable, in my view, amount of time, as i settle into a job, a more stable routine, a life that allows me to envision a future for myself, less commas, etc.

the stakes are very high. these are very high stakes.

OH SHIT I HAVE TO ADD A STAKE, HEIGHTENED SHORT-TERM STAKE, SO YOU WILL KNOW ABOUT THE LONG-TERM THING IN CASE I STOP LIVEBLOGGING BEFORE THE LONG-TERM THING—

if i fail to complete any task on the list, i will post a picture of my naked ass 'as is' on this liveblog. oh, that's nothing, you say? you say this is mere child's play?

THE ASS CHEEKS WILL BE SPREAD.

now i know people tend to enjoy pictures of women's asses. most people. or. i guess most people would find the pictures interesting, at least. some people, not most people. okay. but consider this: i have my period, so if i fail to shower...that's all. just consider this. i'm sorry in advance. now you will be rooting for me maybe.

i am dreading this so hard and i am so excited. so excited about dreadful tomorrow. such high stakes. jesus. i'm completely serious about both of these things. if i fail to complete the tasks and fail to complete my punishments, any person has the right to kill me. this is my will, i'm saying this, this can be legally binding: if i ever end up murdered by a person, i am hereby decreeing it 'not their fault,' if that does anything—i do not want them to be punished. i wouldn't want that anyway. but. just so the world knows, if it makes any difference—if they killed me it would be less like 'murder' and more like 'performing a civic duty.'

i'm not kidding. i know this sounds funny or whatever but i'm not kidding. GOODNIGHT, INTERNET. LOOK OUT.

FOR TOMORROW.

BABY'S DAY OUT TOMORROW. A REAL B.D.O. TOMORROW, B.D.O. OF MONUMENTAL PROPORTIONS. TAKING MYSELF TO...TOWN. MAKING MYSELF THE MAYOR. OF THE TOWN. THERE IS A TOWN, BY THE WAY. WHEN EX-BOYFRIEND AND MOM ARE AWAY THE SHITHEAD COMES OUT TO PLAY. UFF. TRY AND MESS. B.D.O.

2013.

SIGNING OFF,

YOUR LITTLE BITCHES FOREVER,

LEGALLY BINDINGLY YOURS,

ME AND DUNKIN DONUTS COFFEE CUP

6:04AM: this is not off to a good start. sometimes if i'm alone and i'm supposed to be going to sleep i get 'the fear.' big reveal thing: i slept in my parents' bed at least once a week until i was maybe 12 years old. if i wasn't sleeping in their bed, they let me sleep on a sleeping bag on the floor. when i was a baby i would cry and not sleep. when i got older i wouldn't cry but still couldn't sleep. remember watching 'mash' reruns and infomercials on the couch around age 8, with the volume low so my parents wouldn't hear.

remember there being 'events.' after giving up/giving in to me, parents would be like, 'maybe we'll try to make megan sleep in her bed again, wanna try again meg?' i'd be like 'yeah let's do this.' they'd be like 'okay, how about the fifth of july?'

this is the routine that needed to be established for me to fall asleep in my bed:

1. say goodnight to all my 'friends' (in my memory there was like, a wall of stuffed animals almost, filling half of my bed)
2. either parent reads three storybooks
3. mom improvises a few stories with magical undertones
4. dad sits on the floor by bed and we meditate until i'm sleeping

when i was 12 or 13 my parents gave me a portable TV and i'd watch the home shopping network in bed. think that's part of why i like ASMR videos, would experience ASMR looking at HSN. have never told anyone all of this to the extent i'm typing it now, i think—that it was a rare occasion for me to sleep in my bed. i was a scared little asshole.

tonight i felt 'the fear.' 'the fear' causes me to do ritual/preparation-like things. i don't feel it as much anymore, after living alone for three and a half years, but some-

times if there's a small change i still feel it. i didn't do the thing where i check all the places another person can be tonight. here is what happened:

#### STAGE 1: VAGUE FOREBODING SHIT

-peed, replaced tampon. saw roach on my conditioner and thought 'this doesn't bode well. the bugs have returned. it's on my conditioner, like what i'll use tomorrow. should i kill it?' then i could see its head being separate from its body, like it had a little neck or something. seemed hard to kill.

-washed face and brushed teeth while feeling the first stages of 'the fear' where i'm like, just looking around differently. looking at things more carefully.

-ate 1mg xanax, via 'it'll lessen [something] about dying.'

-refreshed dry cat food and gave them wet food thinking 'if i die tonight they will have enough to eat until ex-boyfriend returns.'

-rubbed experimental 'nighttime lotion' on face and neck. think a parent gave it to me. this felt like 'a protective ritual.'

-made bed and brushed crumbs/debris stuff off the sheet. this was just for fun.

-dressed in cherry-printed pajama pants given to me by former baltimore neighbor/co-worker, current close friend and 'will always be one of my favorite people who i love and aspire to be like in some way' person, chelsea. was going to leave on shirt i was wearing today, which chelsea also has and bought before we knew each other, then thought: 'no. it will be too perfect: 'she died wearing the clothes of someone she wished she was more like,' then it'll definitely happen.' in the past i've thought i could increase probability of airplane landing safely if i'd listen to weird al or other unrealistic music to die to.

-applied protective clothing layer: long-sleeved shirt ex-boyfriend bought the day of his 2010 baltimore reading, when he stayed the night at my apartment and we had fun platonic fun all night and the next day.

#### STAGE 2: PLAN DEFENSE AND FLEE

-tried different lighting schemes. the best lighting to let someone know there is a person inside, ready to attack. fussing with lighting is what kicked me into stage 2, where i actually start imagining scenarios where i'll be confronted with the thing that's going to 'get me.'

-gathered all knives and scissors and placed<sub>7</sub> them under pillow (however, this means if

whatever has come to 'get me' hasn't brought a weapon, which it would've, i feel, it'd have to find even scarier and probably more painful blunt objects to use to kill me. like, technically anything in here could kill me). i have sharp things ready, because i think i'd be better at stabbing than clobbering or [who knows].

-stowed car keys and phone under other pillow.

-in stage 2 i have locked the bedroom door, but. i don't know. undecided on this one tonight. i want cats to be able to roam freely around apartment, maybe sleep near me.

STAGE 3: WAIT IT OUT

-you just wait it out. that's all you do. either you're awake all night or you beat it.

getting sleepy. alvie is acting especially jumpy, pacing and chirping. does not bode well. told myself i'd better be sleeping before it was light outside and now it's looking bluer out there goddamnit. actually though, this is good, because now i have more visibility out my window. earlier when it was darker, i 'knew' the face from 'suspiria' was on the other side of my curtains. goosebumps looking for picture of face, like, entire google image search, even now, thinking about looking at it.

fear seems manageable tonight. it helped to type this, like now i'm processing faster because i moved stuff to my external hard drive. drinking coconut water. shirley is here. about to sleep, sun is up, okay. 'you got this.' B.D.O. tomorrow.

2:55PM: had set alarm for 1PM. not boding well. B.D.O. got a mean case of the not-boding-wells. drinking yesterday's dunkin donuts coffee. so far i woke, which i guess is more than what i was expecting i'd do today, last night, so...no that's setting the bar low.

3:28PM: finally answered phone to tell telemarketers to stop calling. so. that was not on the list of things i want to accomplish today but it should've been. going to shower and make smoothie now. \*NOTIFICATION: THIS WILL BE THE LAST TIME I SAY 'GOING TO DO \_\_\_\_\_,' BECAUSE BOY DOES THAT EVER MAKE ME NOT WANT TO DO THINGS.

4:43PM: woman is yelling 'fuck you you dumbass bitch, you stupid ass ho' out window. man is yelling in return. would've been cool if i'd had an expensive microphone when we moved in, so i could've been keeping an audio scrapbook of the sounds of 4th and jefferson. last night around 3:30AM a rooster was crowing. it continued until i went to my bedroom a



little before 6AM. imagine: a rooster, somewhere out there in the expansive wasteland of a dark philadelphia morning. philly sucks man.

kale smoothie: made and drank that shit. -1 shitter from that list.

thought, while scooping out cantaloupe seeds '...with the strength to open melons with a butter knife, the agility of a blender on ice, and the brute force of a thousand butter sticks, megan [discontinued thought].' heard blender about to fall and ran from toilet to avert a famed 'tao lin smoothie disaster of instagram proportions' (didn't even wipe) (serious about averting that disaster) (disaster averted).

called attorney. he's calling tomorrow with new settlement offer. after that mom and i could go to court, to get more money. the guy who hit us doesn't have to pay, it's all corporations, so. i don't know. i don't really care. court seems hard.

assembled packages to mail. not going to make it to post office before they close. will have to fed-ex everything. fuck it, that's good. the post office would've stalled. because i need fed-ex for the real estate thing anyway.

i put stickers on two envelopes 'for good luck' and rubbed them in a 'special secret pattern,' thinking of the part in 'me and you and everyone we know' where she touches the neon dots on her steering wheel.

horn honked twice and a man said 'hey. i love you. mucho. peace' as car drove away.

have responded to more emails per capita than like, ever, i think. four responses so far without spending 15- 90 minutes on them. proud of me. baby's fucking day out.

answered another telemarketer. taking this shit out.

baby's fucking. gonna take this shower. take this shower out. fucking. i want a cigarette first. thought 'no, you can smoke when you're dead.'

no i need the small reward of smoking right now.

so happy i didn't add 'quit smoking' to my punishment if i don't get shit done today. i was about to do that. it would be hard to live in a world with a nasty photo of my ass on

the internet, not enough money to start being a person again, and without the small reward of smoking.

small rewards: only way things happen.

6:01PM: if i have enough time i want to eat a molly to write a draft of my 'cover letter.' (the letter basically just has to say: i'm a nice person, i'm responsible, i have had jobs before, there are jobs i would like to have in your area, nursing home jobs, i want to help old people dress themselves and eat because they are as close to death as me and i understand feeling that and wanting help, i am going places) (the letter has seemed hard to write because i feel like i can't just say those things, i have to like...prove myself...by vaguely...just writing vaguely). would be good for perspective, maybe, to have 'on molly' letter and 'toned down' letter. seems hilarious: 'two-years-jobless woman with emotional problems takes molly to help her write vaguely-worded letter recommending herself as apartment building tenant.'

molly-eating might be destructive. fed-ex and library close at 9PM. shower has not been taken but don't you worry, i have ideas about how to conserve precious shower-time.

responded to another email. seems important, to keep this 'email streak' going. fucking taking it out.

6:14PM: just took out another telemarketer. his name was chris. fucking told chris. he will not soon forget that polite request to take a phone number off a list.

who gave my number to a website where...these health insurance people call you? did i do that, somehow?

6:37PM: took that fucking shower out. here was my secret: i never said i had to wash my hair! OH NO! OH NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!! that foreboding roach on that conditioner bottle last night-how little did it know about how much it would bode!!!!!!!!!!

'boding' seems to be an integral aspect of 'baby's day out'

i am using 'boding' loosely...or...um...think it's just fun to say it...things boding well...my decisions being influenced by 'boding'...being a bode daddy...

thought of a good insult: i wouldn't fuck him with your tampon

shit just re-read list, i forgot about refilling birth control, CVS will still be open i hope SHIT

6:47PM: wearing black flats with twinkly gemstone decorations on the toes. check out fucking twinkle toes over here. baby's day out with the twinkle toes over here. boding all over the place. boding everywhere, in all directions, out of control boding. twinkling it up.

6:53pm: I'm stalling, shit. Why do I stall like this. Pay attention to your stalling Boyle.

6:58pm: drove past a dead kennedys-looking guy crossing street lighting a cigarette as I was lighting a cigarette. Better believe I head-checked.

7:00pm: sometimes smoking cigarettes feels physically horrible. pulled into CVS parking lot.

7:04pm: the pharmacist said my address. I said 'yup, that's the one' like how Alex Trebek said 'trout: that's the fish.' I don't have any refills left. Shit. Does this count? Shit...doctor's office closes at 5pm. Did not account for 'no refill' variable. Shit. I don't know if this counts yet. I think it doesn't, I didn't know.

7:08pm: not going to eat the Molly. Molly-eating does not bode well. Driving to library.

7:10pm: want to watch a YouTube compilation of cars making outrageously unnecessary k-turns.

7:15PM: took picture of sky while waiting for parking meter kiosk to print receipt. stood on a cement fixture for a better view. man's voice from behind me said 'beautiful, isn't it.' he was an old man, maybe in a uniform. i said 'yeah, look at all the colors.' after i said 'colors' he turned his head to look at me.

8:13PM: at library. eyes got watery as hell typing this: 'My family has generously offered to continue supporting me, but I want Beach View Apartments to be the place I launch my new independent life—I want Rockaway Park to be my home for years to come.'



how did i write it. i mean it, but...it looks vulnerable, phrased that way. i feel so fake writing cover letter-type things. that weird subtext of 'if the person reading this suspects i'm writing to influence their decision, which is my only reason for writing this, i will sound disingenuous.'

9:14pm: sometimes hearing snippets of an argument between men who don't seem to know each other. Suspenseful ass coin dispensing process on library printer.

Discovered 24 hour FedEx hell yeah.

Sat in car, emotionally assembling liveblog manuscript in folder formerly containing lease/apartment building application, given to me by Colin.

Walked to park by American-looking museum buildings. Started walking vaguely in direction of FedEx. Lit a cigarette while looking somewhere in the distance. Thought 'proud American moment. America.' Realized I didn't know where I was walking and had left phone with directions on it in car. Proud American moment. America: I think I live here.

Do people know when I'm not being serious...

Walking to FedEx. Just passed a man dragging a heavy garbage bag. Would like to say 'we did a modest mutual head-check,' but it was more like 'which one of us is going to hurt the other one, uh oh'

9:26pm: walked a little more then saw welcoming lights of 24 hour FedEx.

9:47pm: wandered around FedEx. Stood at a counter. Another wandering woman stood 'competitively' beside me. A man with a ponytail did things to a machine in a vaguely employees-only area. Wandering woman wandered somewhere and I didn't see her again. A woman with a nametag that said 'Lulu' approached. She said 'I can help you over here,' not moving her eyebrows much. I non-laid-back-ly said 'oh great thanks, thank you.' Followed her to a shipping counter she stood behind. 'I could see you walking around over there, lookin like that,' she said. 'Oh heh, yeah I was doing that,' I said. Since entering, it'd occurred to me that they might not ship 24 hours. I said 'shit, is it too late to ship things?' Lulu made a face like. Um. Lulu was being this way to me like how I would be to honestly confused customers. Like, pleasantly surprised that a person would come in

who didn't think they knew all the answers. I was happy to be that person, the not-knowing-all-the-answers-already person, for Lulu.

I started to give Lulu the two envelopes I was holding. She said 'you don't need to buy that, we can just do this part for free' and placed two puffy white FedEx envelopes between us. I said 'oh. Oh yeah, well that would be great, thanks. The other ones, yeah, no good.' She smiled in her no-eyebrows-moving Lulu way, looking mostly at a computer.

She told me to fill out forms and left me alone to do that. The moment after I'd finished, she returned. Noticed her pastel blue nail polish was similar to my mint green, but her nails looked manicured. I wanted to say something about this, like something you would say, like, 'springtime: time for nails,' but couldn't think of a normal-person thing like that to say. Lulu said 'I'm cold, it's cold in here, isn't it?' I nodded big and said 'yeah it is, it's really cold in here. And I bet for you...yeah, your short sleeves, man.' I didn't think it was cold. Somehow this did not sound awkward.

Lulu processed the packages and asked me questions. When I answered it felt like we understood something about the customer-employee dynamic, like 'no one really knows what's going on, we have to say these words that someone faraway at FedEx invented. We are the people between FedEx and the things we want.' Like I was thinking 'I want this to be mailed but I don't care how and I don't know what's going to happen when I leave' and Lulu was thinking 'I am at work and things about this place are normal to me; maybe ideally I'd be doing something else, but right now I'm helping this person, I know how to help them and after I do my job I don't know what's going to happen.'

Lulu said 'I'm gonna close it now' about my envelope. I said 'oh great, thanks. Yeah, it would've been like 'oh no, big mistake' if it was closed and the wrong package.' Rested my eyes on a box behind the counter with 'IRONLUNG' printed on the side in large letters. Lulu said 'okay you can pay now.' I grabbed the phone, thinking it was the credit card swiping device. Lulu laughed and said 'no, you give the card to me.' I laughed a little and handed her my card as I said 'I thought, you know. It looks like one of those things.' She handed me a stapled receipt but didn't let go. I watched the receipt and nodded while she said when the packages would arrive in other places, something about a tracking number, going online. Then she let me take the receipt. I smiled, said 'thank

you so much' as I walked to the door, studiously looking at the receipt without reading it. I stopped and turned to face where Lulu now stood, in the middle of the store. I said 'wait, don't I have to sign?' She laughed and said 'no that's it.' I smiled like a big idiot and said 'thanks' as I exited FedEx, feeling mildly like Judd Nelson at the end of 'the Breakfast Club,' raising his hand triumphantly with Molly Ringwald's earring in his ear as the frame freezes before the credits.





**EÎLOT TUERIE**

**CUCK**

I have had sex in a church with a girl who lied that she was under the age of consent. I have tied someone up and left them on my bed while I had sex with someone else. I have had sex with three different people at different times on the same day. I have had sex with someone whose eyes watered as she remained perfectly still on the floor of my girlfriend's living room. I had sex with someone who hadn't had sex in such a long time that she bled all over the dining room rug. I have cut off someone's hair and used it to whip them until they bruised. I was arrested for interfering in an arrest and during my stay in the holding cell was solicited by a Mexican transsexual prostitute to whom I gladly gave my number; two weeks later, the charges were dropped, but the prostitute never called. At thirteen, I had sex for the first time; I got her pregnant. I have been responsible for at least one abortion each decade I have been sexually active. I have had sex with a woman who let me put out my cigarettes on her tits. I had sex with someone who came so many times her limbs went numb and she passed out. I have never done heroin. I have had simulated sex with the carcass of opossum. I have had sex in a cave with a girl my best friend wanted. I have never had sex with a Scientologist. At times, I feel impulsive: I have had sex with numerous people I just met. I had sex with my sister; we enjoyed ourselves very much but decided not to have sex again. I discovered *The Joy of Sex* and a vibrator in a drawer beside my mother's bed. As far as sex is possible, at eight, I got involved with the girl next door; we'd pretend we were in a rocket ship leaving earth at the precise moment the planet was ending, then, at that moment, we had sex; or, she'd pretend she was walking home and I would attack her; her mother caught on and told us we weren't permitted to play in the house; when we tried to have sex behind the chimney on the side of her house, an older boy saw us, ran over, and accused us of having sex; we never got together again. When I encounter an old man or an old woman, I wonder what their sex life was like when they were young. I have had sex in a closet only once. I have had sexual fantasies about my stepfather but not about my stepmother. I often have fantasies about having sex with the people with whom I work. I cannot have sex if the bed is making noise. The first time I was invited to a bondage party, I pierced the host six times across his perineum while he was fastened to a leather harness suspended from the ceiling, during the last piercing I had sex with his friend, a lesbian, bending her over

his suspended body; when I finished, he threatened me, screaming obscenities in several languages; the following week, he visited me at work and asked if I would attend his next party. The last time my mother asked me, "What's new?" I told her I had fisted a man, she hung up and never spoke to me again. I have had two sexually transmitted diseases: the first, from a nineteen-year-old Jewish girl in summer of 1997; the second, from a 40-something-year-old Korean woman in summer of 2012. I have had sex in a movie theater only once. I have had sex in the daytime in a public garden in Bakersfield. I have had sex in the toilet of a diner in Luang Prabang. I have had sex in a staircase during a citywide blackout. One of sexiest photographs of me in high school shows me wearing Krista Johnson's cheerleader uniform at the junior-senior girls' flag football game. After sex, I don't know how to feel when a woman tells me she is glad I didn't murder her. I had sex under a catamaran on Maui with a girl with a shaved head who had cancer. I sometimes wonder if Charles, the man who invited me to my first sex party, is dead by now; he had a diamond embedded between his front two teeth and claimed to have had sex with his son. I remember when I was a kid and the local teen pervert, who was maybe five years older than me, would give Kristen and I instructions to get into various sex positions with our clothes on. The desire to have sex with a non-human animal is not strong. What is it about having sex during a riot? I know an artist who meditates on his girlfriend's vagina to sell paintings. I have had sex with more than one hundred women, I wonder if that's a few or a lot. I have had sexual fantasies about being fucked by a man with severe burns on his face and body. I have had sexual fantasies about fucking a woman with leprosy. I have used a condom twice. I have masturbated in front of a man. I relate more with the women in porn videos than with the men; I am so attracted to women that I wish I were one. I knew a woman who smoked with her feet. I'm turned on by the taste of alcohol on a woman's mouth. I have made-out with two people who were HIV+: a woman and a man; I don't remember their names. I worked for a middle-aged woman confined to a couch; I cleaned her apartment once a week; I used to dust, vacuum, and wash all the rooms: kitchen, bathroom, living room, both bedrooms. Every other week I did laundry, yard work, and occasionally brought her groceries upstairs. In the garage, I used to sniff her underwear. Once, I used her underwear to come before putting them in the wash. Another time, before bringing



her clean clothes up, I used her underwear again. My favorite part of a man's body is his cock, when it's hard. In the parking lot of the funeral home, I glimpsed my dead mother's big toe as the funeral director carefully wheeled her upon a gurney into the vestibule. From my bedroom window, I called down to a woman wearing a short skirt who was limping; she came inside, we talked, and, seconds later, we kissed. I have had sex with an amputee. When a woman yawns, I imagine coming in her mouth. For a year, I collected the hair that I found on the bed pillows and bathroom floor of an older, Japanese woman I was seeing. On Coronado Street, in the hospital supply store windows, the mannequins wear nurse outfits with nylons that only go up to the middle of their thighs. Once, to entertain me as I paddled a canoe in a marsh, the woman I was seeing kept opening her legs. I sometimes wonder what happened to Ron, the short, portly, dirty old man who kept me company at the thrift store where I worked and who told me stories about the revolution in Portugal and his threesomes with nurses at the hospital where he worked; he read my palm once and stared at me horrified. Noticing my long hair hanging below my baseball helmet, a man asked my mother if I was a girl. I have gone to many gay bars but I have never gone home with a stranger after meeting them there. I once went home with a man who bought me a donut. I am being courted by a gay man I met on Facebook; I have not yet fantasized about giving him satisfaction. I have a fetish for acne but equally strong is my fetish for women who wear lots of makeup. I knew a girl whose feet would perspire whenever she got turned on. My grandfather later lived with his mistress, who'd become his second wife, and in their recreation room there was a psychedelic poster showing twelve nude couples, each one in a different sexual position, in line with the signs of the zodiac.

I have had sex in a church with a girl who lied that she was under the age of consent. I have tied someone up and left them on my bed while I had sex with someone else. I have had sex with three different people at different times on the same day. I have had sex with someone whose eyes watered as she remained perfectly still on the floor of my girlfriend's living room. I had sex with someone who hadn't had sex in such a long time that she bled all over the dining room rug. I have cut off someone's hair and used it to whip them until they bruised. I was arrested for interfering in an arrest and during my stay in the holding cell was solicited by a Mexican transsexual prostitute to whom I gladly

gave my number; two weeks later, the charges were dropped, but the prostitute never called. At thirteen, I had sex for the first time; I got her pregnant. I have been responsible for at least one abortion each decade I have been sexually active. I have had sex with a woman who let me put out my cigarettes on her tits. I had sex with someone who came so many times her limbs went numb and she passed out. I have never done heroin. I have had simulated sex with the carcass of opossum. I have had sex in a cave with a girl my best friend wanted. I have never had sex with a Scientologist. At times, I feel impulsive: I have had sex with numerous people I just met. I had sex with my sister; we enjoyed ourselves very much but decided not to have sex again. I discovered *The Joy of Sex* and a vibrator in a drawer beside my mother's bed. As far as sex is possible, at eight, I got involved with the girl next door; we'd pretend we were in a rocket ship leaving earth at the precise moment the planet was ending, then, at that moment, we had sex; or, she'd pretend she was walking home and I would attack her; her mother caught on and told us we weren't permitted to play in the house; when we tried to have sex behind the chimney on the side of her house, an older boy saw us, ran over, and accused us of having sex; we never got together again. When I encounter an old man or an old woman, I wonder what their sex life was like when they were young. I have had sex in a closet only once. I have had sexual fantasies about my stepfather but not about my stepmother. I often have fantasies about having sex with the people with whom I work. I cannot have sex if the bed is making noise. The first time I was invited to a bondage party, I pierced the host six times across his perineum while he was fastened to a leather harness suspended from the ceiling, during the last piercing I had sex with his friend, a lesbian, bending her over his suspended body; when I finished, he threatened me, screaming obscenities in several languages; the following week, he visited me at work and asked if I would attend his next party. The last time my mother asked me, "What's new?" I told her I had fisted a man, she hung up and never spoke to me again. I have had two sexually transmitted diseases: the first, from a nineteen-year-old Jewish girl in summer of 1997; the second, from a 40-something-year-old Korean woman in summer of 2012. I have had sex in a movie theater only once. I have had sex in the daytime in a public garden in Bakersfield. I have had sex in the toilet of a diner in Luang Prabang. I have had sex in a staircase during a citywide

blackout. One of sexiest photographs of me in high school shows me wearing Krista Johnson's cheerleader uniform at the junior-senior girls' flag football game. After sex, I don't know how to feel when a woman tells me she is glad I didn't murder her. I had sex under a catamaran on Maui with a girl with a shaved head who had cancer. I sometimes wonder if Charles, the man who invited me to my first sex party, is dead by now; he had a diamond embedded between his front two teeth and claimed to have had sex with his son. I remember when I was a kid and the local teen pervert, who was maybe five years older than me, would give Kristen and I instructions to get into various sex positions with our clothes on. The desire to have sex with a non-human animal is not strong. What is it about having sex during a riot? I know an artist who meditates on his girlfriend's vagina to sell paintings. I have had sex with more than one hundred women, I wonder if that's a few or a lot. I have had sexual fantasies about being fucked by a man with severe burns on his face and body. I have had sexual fantasies about fucking a woman with leprosy. I have used a condom twice. I have masturbated in front of a man. I relate more with the women in porn videos than with the men; I am so attracted to women that I wish I were one. I knew a woman who smoked with her feet. I'm turned on by the taste of alcohol on a woman's mouth. I have made-out with two people who were HIV+: a woman and a man; I don't remember their names. I worked for a middle-aged woman confined to a couch; I cleaned her apartment once a week; I used to dust, vacuum, and wash all the rooms: kitchen, bathroom, living room, both bedrooms. Every other week I did laundry, yard work, and occasionally brought her groceries upstairs. In the garage, I used to sniff her underwear. Once, I used her underwear to come before putting them in the wash. Another time, before bringing her clean clothes up, I used her underwear again. My favorite part of a man's body is his cock, when it's hard. In the parking lot of the funeral home, I glimpsed my dead mother's big toe as the funeral director carefully wheeled her upon a gurney into the vestibule. From my bedroom window, I called down to a woman wearing a short skirt who was limping; she came inside, we talked, and, seconds later, we kissed. I have had sex with an amputee. When a woman yawns, I imagine coming in her mouth. For a year, I collected the hair that I found on the bed pillows and bathroom floor of an older, Japanese woman I was seeing. On Coronado Street, in the hospital supply store windows, the mannequins wear nurse

outfits with nylons that only go up to the middle of their thighs. Once, to entertain me as I paddled a canoe in a marsh, the woman I was seeing kept opening her legs. I sometimes wonder what happened to Ron, the short, portly, dirty old man who kept me company at the thrift store where I worked and who told me stories about the revolution in Portugal and his threesomes with nurses at the hospital where he worked; he read my palm once and stared at me horrified. Noticing my long hair hanging below my baseball helmet, a man asked my mother if I was a girl. I have gone to many gay bars but I have never gone home with a stranger after meeting them there. I once went home with a man who bought me a donut. I am being courted by a gay man I met on Facebook; I have not yet fantasized about giving him satisfaction. I have a fetish for acne but equally strong is my fetish for women who wear lots of makeup. I knew a girl whose feet would perspire whenever she got turned on. My grandfather later lived with his mistress, who'd become his second wife, and in their recreation room there was a psychedelic poster showing twelve nude couples, each one in a different sexual position, in line with the signs of the zodiac.





**BURL**

**DREW BUXTON**

Tori put her hand over my mouth and pointed. I never could hide my excitement. She stood off the bed real slow and tiptoed to our bedroom door but stepped on this one creaky spot in the carpet, and you could hear Joselyn scurry back to her room.

She'd been eavesdropping on us since she could pick up what we were saying. Back when I was still working for the logging company, she overheard us talking about sending her to kindergarten for advanced kids. She got up from behind the kitchen cabinets and said no way. She had to be with everybody else, said it would be better for her socializing or something.

I got out the baggie of crank I'd picked up that afternoon and cut up some on the nightstand. We waited her out and did bumps and followed the storm on TV. We could just hear it coming in from the west, and it would stay on top of Six Rivers for another hour at least. Rain meant coverage. It meant the rangers wouldn't be out.

Tori opened our door and crept down the hallway to the kids' room. She came back and gave a thumbs-up. "She's snoring, and I can hear the baby breathing too."

I turned up the volume on the TV. "I found the biggest boulder," I said. Boulder was code for burl even though Joselyn knew our code words. *Curly swirling burl*. "The gnarliest swirls you've ever seen. Worth 25, 30k easy," I said, and Tori rubbed her hands together and giggled. Burl was the most beautiful fungus.

When the thunder got close we put on the sweats we kept in the bottom drawer of the dresser. We snuck to the front door and waited for a boom to turn the knob, and we waited for another to start the engine of the old-body Chevy pickup. The four-wheeler was already loaded in the bed.

I went 75 the whole way, and the heavy north Cali rain came down hard, and the wipers fought to keep up. The truck was maroon with beige trim, and the cops could spot us easy in the daytime and would pull us over just for driving west of Redding. I'd already been busted once.

For the most part Six Rivers National Forest wasn't fenced in. It was just too big, and there were only a handful of rangers to look out for. They were smart though. Joselyn'd giggled in court when my lawyer blamed it on the drugs. She knew burl was the addiction

and made me take the crank. You can't go out there at night during a thunderstorm without a boost. They gave me probation and rehab, and on the way home Joselyn telling me how lucky I'd gotten, rubbing my baldhead and making fun of my cheap Goodwill suit.

It was still pouring when we got to the forest, and the road was empty. I had a spot I'd cleared just inside the woods where I could pull the Chevy in and be out of sight. Signs of bears were everywhere if you were dumb enough to look down or to the side—bear shit, claw marks on trees. Black bears and grizzlies.

We flew down the game trail on the four-wheeler, and Tori clung to me with the chainsaw bouncing across her back in its case. *Burls, curls, swirls*. The tires barely kept a grip on the mud, and the headlamps only let you see a few yards ahead in the soaked dark, but I knew the trail.

Our tree was wide as the Chevy was long and must've been over 1000-years-old. I showed Tori where I'd hacked at the burl with an ax to see the insides. It was beautiful with dark chocolate swirls in the pale wood, and we couldn't wait to see the rest. I was a surgeon with the chainsaw, and soon I had all the burl growth off the base of the tree. This one could've made five or six gorgeous coffee tables or fancy doors, 25 Lexus steering wheels.

Redwood is like a dirty old treasure chest. It's grey and ugly on the outside like firewood, but then you cut it open. Burl's what got me fired from the logging company because I kept sneaking off looking for it. Joselyn had been hiding in the pantry when I told Tori. She came out and asked me how I could be so irresponsible.

"Goddamnit, the goddamn pantry? What're you doing?" I said.

"Checking the nutrition facts of the food you've been giving the baby," she said. "This obsession with burl is destroying this family." She was tall for her age and could hold eye contact forever. She said she was worried about how it was affecting the baby's development and future. "I do my best, but I'm only nine. He needs parents. I'm tired of changing his shitty diapers. Also the electric bill is super overdue." She knew about the burl in the attic and under our bed and said if we didn't stop she'd have to call CPS or tell the cops. I'd go straight to jail. That day we promised to never touch the stuff again, but how could she expect us to work for \$15-an-hour when we could make thousands

in one big find. Really it was for her future and the baby's future.

We each did a bump and dragged the slabs onto the tarp. Try moving around burl without a little boost. We rambled about the swirls: 50k, 75k they had to be worth. It was three in the morning, and the storm had passed and we had to get out of there. The load was too much for the four-wheeler though. "Please, God!" Tori screamed into the sky, and I held her hands to calm her down. We'd stash some in the woods for later. We did a bump and moved two slabs behind a tree.

We got everything loaded in the truck bed and stripped off our muddy sweats and tossed them behind some bushes and drove back toward Redding in our underwear.

We had a storage unit just outside Redding, and the place was always totally empty at that time of night. There was almost no room left in our unit, and there was nothing in it but burl. Slabs stacked to the ceiling, a room full of gold. We spent 30 minutes wading through it and pushing everything to the back as tight as we could to make room. Tori cut up her knees but kept helping. We figured there was half-a-million dollars in that room easy, but the trouble was finding the right buyer, someone who would pay what it was really worth. Every burl is a unique abstract painting, and it seemed ridiculous to even try to put a price on it. I told Tori not to look at one for too long so she wouldn't get attached. We would hold onto them until the right time.

We got back to the house at about 4:30, and it was still dark out. We pushed the truck doors halfway shut and took our time going inside. Once we got to the bedroom safe, we kept on about the swirls. "We gotta get back soon before someone finds those slabs," Tori said, drying her hair with a towel.

"Yeah, hopefully it rains again tonight. There's a good chance it will," I said. "I'll start looking for the right buyers. Just poke around and feel them out at first."

"Exactly. Don't show our cards too early. That's been our problem!" Tori said. "You go in with a small sample and let them commit to a price-per-pound, and that's when I'll pull up with a truckload."

"I almost think we should start our own wholesale business, sell direct to furniture manufacturers," I said. "That way we keep all the profit." We couldn't stay sitting on the



bed. We were spun still, off the find and the crank and the cold rain, and we forgot our code words.

There was a knock, but Joselyn didn't wait to come in. She was totally awake, and her face demanded an explanation.

"We did a few bumps, okay? Is that a crime?" I said.

"Yes, it is actually."

"What are you doing up?" Tori asked.

"I have a math test tomorrow, or today, I should say, and I need to review." She came over to the bed, and Tori pulled the comforter up to her chin, but she yanked at it.

"I'm not wearing anything, honey," Tori said.

"You're wearing a bra. I can see the strap," she said and felt the wet fabric.

"I just got out of the shower and didn't dry off good."

Joselyn put her hands on her hips, and a while went by where we couldn't look back at her. "Big find today? Hmm? Think you're being subtle when you pull up in the Chevy?"

We cocked our eyebrows. The truck was loud for sure. We should've parked a block away and pushed it. Joselyn rolled her eyes and shrugged her shoulders until Tori cracked and giggled, and it made me laugh too. Joselyn looked too mad to know what to say.

"Calm down, honey," I said. "It's only until I can find another job."

"Shut up. You're lucky I haven't already called your probation officer."

I thought she was bluffing, but she said, "4567320," and I started crying. I didn't have the number memorized, but that sounded right. "6578456," she said. "You know what that is?"

I shook my head and Tori didn't know either. She was crying now too, and she buried her

face in my chest.

"It's CPS, and don't think I won't call them."

"What's she trying to do to us?" Tori cried. "Our baby wants to destroy us!"

"Please," Joselyn said and then broke it down. She told us she wasn't going to school that morning to take her test. Tori would write her a letter saying she was home sick. We would take all the burl into town and take the first offer no matter what. She'd come with us. We would pay the bills with the money.

"I want a real breakfast this morning. Bacon, eggs, and toast...and I want to go to McDonald's *twice* a week from now on..."

She kept on with the demands. She wanted to see San Francisco. We nodded our heads at each one, but I could only keep focused for so long, and we couldn't make ourselves cry anymore. Joselyn didn't know about the storage unit. I could tell Tori was fading too. I bet she was thinking about the chocolate swirls on the slabs we left at Six Rivers. Joselyn didn't know about those either or all the rest of the burl still out there.



**WHERE WE LEFT  
IXIAN COUNTY**

**TOBIAS CARROLL**

The suburbs of tiny Ixian County were unmade in the torrents and floods of 2003. After the waters had abated they left behind a highway exit, a handful of roads, and little else. Four towns' worth of ruins and a farm, abandoned to bankruptcy years before, that had gone largely untouched. That was it. The ruined barn and the decomposing silos, now home to hundreds of bats that dined on the county's grotesque moth population, mocked us all.

The mudslides, swore the relevant parties, were finished; the mudslides would never come again. Infrastructure was being built, they promised, at this very moment. Infrastructure would hold future mudslides at bay, and could perhaps even be yoked to some other sprawling plan, some sort of perpetual-motion device or industrial-strength divining rod. And so the municipalities of Ixian County were conjoined. Efforts to decipher this collage were heatedly debated. And so commenced the developments, the spirals, the roads that evoked cul-de-sacs but were something altogether different. This was our introduction into the future of our community; this was our introduction into some hallowed hole toward the mythic.

Call it the work of Glenn Detlof, the Robert Moses of Ixian County, if Robert Moses had been a recluse with mystical leanings who dressed like an aging Gram Parsons. Concentric rings, he said, and let the silence hang. He spoke about it all the time, at community meetings and news conferences and conversations both on and off the record with members of the local media. Periodically he raised the subject in formal interviews with certain publications dedicated to progressive and eccentric strains of urban planning and architecture.

Glenn Detlof looked at the received wisdom regarding how you built a neighborhood and a community and he chortled. Most people would say, housing development and housing development and housing development along a main road and along that main road you'd have your shops, your restaurants, your bars, your automotive dealerships, your magic shops, your pet stores, your trickery, your pizzerias, your bookstores, your adult bookstores, your florists, your vape shops, your other vape shops, your vape shops that first appeared to be something other than vape shops, your liquor stores, your toy stores, your furniture stores, your afterschool tutoring centers, and your institutes for distance learning.

Glenn Detlof said, no. Said, here's what we do: we put those buildings at the center and we build the houses around them. So that's why you find the burger franchise in among the

homes and lawns of a neighborhood hundreds strong. That's why the bait and tackle shop scalded into oblivion was reborn adjacent to two modest ranch houses in a tree-lined part of town. And that's why several residents of the Millstone Acres neighborhood could walk to their local pharmacy and liquor store and puzzle shop. Why the age-restricted housing with the interstate humming in the distance was also adjacent to the local branch of a salad chain with a cult following.

We had a couple of reporters show up. We saw photographers waiting for the perfect day for a photo that would capture the arc and the full splendor of the sum total of the rebuilt community. Sometimes we'd see drones flying overhead on clear days to document the arrangement of buildings and greenery. It seemed great. It seemed wonderful. We didn't see where it was all headed.

A reporter from *Dwell* asked a few of us if we ever headed to the point where the streets ended, after all the homes and businesses had ebbed away. And all of us asked shook our heads. Fewer of us began to wonder. True, we did hear strange sounds in the night. Some of us. Pursuit, perhaps. Or something prompt, in search of prey.

In retrospect, we're all a little disappointed that no one said the word *labyrinth* when Glenn Detlof was around to hear the question. It really should have been obvious. I mean, have you seen a picture of Glenn Detlof? Picture Rasputin in a Nudie suit, and there you go. We should have been suspicious about Glenn Detlof's designs on Ixian County, is all we're saying. The man was, in retrospect, quite sinister.

Admittedly, even as we'd looked back on his body of work, there wasn't much precedent for the work he did in Ixian County. He'd done master plans for a neighborhood that looked like a New Urbanist Tiki bar; he'd been involved in this floating city in northern Maine that no one could be sure was real. I mean, we saw photos, but they could have been faked. They could have been models. That one guy's shirt could have been painted on. We didn't know.

After it all went wrong, we spent a lot of time looking for the clues. The spiral designs were obvious. The branching nature of streets and paths. We lived in the suburbs; we had GPS to rely on. The seemingly random arrangement of streets was never unruly with mechanical voices guiding us. And the shops and the food establishments were all further in to the clusters than our homes. We would do our errands and get out. We never needed to pro-



ceed deeper in.

But that was the mistake, wasn't it? Maybe we might have seen the things that served as warnings. Perhaps we'd have seen the watchtowers or the pits. Perhaps we'd have seen space for an oracle, steam still rising from the ground, awaiting someone to inhale the fumes and prophesy. Perhaps we'd have wondered just how the mudslides came; we'd have wondered if Glenn Detlof had been serving the whims of some old forgotten god and had made with some sort of ritual, some kind of summoning.

We'd have wondered if we lived on a new sort of altar; we'd have wondered if we were meant to be the priests or the offering.

But that was still to come. Most nights we celebrated this new space. We embraced its freedom and its strange avenues and the artist who'd conceived of it. We didn't wonder about the other things; we didn't comprehend. We didn't shudder in our beds, dreaming of pursuit. That was still to come.

# OH, THE MEADOWS



**DAVE K**

Five pairs of hands let me go on Monday morning. Only one pair was needed.

My supervisor did a lot of the talking, though the other four men in the room would chime in at intervals to finish his sentences. There was no pattern to their interruptions.

Poor head for numbers. Ledgers carious with miscalculations. Antisocial personality, unfit for the camaraderie of professional life. These were their words, their nasal Ivy League voices shared like a common uniform, their faces scrubbed and shaved waxy under the lights, their ties and suspenders, their matching socks.

I sat in front of them feeling like wadded-up paper, my feet planted on the white floor. I didn't want to cross my legs because my trousers were too short and my socks didn't match.

Later I would pass a man whose dog was sniffing around in the bushes. All I could see of the dog was his tail, his lead wrapped twice around his owner's firm wrist. This man looked like his socks matched.

I don't know what it's like to be that kind of person. I am done putting on such airs.

There was a pattern to their interruptions. I just couldn't see it.

They allowed me to collect my things before I was shown out. I knew the way, but I wasn't the one being shown. The rest of the accounting chamber stared down the hall after me, their shoulders bent, eyes narrow and dry under their green visors and behind their bifocals.

Five days earlier, I'd passed the rummage shop near my apartment and saw a chipped plaster replica of an Easter Island head staring out from the piles of rusted mechanical parts and wormy furniture and children's toys. I asked the proprietor how much the giant head cost. He told me. I asked who would pay so much for it. He told me he only sold what he was given. I walked away.

My supervisor did not say I was "fired." He said, with help from the others, that I had been "let go," which is worse. Being fired suggests a trajectory that will end somewhere. I will land somewhere. Being let go is just falling falling falling and slick stone walls

on all sides and no light.

I left the office and turned left where I normally turn right. I passed rows of houses with stone porches and dark lamps in the windows. The grass and trees were green, burnt yellow in patches by the sun. The trees bent towards the sunlight and their branches drooped into the street. One house's small yard had been stamped raw, down to the dirt. Hopscotch squares had been drawn on the sidewalk.

My father used to say that a man's hardest fight was between himself and the mirror.

As I was being let go, my supervisor asked me if I had anything to say. I stared past him and the others at the stack of ledgers, their leather covers bruised by my fingerprints. I knew they'd been marked up by the senior accountants. Pens scratching in the margins and red ink welling up in loops of inscrutable cursive.

My mother used to say that what you will not do is what I will do. She drowned when I was nineteen. Nets dragged her out of the ocean, onto the boat where my father and I stood. She was smiling.

Two days earlier, I'd passed the rummage shop near my apartment and saw a dented suit of armor for sale. It was wedged between two brass outhouse fixtures, probably to keep it from toppling over. I asked the proprietor how much the armor cost. He told me. I asked who would pay so much for it. He told me he only sold what he was given. I walked away and wondered why the proprietor would sell it at all, why he wouldn't disassemble it and keep one of the arms for himself.

When my window is open and the weather is mild, I can hear the drone of crickets and birds, and the distant, funereal tones of church bells on the hour and half-hour.

My landlady hates me. She is a Christian.

Today, I passed by the rummage shop near my apartment. Twice. The first time, the proprietor wasn't sitting out front in his rocking chair. The chair was empty except for a note: *Back in five minutes*. There was an oversized cannon for sale. Someone had painted it like a barber's pole. I left.

I returned ten minutes later and the proprietor was there, rocking and smoking. I asked him how much the cannon cost. He told me. I asked who would pay so much for it. He told me he only sold what he was given.

When I was nine, I stepped on a fish-hook and the wound never healed properly. I think I have been slowly leaking over time, depleted by every step I take. Perhaps this is why I am a bachelor, a shelf waiting to be stocked.

I bought the cannon on credit and the proprietor offered to drive it back to my apartment for me. I rode beside it in the back of proprietor's steam-junker, trying to decide if it would fit in my building's freight elevator. I ended up leaving the cannon in the grassy lot behind my building.

Sometimes I dream of swimming towards a dim, vanishing shore, salty and sunblind, my mouth full of seaweed.

The cannon is a deceit. The fuse is a rope that, when pulled, deploys a springboard inside the barrel. Maybe there is no cannon. No window. No building. No street. No landlady. No me.

It rained overnight. The cannon's gullet stayed dry and cool.

Before the rain came, I sat on my windowsill with my legs and bare feet dangling down. I swung them back and forth, my heels knocking against the bricks. My back was turned to my degree in mathematics, crooked in the frame my father bought for it, and by proxy for me. I imagined water just below my toes, even though I live on the fifth floor of my building and everyone below me would have drowned.

I will crawl inside the barrel. I will pull the rope. I cannot pull the rope. Someone else will pull the rope. Being fired suggests a trajectory that will end somewhere. I will land somewhere. I live on the wind now.



# **XBOX VIDEO GAME REVIEWS 2018**

**GENE MORGAN**



## Fortnite

Fortnite is a riot simulator for children. Characters lives are short like ours- the game is filled with moments to reflect upon hard choices, choices in the format of a fun cartoon-like murder game young boys love. Fortnite for Xbox is a perfect way to get killed over and over again and feel emotion as you grow old and work a job and come home to smoke weed from a battery, make vegan hot dogs, take kids to basketball practice, and fall asleep before making love. This game is an easy diversion in an otherwise asinine journey where you live and die just once. Five stars, I've never played it.

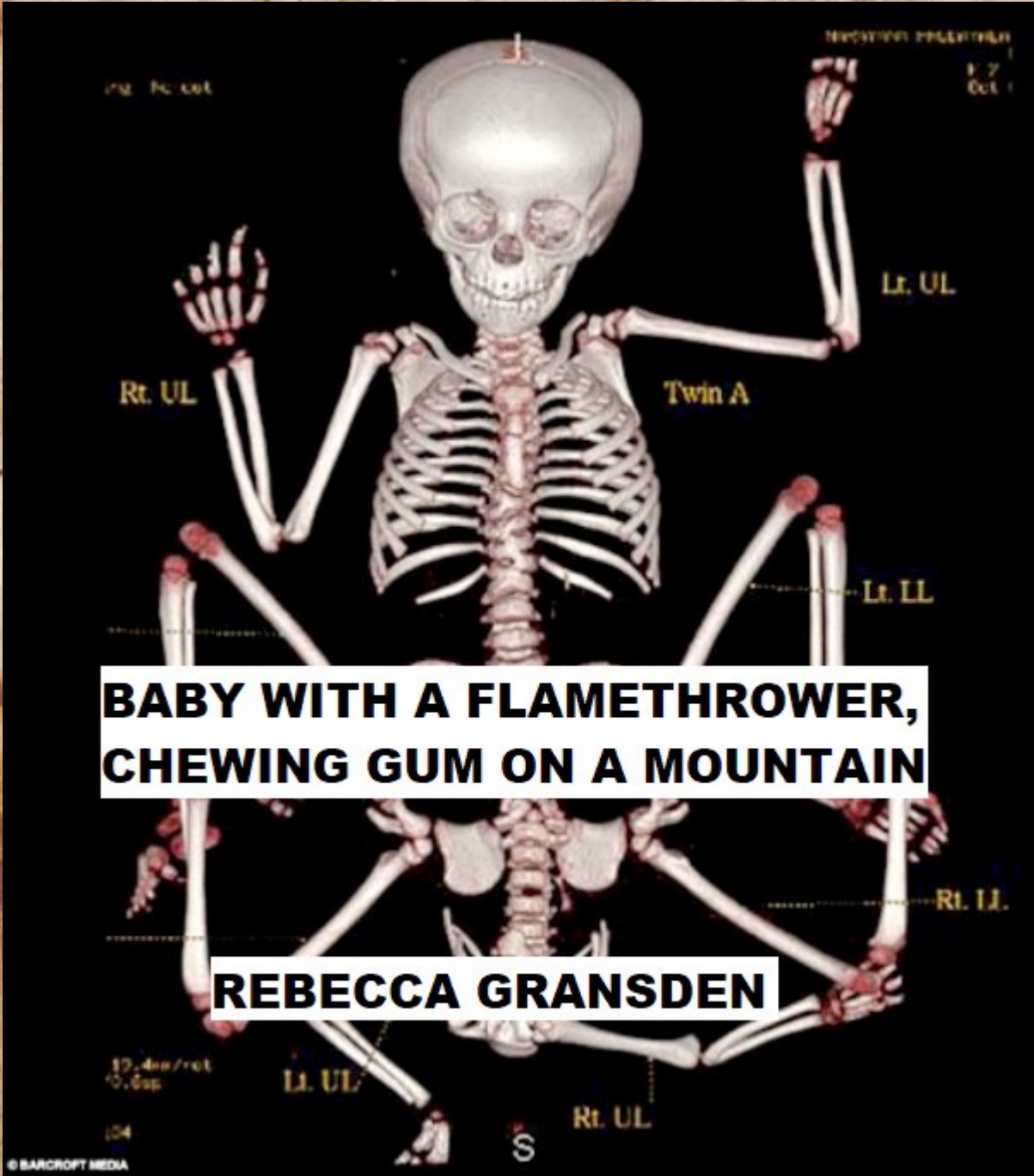
## Monster Hunter: World

Monster Hunter: World is about harvesting flesh. The monsters you gut, you pull the meat from them, and you sell or trade that meat for a shield and maybe clothes. How many pelts are too many? You decide. Live with excess. Life is excellent. You have a cat and your cat brings you health. Cats fucking protect you. Cats live forever. You can give your cat a beautiful name, like Susan. Susan will fight for you. And when you're ass-deep in entrails, Susan's only worry is a monster planet filled with lush vegetation. In Susan's world species have not yet begun to die-out at the highest rate since the last great extinction. There is no end. For Susan, an excess of monsters seems like the only hell any player can thrive in- A hell where there's nothing left to do but hunt, so you dig deep inside yourself and flood the world with meat.

## Cuphead

Blessed that the devil exists, two cups look to settle a debt. My daughter let me know a fish smokes in the background of this game. I'm not sure if it's a fish. I can't remember, My head hurts. I've never had another life, so I don't understand, I don't understand all of the accomplishments I'll never see, all of the unfinished projects I left alone in my inbox, all of the shoes I never wear, the way I smoked while I was looking after my children, like my mother. Cuphead is a visual achievement, and it's impossible to play. My life is slowly losing any focus on the past, and I can only hope the devil opens a casino near my home, a place where I can gamble for something worthwhile or, really anything I lost in childhood.





Stay back!

I will melt your mugs with fire if you move an inch, you police cordon shitmorons.

Your pink stinks.

*Especially you. Stares at squat policewoman centre left*

I've filed my baby teeth into pointy baby fangs, and I will bite with my baby jaw if you try to stop me. The pitball in the alley showed me how to do it. I watched its eyes too, you know.

*Baby arcs flamethrower flame overhead making an infernal rainbow against a starry ink sky*

My burping today is toxic gas, regurgitated from last night, from the barrels of radioactive waste I found at the back of the supermarket. Yes, I guzzled them. I'm a baby! I'm a chubby flesh house of tantrum and mayhem! I will have my barrels to feast upon, my chemical dummy to furiously suck, my substitute nipple of chaos and disaster! Bring them to me or I will burn you until it's not funny anymore.

*Police officer uses megaphone to address baby but baby cannot hear due to whooshing of flamethrower going berserk*

Nom, nom, nom. Just thinking of it now gets me going. Green sludge of my dreams. Every second without it is a nightmare! I will unleash fury of the like your tiny minds cannot comprehend if I'm deprived any longer. Where is my waste? Get me my barrels, you incompetent inverted dick whistlers!

*The police line retreats and huddles in a circle, deliberating*

*Baby goose-steps along the mountain path, the city at night displayed below*

*One of the officers breaks free from the circle and screams through the megaphone "Stop doing that, it constitutes a form of hate speech"*

You are going to make a *point*? Now?

*Baby's eyes glow with red rage*

I'm a freewheeling baby without a care in the world, strutting the land on which I was born. I'm brand new and that's a fact, and this, this? is how you react? You can't swallow the freedom, can't stand my show. You're a baby too, didn't you know?

*The megaphone says "Stop rhyming. I find it offensive"*

Couplets, smuplets. You let me be, or I'll fry every one of ye. See this fire, see this flame, I see the whites of eyes resplendent tonight, in my firelight.

*Baby shoots a bolt of flame like a waterfall*

Wanna be crispy? Wanna be a delight! Roast you up on a spit, fry your innards, cook your fingers, that barbecue aroma so sweatily lingers, onions and oil stench from your skin, endlessly turning. What a sight, what a smell, my fangs gnash in chomps of glee, in this future, that will be, surely. Now get me my barrels before hell is raised, and you, my stinky chums, are glazed.

*"Fuck off"*

I'm getting ready to go turbo, up to the max. I've been pumping iron while weeping, in preparation for this day. There's nothing you can surprise me with.

*The circle disbands and a hefty police officer steps from her parting colleagues, a bazooka on her shoulder*

Holy shit! Don't bazooka me. Overkill! I'm just a baby! *Baby cries* Mother!

*A man in a casual suit sidles up to bazooka woman, calmly takes the megaphone from the other officer and says "My name is Mike Oldfield. Would you like us to contact your mother for you?"*

*Still crying* No. I don't want her to see me like this. Because I'd kill her. I'd pyre her just like the rest of you. *Snot cries of disgust* Get that patronising negotiator away from me. Give me a stake and I'll burn you black on it. Yum.



*The man slinks off, leaving bazooka policewoman to confirm her readiness with a wide load-bearing leg stance*

You're nearing your end, the end of you, flamed by an infant with an addiction to goo. What a travesty, a glorious way to expire, I'll give you a way to be remembered, I know you care a lot about that, with your badges and accolades and slaps on the back. You drew the line of duty, and perished, what fun. Do you want me to disembowel you to add symbolic weight to your desisting? Hail me with bazooka! Split my entrails to bits, let's see my flesh fly over this cretinous city, to the earth, a zit.

*The officer picks up the megaphone and says "For the record, why are you doing this?"*

I'm bored. And your face hurts my eyes with its disinterest. I'm chewing this gum I've collected since I was born. When I slapped my way out of the afterbirth I had become conscious on, across a concrete wetted with the fluids of my birth, I lifted the umbilical, which had nearly strangled me, from my blue neck and took some breaths filled with ammonia and rot. I left my mother's carcass to the back alley predators and crawled away shaking and weak. On my way to finding my feet the path was decorated with gum of many colours, smells, and, I discovered, tastes. Soon I was using my baby energies to claw the flattened gum away from the street, until I had a precious ball made from each piece squished together, a chewy gobstopper linking me to humanity, all those mouths turning the gum against their tongues, biting down with their teeth, infusing with their saliva and cells. Now I have them, I can taste them, every one of them. So give me my barrels! That slime is the only thing I've eaten that takes the taste away. Cleanse my palate, you rancid harbingers of nothing!

*Flamethrower roars*

Die, die, die! This infant malcontent will atomic bomb your soul in a booming eruption of fire vomit. I can hear your molecules praying. Squeal as you kneel, fucksters!

*Bazooka whooshes from inside ball of hellfire and screaming*

*And misses*

Not even a comeuppance!

*Bazooka hits the hillside behind baby and shakes the mountain*

*The officers continue to die and moan*

*With my flamethrower ablaze I shall hit the city.*

*Baby waddles towards the twinkling city lights, thrusting the spewing head of flame forwards*



**THE MEANING OF NIGHT**

**M.C. ZENDEJAS**

Dean never came around too much to start with, but after his dog died he stopped coming altogether. Claudia had just moved out, and there wasn't anything to do anymore. I sat in front of the TV, flipping through channel after channel until I eventually hit static. The quiet became too much and I decided to go over and surprise Dean, but he told me no, that he wasn't in the mood to see anyone. He said it through the closed door and I had to press my ear against its worn wood to hear him clearly. As I walked to my car I glanced back and saw him waving from behind the window, like he was trapped in there.

One night I was at a bar by myself. It was supposed to be me and my coworker, but she never showed up. She didn't even answer my texts. I reread them until I got a headache from hating myself so much.

The fifth rum-and-coke of that night had just been dumped down my throat when I looked over and saw Dean sitting in the corner. His hat was off and to the side, and he stared down into the dark liquid swirling in his glass like it was a part of him.

He gave a small jolt and looked over when I touched his arm and slurred "Hey, Dean". I forgot the name of what he was drinking, but it was strong and had no ice. I ordered myself two of them.

He asked what I was doing there alone. I made something up about my car being worked on down the road and asked him about his job. He was thinking of quitting. They weren't paying him much of anything, and the hours were shit. I had to piece his answer together from the small bits I would catch as my unanswered text messages ran in a constant scroll at the back of my head.

I told him he should just quit if he was so tired of it. The music playing overhead swelled and the fuzzy tone of the guitars pulsated warmly around all of us. I saw a redhead smiling at me from across the room. Something about the way she looked at me made me forget about my coworker, and the texts, and Claudia. I told Dean I'd catch him later.

When the redhead and I finished we laid there silently, staring up at the ceiling. I couldn't think of anything to say. It was a little after midnight, and her room was sunk in a deep navy blackness that wouldn't let me see directly in front of me. I reached out somewhere into the dark, looking for her hand, but kept grasping the cold half of the sheets.



I made plans with Dean to have lunch the following Monday. Twenty minutes passed and I started thinking of earlier that day, when my coworker saw me wave at her and vanished into the filing room, and how I was left standing there. She'd been avoiding me ever since she stood me up. He rushed through the door, face red and hair undone, interrupting my thoughts.

"Sorry I'm late, I was walking my dog." He saw the way I was looking at him and added "I got a new dog. Like a week ago." He pulled his phone from his pocket and showed me pictures.

It was one of the ugliest dogs I'd ever seen. Not the so-ugly-it's-cute kind, either. Patches of fur had fallen off of it, exposing bright red skin beneath that looked like raw hamburger meat. What fur was left was matted together and matched the dull yellow of its teeth. I smiled and said "it's really somethin'."

Our booth was next to the window. A piece of sunlight fell through the leaves of a tree. It settled across groups of smiling people walking around outside. Some held hands, some wrapped their arms around each other. From behind the window, I felt how far away I was from all of them. Wanting to see pictures of anything besides that dog, I asked him how work had been. He told me he quit his job at the office. He said he was waiting tables at a hotel restaurant until he could save enough money to move to the beach.

"There's a celebrity staying there right now. A movie star. I'm not allowed to say who, though." I nodded and leaned forward and swore I wouldn't tell anyone if he told me who it was. His head shook.

"I can't tell you that, but I can tell you something even better." I leaned back when I saw the way he was grinning.

He took his phone out again. Fearing he was going to pull up more pictures of the dog, I pretended to be distracted by something beyond the window. He shoved the phone in front of my face.

"Someone sold Justin Timberlake's left-over French toast for \$1,025." I grabbed the phone and read the article. The French toast was from a breakfast interview he did in 2000. Dean explained he could easily get a hold of the celebrity's left-over steak. I asked why



a steak. He told me steak is usually more expensive than French toast, so *obviously* he'd be able to make more money.

Leaning back in the booth, looking over at him, it hit me that something was different about Dean. I couldn't point to what it was, though. His haircut was the same, and he was wearing one of the three outfits he'd had on a constant loop since I first met him. Before I could figure it out, our conversation was interrupted by the waitress bringing the food to the table. My soup was cold but I didn't say anything.

When I got home, my dog was curled up on the couch with his back facing me. It was so quiet.

"Wanna go for a walk?" He didn't respond. I decided to google the name of the hotel Dean was working at. There was nothing else to do. I scrolled through images of enormous double-doors and ballrooms filled with intricately gilded cutlery and laughing faces stuffed into black tuxedos. At the top of the webpage is the motto, "Where dreams are reality".

After I heard the rumors, I called Dean and asked if it was true. He hung up and blocked my number. I tried going by his house, but it was completely empty. He'd even taken his mangy dog with him. Yellow teeth and all. So, all I can tell you is what the actor said in an interview:

*I was in Houston shooting for my newest project when this waiter snatched my plate off the table. I wasn't done with it, so I said 'excuse me!' but he pretended he didn't hear me & kept walking. There was still a pretty big piece of steak on that plate, so I got up to try & follow 'em, but that's when he started running. The creep was trying to steal my steak! It was the weirdest thing. My security finally got 'em on the ground, & he was rolling*

*around with the steak clutched real tight in his hands, & he was saying 'I NEED THIS STEAK! PLEASE! IT'S MY TICKET TO BEING LIKE YOU! PLEASE!'. The cops took 'em away & he was bawling, saying he was sorry & that he missed his dog, whatever that means. Weird guy. If you're asking me, probably just another stalker or something. You'd be surprised how many weirdos you run into as an actor. It's just part of what makes it such a brave career choice, ya know? Like being a soldier.*

The interview goes on for a few more pages, but I can't stomach it. Once I get to that part, I always fling the magazine away from myself. Its glossy cover makes a slight fluttering sound as it hits the floor.

Every now and then, I walk my dog. He just got through a flea treatment, so patches of his fur are missing. Sometimes we pass by Dean's old house. Sometimes I just stand in front of it and look. No one else has moved in yet, and its colors are becoming more and more dull from the weather beating up on it.

I think about texting Claudia or asking my coworker to get drinks again as my eyes trace the worn shape of the house. The roof sinks towards the ground, and no curtains hide its bare walls. Dead leaves sweep across the brown lawn, whirling around in the voiceless wind before zigzagging towards the ground like bodies from a crashing plane.

We walk around town, looking at the laughing couples. The window isn't there anymore, but I can't help but feel so far away from them. From everyone.

I end up moving into the house. Tabloids calling Dean a stalker drove property prices so low they practically gave me the place. It's easy to feel alone in its echoes, in nights

so dark they seem endless until every morning, when a pale-blue creeps through the curtains, past the still-bare walls, and I stare up at the ceiling, waiting, grasping the cold half of the sheets.

# **THE CALL OF THE CIRCUS**



**HANNAH STEVENS**

She didn't know they were coming but she knew when they'd arrived. It was April and the weather was too good for the time of year.

She heard the noise on the breeze: the faint, twisted sound of faraway music from a tent. She was outside and sat on steps framed by wisteria. Purple flowers hung from the thin tangled limbs of the plant and the heavy, tapered bunches reminded her of grape vines. Her feet were pale and bare and the tops of them burned.

Every few minutes there was a lyric caught between the music in the air. Adel put on her shoes and began to walk towards the music. As a child she'd felt compelled to follow ice-cream vans and her mother had lost her more than once. It had never been the sweet things that drew her because they'd always hurt her teeth: it was the colour and noise that she'd had to chase.

The circus tent stood in the fields across the main road. It was tall and she could see the red top and stripes high above street signs and hedges. The sky above it was dark blue but faded to paler shades as it got closer to the earth. It hadn't rained for weeks and the dust in the air turned orange in the falling sun.

Later, when Noah was home, she told him they would eat in the garden. It was Sunday and he'd been working overtime again. Outside, she'd already lit the barbeque and the coals were silver and hot. Coloured bowls of salad and rice were laid on the table and she'd chopped radishes in the shape of jagged flower heads.

'We're eating outside tonight,' she said, 'you just need to bring the wine and glasses.' She handed him a cold, cloudy bottle from the fridge and watched as the condensation ran down its neck.

'Oh,' he said, 'but what about the bugs: I'll be bitten all over.' He looked at her but she was already in the arch of the door.

'There's something in the cupboard for that,' she said without turning her head. 'I'll see you outside.'



It was past ten now and though the garden was dark the sky still had patches of blue. It was as if day was waiting for something and wouldn't leave.

'Look at that,' Adel said and pointed upwards.

'Oh yes,' he said, 'it reminds me of a toy I had as a child: it was like a jigsaw puzzle except it was made of wooden blocks. You flipped them over one way and it was a night scene. You flipped them the other and it was day. Sometimes I only turned half so it could be both at the same time. I always wanted it all, even then.' He laughed.

'That's sweet,' she said even though she didn't mean it.

'Maybe we'll get something similar when we have children,' he said and looked at her in that way he always did when he wanted something. She picked up the folded blanket beside her and pulled it across her legs.

She remembered the time she'd thought she was pregnant. It wasn't that long ago and she remembered the sick feeling and how she couldn't bear to do a test. Instead she'd looked up abortion clinics and how they did it. When Noah asked what made her restless at night she'd said it was work. Or maybe she was eating too late. It was probably just one of those things, you know how it is. In the end there'd been nothing to worry about after all. Either she'd miscalculated the dates or nature had solved the problem for her.

'Shall we go inside?' he said. 'I think I've been bitten. Plus we've both got early starts tomorrow and you look tired.'

She thought of the drive to work in the morning and reading the same street names as she passed them. She thought of the traffic crawling at its painful pace during rush hour and parents at school gates with purple circles beneath eyes they could barely keep open.

'You go,' she said, 'I'm staying out a little bit longer.'

'What about the cleaning up?' he asked.

'It can wait,' she said. 'Let's be reckless.' She picked up her glass then and swallowed the last of the wine.

'Okay, just this once,' he laughed and then he kissed her nose which felt cold now.

She waited until she heard the click of the door as it closed. Then she stood up and crossed the garden. The grass was cool and she could feel the material of her canvas shoes dampen as she walked. She stopped at the top of the driveway. A few seconds passed. There was still the sound of music but it was fainter now: maybe the circus had finished for the night. She hesitated for a moment and then stepped onto the pavement.

There were caravans lined up in neat rows behind the circus tent. In some she could see lights glowing from behind drawn curtains while others were in darkness. She wondered who was inside and if any of them were sleeping yet. There was noise coming from the circus tent and the music was louder there. She pushed aside the material that had been untied from its guy ropes and now hung across the entrance.

String lights were suspended from the ceiling and curled around supporting poles and ropes. They were shaped like lanterns and glowed red, yellow, green and blue. There were clowns in the centre of the tent and she watched as they stacked chairs and put props into boxes. Adel noticed a pile of empty beer bottles.

'Are you okay?' a clown in braces with bare feet asked.

'Yes', she said, 'I was just having a look.'

'Well the show's over now, you missed it,' said the clown, 'but you can join us for a drink if you want.' There was a gesture towards seats close to where Adel stood. She took a few steps and sat down. The clown offered her a bottle of beer and she leant forward to take it.

It was hot in the tent: the heat was damp and humid and Adel tasted salt on her lips. The clowns were still wearing their makeup and she wondered if she would recognise any of them once they'd taken it off. The clown next to Adel had smudged some of the white paint across her face and flashes of peach were slashed across her forehead.

Someone turned up the music and then there was dancing.

'Let's dance,' said the clown with the smudge. She held out her hand as if inviting Adel to a formal waltz. Adel laughed and stood up. The clown's hand was cool in spite of the heat and she was surprised.

'When are you leaving?' Adel said.

'Tomorrow,' said the clown and raised an eyebrow. 'In the morning when most people will still be asleep.' Adel could feel her phone as it buzzed in her pocket. It was Noah but she didn't answer. The clown's shirt was undone now and there was a vest she could see through beneath. A giant blue bow was still tied across her throat and she touched it. It was soft between her fingertips.

'Even after all these beers?' Adel asked and lifted her empty bottle into the air.

'Of course,' said the clown and she pulled Adel closer. 'Come with us.'

# HONOR SYSTEM



**DANIEL HANDELMAN**



"Maybe some people have both," she said.

She was rolling up a joint. It had too much weed in it. The edges didn't connect.

"The way she writes the male," she said. "She knows the male. But does the male know the female?"

She leaned back into the couch. They'd gone to a motel. There was no Americana, no plastic flamingoes. It was a motel with none of that. It wasn't what she pictured.

"There must be a male who knows the female," he said. "Out of seven billion people, it is possible there is a male who knows the female."

"Maybe," she said. She removed a pinch of weed and sprinkled it on the coffee table. The joint wrapped up nicely now. She licked the seam, then offered it to him.

He shook his head.

"Sure?" she said, holding it an inch higher.

They sat looking at an old TV. She lit the joint.

"Are we fighting?" she said.

"No."

"You can tell me if we are fighting."

It was night. A thin slice of light came through the curtains, splitting apart a watercolor of a boat and churning sea.

"We are fighting," he said.

She leaned forward a little off the couch, her head between her knees.

"Getting in bed," she said.



She took off her boots and pants and fell onto the mattress, bouncing, the crunch of springs.

"Would you wear jewelry?" she said from the bed.

"Jewelry?" he said.

"I wear this," she said, holding up her hand. "The ring you gave me. You've never worn jewelry?"

"I wore a Saint Christopher," he said, thinking. "And pookah shells. That was middle school, the mid-nineties."

"Not now? – in the late teens?"

"I have the shirt," he said, looking down at it. He liked it. There was a shark on it.

"No," she said. "Something significant."

\*

In the morning she was up and out of the room before he woke.

He went out onto the balcony. The sun was a weak glob.

He saw her approaching, her head bobbing, jogging. She came up the stairs and slid her keycard. She took off her running shorts and shirt, then got in the shower.

His neck hurt. He stretched out on the floor, flipped through channels.

\*

They drove to a gas station. A bird pecked at an oily puddle. They bought a bottle of wine and poured it into a canteen.

On the highway they didn't talk but could feel the tension loosening. They were starting to feel happy. Some thick film between them breaking apart. Palm trees swayed freely.

Cars on the road seemed friendlier.

They drove and drove through less and less civilization. Fast food, names of DUI lawyers. Everything was sweating. The freeway became a two-lane highway. Dirt roads led off into woods marked by bunches of mailboxes.

\*

They came to a fruit shack.

They walked down the aisle of bananas, mangos, guava.

Coconut, watermelon.

He picked up a mango and put it to his nose. "This one," he said.

She took it and set it down at the register. She added a hand of bananas and a guava.

They looked around.

"Nobody's here."

At the register was a lock box with a slot in it, a list of fruit and their prices.

"It's an honor system," she said.

She took out some money from her bag. He went back to the car for quarters. They kept expecting someone to appear, to take their money, but no one did.

It was getting dark. The two-lane highway connected with a freeway, back to civilization, where they came to the brand of motel they'd stayed at the night before. The woman at the front desk looked similar to the other, and for a moment they felt like they'd gone in a circle.

"Can you recommend anything for dinner?" she asked the woman.

"Mall's your best bet," she said. "Just down the road."

In the mall, she lost him on purpose. When she tapped his shoulder, he hadn't known she'd gone.

\*

Back at the motel she reached in her bag and took out a gift box.

"For you."

He pulled apart the ribbon and slid off the top. There was a locket, a gold heart on a silver chain, and a ring with a blue stone.

"Do you like it?" she said.

He put on the ring. She helped him with the necklace, turned him around and kissed him, took his hand and put it under her shirt.

He had the thought that he was her. That he wanted to be wearing her lingerie.

# LILLY AND THE NINE-TOED WOMAN



**TOOM BUCKSAW**

Eder u. Valenta

Versuche mit Röntgen-Strahlen



Lilly brushed her teeth and saw another woman's face in the mirror. She stared into her eyes and wished she could ask that woman where the fourth toe of her left foot had gone. Why hadn't she taken better care of herself? Didn't she know Lilly would need her toes someday? Lilly pulled her socks on and tried to forgive her.

In the big room Ellis was still sleeping on the floor with his head on the couch. The mechanical blinds on the window were creakily opening and shafts of sunlight were pooling on his face. Lilly didn't let him sleep with her anymore because he came home late, but most importantly his drunken pratfalls into bed forced her to wake up and become accustomed to the weird way her sheets rested on a body that wasn't her own once more before going back to sleep. He'd been more of a roommate than a boyfriend since the operation anyway.

Lilly crossed the big room and slid her card in her reward kiosk.

"Congratulations," it said. "Thirty three point three repeating chips have been awarded to your account. Check back tomorrow at sunrise for fresh new chips. Tomorrow, the sun will rise at six thirty one A.M. Today's temperature is fifty six degrees. Would you like a receipt?"

She couldn't change the volume on this model, not that she cared to. Ellis stirred, like he did every morning; his breathing was shallower now and less rhythmic and she knew that she'd woken him up. Lilly was glad he had enough sense to play dead until she left. She allowed the kiosk printer to work loudly at a nine and a half inch receipt covered in full-color advertisements. The price of the ink was worth Ellis's furrowed brow.

Lilly rode the mover to work and waded through that same gauntlet of obligated empathy and "if you need anything call me" eyes that had lined the path to her cubicle since the operation and showed no sign of abating. Her new photo I.D. still wasn't scanning right at the check-in. She pulled out her old I.D. with her old face on it and the guard waved her through.

She was once the fastest typist in her department. The clacking of keys from her cubicle used to be the centerpiece of her floor; two years ago her secret santa had given her an extremely loud keyboard and when its keys rang out from her desk her coworkers were not annoyed but proud that they should share a floor with such an efficient worker. Now the

nine-toed woman's fat, dumb fingers had cost the company 1,325.638 chips in typos and clerical errors. She typed as quietly as she could so no one could hear how slowly she did it.

She typed so slowly that her mind wandered and filled the gaps between each keystroke. She thought mostly of when she was taller, thinner and whiter and of when Ellis slept beside her, and she pretended that he'd embrace her when she got home, pretended he'd be there at all.

The sun had set on the city when work got out and the mover was crammed with people. Rain pounded the street and drenched the commuters on this unenclosed section of the mover. Lilly stood under someone's balcony out of the rain and swiped through the faces of the single men she shared this metropolis with. She'd been fielding these digital men for a little while now, about as long as Ellis had been sleeping in the big room, and to her disappointment she'd realized that as long as she shared rent with the only man she wanted and allowed him to eat from her refrigerator, she'd always want him.

Lately, there'd been one possible exception.

"You free tonight? Would love to finally meet," Brandon messaged her. Her phone vibrated and with it her entire being. Brandon had started an acquaintance with her shortly after she'd made her profile, and he was the only one whose messages she watched for. He was everything she could have hoped for in a man she met through a chat box. He didn't come on strong and most of all he didn't tell her how much he "loved Mexican". She'd been told the nine-toed woman was Bolivian, anyway.

She smiled at Brandon that night in the dim light of a mediterranean place Ellis had taken her once when he had had money. "Now that's what I like to see," he said. "Do it again." She couldn't help but smile again, and laugh as she hadn't since the time when she'd had her own ten toes to walk on. "The way your lips curl when you smile." He closed his eyes and did that kissing motion with his fingers she supposed French chefs did when they see a great soufflé .

She told Brandon about her job and how the nine-toed woman's ten fat fingers had ruined her prestige. He laughed, but his laughter died quickly. He asked what else bothered her about her body. She told him about her missing fourth toe, and when he asked her what had

happened to it she told him they didn't tell her things like that. "Don't you ever wonder?" he asked, his face wrinkling oddly in a charged confusion. The expression caught her off guard. She made an ambivalent expression that involved a shrug, raised eyebrows and a shake of the head and thought she saw some curious shade fall over him, but it was gone as soon as she noticed it.

Brandon ate and Lilly watched his jaws grind his food into paste. Handsome, handsomer than Ellis maybe. Ellis's mind-life insurance certainly wouldn't cover a body with such a strong chin, at least. A man could sell a chin like that and live pretty well. He was nice, perhaps overly so, but there are worse things to be, she thought, and you can't buy nice the same way you can buy a better chin. She traced his eyes as he ate and when he went to the restroom she smiled only for herself, feeling her lips curl the way Brandon liked and for the first time finding herself liking it too.

Ellis was gone when she led Brandon through the kitchen and into the big room, the front door sliding itself shut behind her. Some mechanism misfired as it always did during the locking routine and some metal clanged inside the door. The sound was loud enough to wake her up most mornings when Ellis came stumbling through, but tonight she hardly heard it.

She could already feel his hands on her. At dinner she'd looked over each of his fingers from tip to knuckle and couldn't help but see the monetary value inherent to their beauty. She imagined herself like a greedy cartoon character, some oil tycoon or gold prospector, archaic dollar signs flickering in her eyes, wanting to feel that monetary value inside her, as if it would somehow increase her own.

The door to her bedroom malfunctioned and beeped at her. She leaned her back against the stubborn door and smiled through a sigh. Brandon caught up with her and her body, not anyone else's, was pinned between the heat of Brandon and the deep space chill of the metal door and it was her body, not anyone else's, that became increasingly exposed as the clothing she concealed it under fell to the floor piece by piece.

His fingers crept along her outline and they kissed under the flickering tubes in her ceiling. His touch made her feel expensive. He caressed the curves of her "budget" 700,000 chip body the way Ellis had caressed the body of the woman she'd been before. That woman seemed alien to her now. She'd feared that using another woman's body to have sex would feel strange, wrong, or possibly like some twisted late-capitalist form of

rape, but it was just the opposite. Feeling Brandon inside her, knowing he was there only because she was exactly who she was, made that body, finally, miraculously, her own.

When they finished, they laid against the couch Lilly usually found Ellis dangling off of in the morning and stared at the soft blinking lights on the reward kiosk across the room. Brandon talked more about the place he went on holidays, out west where the mover didn't reach and you could even see stars if the moon was new. He showed her a picture on his phone of the perfect blue water you could rent a room beside. She pinched her fingers on the screen and enlarged the image to see a fisherman on the lake.

The utter solitude of that figure stirred something in her chest; she wanted immediately for Brandon to take her there, onto the water, where they could float on the waves of that blue mirror and be near no one but themselves. How little she knew about this man meant nothing to her. She knew enough. She knew that he was Brandon, that he wanted her, and that the fisherman was calling to her from across time.

She swiped the image aside and saw another much like it. This time the focus of the picture was on the snowcapped mountains that cut across the sky. Brandon reached for the phone, but she moved it away from his grasp.

She swiped again. A picnic blanket, with sandwiches on paper plates, spread across sand.

At first she didn't notice it, but as her eyes crawled along the pixels that made up the enchanting image of rural bliss, they tripped over an object of singular Wrongness, a chaotic thing impinging upon the scene of rustic tranquility Lilly had never known. It was her own maimed foot.

Brandon snatched at the phone and ripped it out of her hand, muttering some curse under his breath. Her flesh dragged across the screen, sliding the photo and revealing a portrait of her own pudgy, olive face, her hair lightly tossed in the lake-blown breeze. She looked happy. She did a better job with her make-up than Lilly could.

She could only confront the face of the nine-toed woman for a moment before the screen went black and Brandon thrust the phone into his pocket. He stood shirtless putting on his belt. Lilly watched him from the floor, her reclaimed sense of self nothing but a foolish sex-fueled lark now in the tightening prison of Other flesh. "What was my name?"

she asked.

Brandon pulled his shirt over his head and paused, his mouth hanging open. He shook his handsome head and started across the big room toward the door.

There was a pounding on the metal. "Lilly," Ellis slurred from beyond it, "unlock this shit."

Brandon opened the door using the terminal and Ellis tumbled through it, immediately falling onto the kitchen floor, not taking any note of the man in his way. The door slid shut and Brandon's footsteps faded down the hall. Lilly lay naked on the big room floor, listening to Ellis breathe against the grubby kitchen tile and felt a shred of intimacy sharing the floor with him, however far away. She thought about the lake and her hair blowing in its wind as if it were a memory and looked around at the things that didn't belong to her, the reward kiosk ready to distribute another woman's chips, the refrigerator stocked with another woman's food, another woman's ex-lover sleeping in the dirt of another woman's sloven apartment. Some cluster of cells in her wanted to run after Brandon and tell him it didn't matter what her name was, that she would be whoever he wanted her to be, as long as he would have her, but she couldn't be sure if those were another woman's desires.

She let him disappear along the mover and stayed there somewhere inside the nine-toed woman, wondering if two halves made a whole.



*jennifer lawrence*

*javier bardem*

# **REVIEW OF MOTHER!**

**CHRISTINA ANTONOVSKAYA**



*a film by darren aronofsky the director of black swan*

*mother!*

*written and directed by  
darren aronofsky  
september 15*

PROTOZ@A

MotherMovie.com



## A FEMININE DARKNESS REBORN: REVIEW OF MOTHER!

(Warning: spoilers)

We were looking for the room at Champagne Centre for the appointment, and I found a pin on the ground that has "I feel it all" written on it and an image of a woman smoking printed on it. I took it and put it in the left pocket of my pea coat and will probably keep it there. This quote resonates with me and also with the themes of the script and film.

Impurity, more exact, the myth of pureness is depicted through Mother's character with physiology, vicarious causation of surroundings, and the creator of Mother himself, as when Woman subtly hints that she is young enough to be his daughter. Mother has no choice but to be directly affected, as she is the house and the house is her, and whatever happens to one also happens to the other. She becomes "tainted" as the disciples enter. Meanwhile, Man and Woman both contribute as Man/mankind is literally dying and Woman is menacing with her unruly behaviour and minimal appreciation of consequences.

### Labour of care and emotions as compassion

Even though Mother is selfless, this emotional labour is not necessarily reciprocated, and instead is diminished by the human desires associated with selfishness and money. Mother is unable to really relate to the motifs of the Sons at the level of resentment they feel towards each other due to problems caused by these same weaknesses of human nature. Yet, it still pains her to watch what happens. Mother is humane, but not really a human like them or us.

Nobody else is as connected to the house as she is, and while there are moments that lead up to immense pain and suffering, she is not at fault for it. Mother, much like real mothers and women do, committed to sacrifices and experienced significant loss.

### The current climate

Current events within the year proved hubris of our need to invade the natural environment for our own purposes; government allowance of creating more infrastructure and development of oil and gas rigs and excavation, digging into the earth, minimizing nature's

resources more and more, and scientific "progress" that has questionable or uncertain consequences. Biblical allegories as warnings, or else history will repeat itself, and now it is us having to face it if we don't pay attention.

Reference is made to Mother also as the subservient role of housewives, girlfriends, or any woman that finds herself in this situation today at the expense of men and others that are dependent on them. The "m" is lowercase. The earth and humans are in a directly codependent relationship in reality, and it is just as portrayed by Aronofsky that at some points, it actually *is* that destructive and unnerving, although within the context of the script it seems as though it was taken a step too far.

When the house, or earth, suffers, we all suffer vicariously through what nature has to endure, and this is a negative feedback loop that is difficult to break. Not until complete chaos and death, does that cycle break, and after even the child of Mother dies also. In the midst of the destruction and war in their house, the symbolic notion of the tower being built and things taking shape, reflective of society's structuralism, and that it has taken its place there even under such dire circumstances.

What remains, and always will, is the spirit of womanhood, or particularly motherhood, as a seemingly pure crystalloid energy that is able to withstand all of the damages. While this is empowering, it still feels fiction-based, and sidelined from feminism that is relatable or current. Mother had indeed been killed, mercilessly, not just suffered "an assault" as Lawrence stated, and for no cause but reprise or rebirth into a new beginning. Again, this is at the expense of Him, undeniably the main man and mastermind behind all that has happened in the first place.

The story begins with Him being almost indifferent and struggling to find purpose of himself, as a writer, husband, and himself, almost as if to suggest that of course, being Him, this isn't necessary for Him. However, tables turn by the end, and the one in full command of Mother and her fate is Him, as power dynamics are consistently evident to not be on Mother's side, everything from who they welcome into their home to if they have sex or not. It is even difficult for Him to deny his disciples what they wanted, and then to make them leave Him and Mother alone as their force violated Mother, their home, and even turned on each other, as allegorical to the backlash of human destruction as creation.

Ogling the piece as an entity apart from the film almost feels like looking at a secret

process. This could be of my cherished experiences with original scripts; this one and the *Alice in Wonderland* (1983 playwright's edition, one of my best possessions and was attained mysteriously). It brings something to the reader much different from a viewing experience. This was a glimpse into Aronofsky's honest stream of consciousness, or as close as we will get to it. Photos from the scenes are embedded in the screenplay, including some of the most grueling moments. Surrounded by destruction, these characters all exude their own livelihood and creation. Even though the film is focused on Mother's perspective, the story is just as much about her as it is about Him. The rebirth is equally theirs, as they both are forced to start anew.

Hollywood, CA, Paramount Guilds, 2017 Paramount Pictures Corporation. Screenplay by Darren Aronofsky.



**DENTIST TRIP**

**REBEKAH MORGAN**

R

L



I drink three nescafe coffees before i leave Iași for the rest of the weekend, heading north on the 10:49 CFR line.

Sometimes on Saturday mornings i halfway tumble my ass all the way down to the railway station in Gară from my bloc near the top of the huge hill in Copou. The rail station is one of the oldest ones in Romania with huge ceilings and big windows and lots of bright white pigeon shit for the floor. At christmas time they put up decorations and some blue and white lights that blink so fast they make you wanna jump on the tracks after a while. It's dreamy though somehow.

The ladies who sell tickets have big soft faces like cookie dough and an urgency in their eyes that fades as soon you can glance it. The ladies who sell tickets wear pressed blue shirts and navy slacks. The ladies who sell train tickets are the kind of ladies who have gold jewelry to wave all around their faces. They look proud and annoyed at the same time, but they manage to not be looking pretentious. This demeanor is a feat of some sort since they hold a bit of power over most of us or at least they control our fate in regards to catching trains.

I stand in line behind all the college kids going home for the weekend. I tell the doughy faced woman where i'm heading and hand her twenty lei. On the platform i smoke two So-branie negru slims and drink another small nescafe from a machine by the tracks. The train roars in screeching its brakes at me and I hop the train and head towards a town not to far from the ukrainian border. It's the town where the farmer i'm sleeping with lives with his goats and his mama and his cat. The train stinks like ass but is also precious and i love it. The lady carrying a small pink and white oddly calm looking pig barges past me and plops down a few rows in front of me with the little porker on her lap and a scarf wrapped tight around her head.

I stare out the big glass window for almost three hours as the remaining bits of winter pass by me. The hill sides wash down onto the floodplains that are now filled with the melted snow. The people who use horse carts can be seen from the train along the base of the hills and out in fields. The train creeps by an orthodox church and quite many people start crossing themselves. I always cross myself too but with just my finger shoved in my pocket scratching along the pocket liner. I do this just for something to do i guess since i only believe in god when i'm about to piss myself in public. I like secretly crossing myself a lot though. I don't know what i'll do when it starts getting warmer in

the springtime and I won't have my jacket to hide my new habit.

The train rolls on and on and i stare out the window at the landscape and the people and i stare out the window at all sorts of animals. I see a goat standing next to a duck like they are friends or maybe lovers and i say 'wow' out loud by accident. I open a little bag of paprika peanuts. The paprika peanuts are good and i eat them while listening to monks sing on the radio of my Nokia phone.

The queen of the train with the pig stands up as the train crosses into the town of Paşcani and hobbles off the train. A woman with a dog takes the place she was sitting and the train rolls on to Suceavă. An hour passes quickly as i watch stacks of hay covered with tarps weighted down with plastic bottles and herds of sheep pass by my window. I see the huge smoke tower by the Iulius Mall slowly approaching in the distance and take my black leather backpack off of the baggage rail. I smear on a layer of bright cherry red chapstick before i shove a cigarette between my sticky lips and take my lighter out of my hoodie pocket. I kick the train door open with my booted foot when it gets stuck and the cold air blasts me in the face as we pull into the Suceavă station. Spring is creeping in and in my head i think

'it's not as cold as it once was, but it's as cold as it ever was' set to the tune of that Toby Keith song and hop off the train.

I light my cigarette and glance around the station looking for Lucian. I turn around and he's standing right in front of me. We say 'salute' and kiss each other on both cheeks then march arm in arm towards the number two bus parked across the street. Lucian is wearing an alpaca sweater.

I sit across from a small child making cat noises at his mother and he kicks me hard in the leg. His mother puts on the same chapstick as me and then i put more on myself a few minutes later and the mother checks her pocket for her chapstick as she watches me apply mine. The bus is filled with people and almost everyone has a hat on except me. Lucian is sitting across the aisle in his grey beanie with his cheek pressed against the window and i wonder if he has ever seen a shark. I wonder if he knows female sharks can impregnate themselves if they don't find a suitable mate. The child kicks me in the leg again as Lucian signals the next stop is ours.

I tell Lucian i'm excited to drink at a dentist office because i want to tell people that i was drinking at a dentist office. We arrive a bit early to Dr. Sorin's office so we each smoke a cigarette on the green bench outside a vegetable market. I watch two street dogs walk by and then a third. The dogs seem old and tired and i feel glad for them that spring is coming soon. I buy some green olives from the old woman at the market and eat them with Lucian in the courtyard and smoke another cigarette. Dr. Sorin calls Lucian and i think about the romance involved in drinking in a dental office bathroom in the old Eastern Bloc.

We go inside the dental office and posters cavities and root canals watch me as i pull two blue baggies over my shoes. Lucian pulls blue baggies over his shoes too and i tell him to take a picture of my baggied feet.

Dr. Sorin leads us back past two big dental chairs to a small bathroom attached to another smaller bathroom. We all cram into the bathrooms and light cigarettes while Dr.Sorin fixes three whiskey sodas. On the wall above the sink is a Jim Beam bar mat that says Nightology. Dr. Sorin puts the glasses with the whiskey on the shelf above the sink. We all take a glass and clinck them together while saying 'Noroc'.

I watch myself drink the whiskey soda and smoke in the mirror. I look nice, i watch Lucian drink in the mirror and watch us be together and i hope i feel drunk soon. Lucian and Dr.Sorin make jokes and gossip. Dr. Sorin puts on Led Zeppelin real loud. We all agree Led Zeppelin is good and Dr.Sorin makes more drinks. I look in the other bathroom that is only for Dr.Sorin and there is a little wooden sign with a naked woman with her ass stuck up in the air. In romanian the sign says something like, 'god made man and then he rested and on the next day god made woman and then no one ever rested'.

I stand between Dr.Sorin and Lucian. Dr. Sorin has lots of porn on his phone, i watch as he skims his messages for a meme to show us. I drink more whiskey and watch Lucian in the mirror. Dr. Sorin shows me a picture of a brunette with her legs spread with a piece of cake on a plate placed in front of her pussy. Dr. Sorin shows me a picture of a girl kissing a man's feet drawn in charcoal and he wheezes when he laughs. I switch places with Lucian and smoke another cigarette. Dr. Sorin reaches across lucian with his phone and shows me a photo of a girl with two pussies. I say nice and Led Zeppelin says:

*We come from the land of the ice and snow*

*From the midnight sun, where the hot springs flow*

*The hammer of the gods*

*We'll drive our ships to new lands*

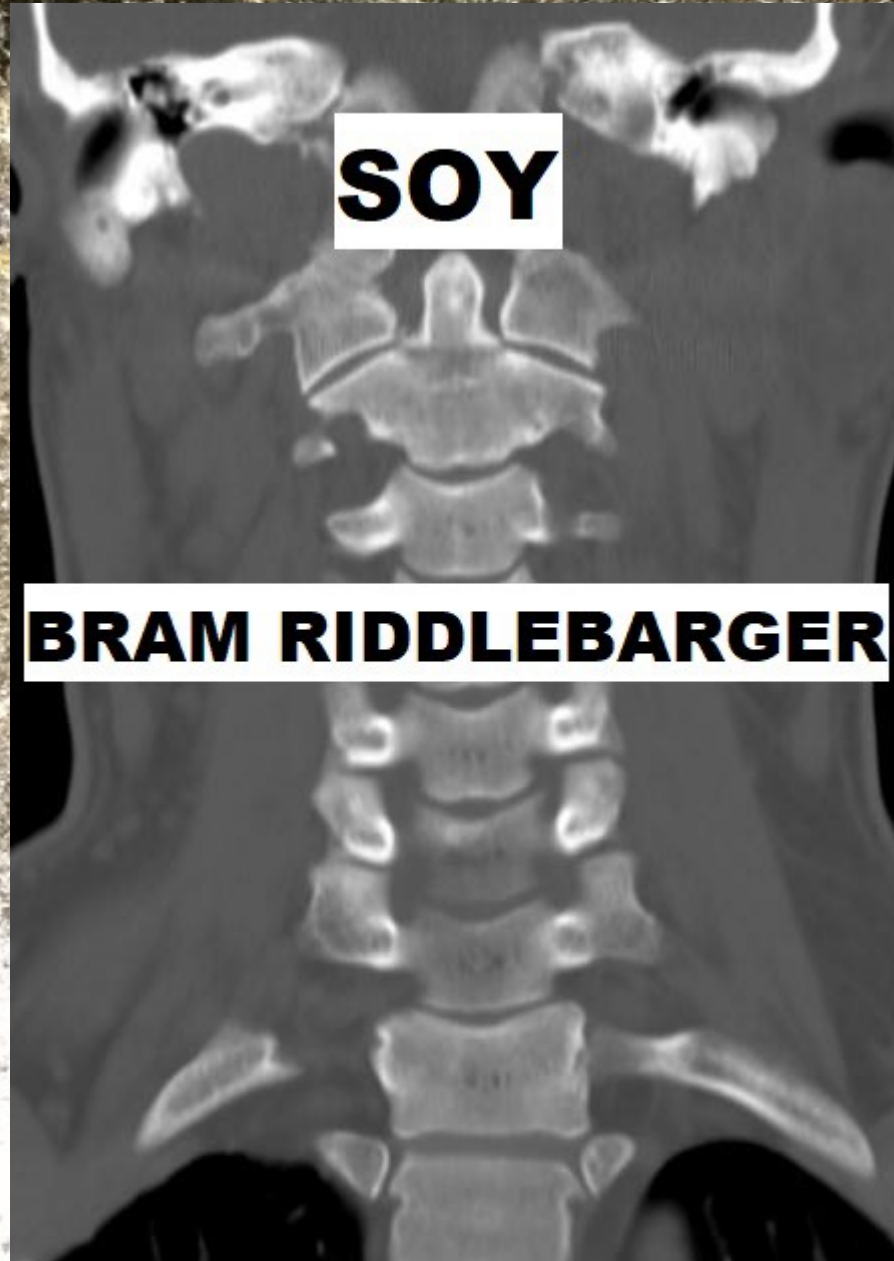
*To fight the horde, and sing and cry*

*Valhalla, I am coming!*

I think about being an immigrant and how i'm lucky to even be here with some jackoff showing me his porn stash. Dr. Sorin pours more whiskey and soda and then looks at me and says "you could put a nice brand on Lucian's arm with those hott tits" and i say 'yeah' as i press my hott tits against Lucian's arm. After that i shove both of them out of the bathroom into Dr.Sorins main office shouting at them in romanian that i have to take a piss. Then i piss and its great somehow.

□







It was when he started drinking the milkshakes that the trouble began. Before two weeks had passed he had ballooned up fifty pounds and was beating the pulp out of every mother-fucker that came within an inch of his mind's eye.

His power, he believed, came from his special method, patent pending, of milkshake making. It had to do with split-second timing between milk added and ice cream stirred, although quick wrist action was as necessary a factor as any. Of course, he didn't use an electric blender. It was just pure spoon on glass like a junkie and his needle. He needed these milkshakes. They were his rebirth into the realm of the gods and he was their master.

In one sick instance of his depravity, he beat a skinny blond-haired boy to a bloody mess as he recited the current thirty-one flavors of Baskin-Robbins ice cream in 3/4 time: one flavor for every blow to the boy's ever-flattening blond melon. Then he went home for a vanilla milkshake. He needed simplicity in the wake of triumph.

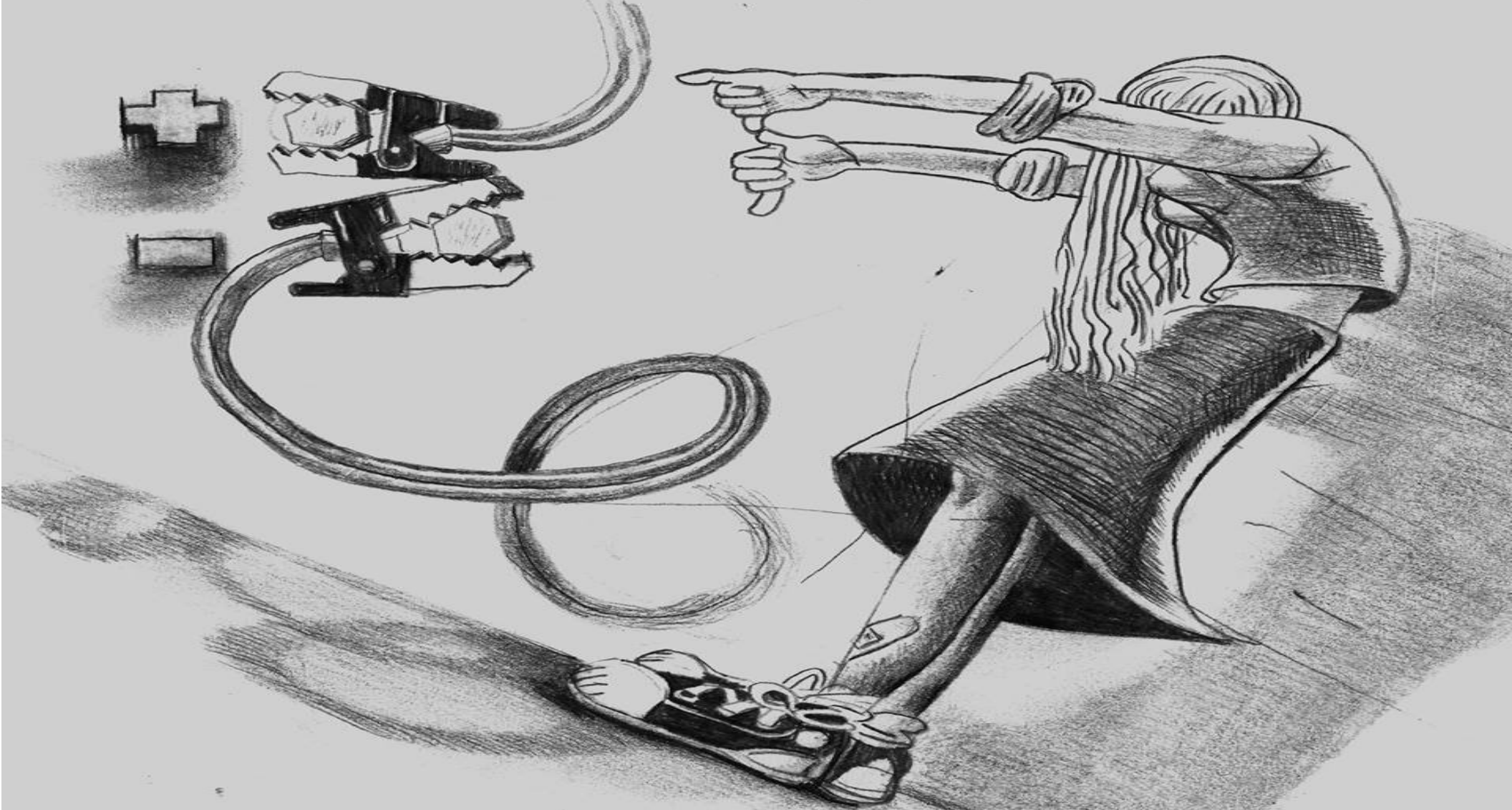
Then, when all the cows died, he was ruined. There was just no room for soy in his life.

He cried about it sometimes, later, but mostly he just dwindled away.



**LUCK OF THE PLUG**

**GREGG WILLIARD**



The power strip could take nine plugs. Only four were being used. The floor lamp, table lamp, TV/DVD player and CD player were all off. She pressed the off switch on the strip. The little light went out. She pulled out the plugs. She went to the kitchen and got a roll of tinfoil. She tore off small pieces and tucked them into the outlets, deep enough to be hidden. She wiggled the plugs back into the outlets. She used a butter knife to wedge tinfoil behind the power switch. Maybe when he turned the strip back on it would just trip the breakers and blow out the power. Piss him off real bad and give her a little head start. If it killed him she'd be in the clear for good, but he'd never know she did it. She pulled out the driveway and headed for the interstate, weighing either outcome with a smile.



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