

The Lump

By William Pauley III

My brain was throbbing in pain, a migraine, a ticking time bomb that would never explode. It just kept ticking and ticking and ticking. Tick, tick, tick. The pain resonated from somewhere within the five sections of vertebrae between my neck and shoulders. I hopped in the shower thinking somehow it would ease the pain, after all it worked wonders on hangovers [or so I've been told]. I didn't like to rely solely on drugs, medication. If there was a chance to solve whatever ails I was experiencing in a natural manner, I preferred to do it that way. Drugs were a last resort. I laid in the bottom of the tub and let the water pour down on me from the shower head, soaking into and pruning my skin. I was an old man then, so I don't know what that makes me now.

To my surprise, the pain did not ease, in fact it had gotten worse. Much worse. The pain felt as if it had kicked and ripped apart my brain. *I thought I felt the prying fingers of a fucking ape!* The bastard was spreading apart the deep folds of my brain looking for mites, lice, or any other vermin that may have been living down inside. Pain radiated from the bones in my neck like a thousand volts of electricity and the muscles running throughout my body had stiffened and made it almost impossible to move. I managed to take hold of my head with both hands—one on my jaw, the other on my crown—and I twisted my skull in a violent rage. I meant to kill that fucking ape, but instead I felt a sharp pain, and then nothing at all. I heard the terrible sound of vertebrae slipping, shifting, and snapping. Afterwards, my world went dark.

Blindness wasn't the only thing that furious snap brought me that day, it also paralyzed my entire body. Every nerve inside me had been severed, as if I'd blown the one goddamn fuse responsible for my every movement. From that unfortunate moment on, I've been nothing but a lump, an immovable wad of lard wrapped around a tiny skeleton.

A Spanish woman named Penelope came to my aid every day after that, and she was at my side almost every hour. The government paid her to do

so. *The government, ha!* She was sent by the goddamn government to spy on me, that was more like it, or at least it was my suspicion. Had a girlfriend go missing in 1978 [a long story that doesn't belong here] and they've been following me ever since. *That goddamn helper woman would steal from me!* I'd hear her quietly going through my things and the jingle- jangle of her oversized purse as she scrambled for the door. *That whore!* She fed me too much. I was a fat bloated pig because of her. Every bit of 500 pounds. *She was trying to kill me!*

In the twenty years of being this lump of flesh and bone, I'd nearly forgotten the beauty of the world.

Colors faded from memory. I couldn't see color even in my own imagination, only grey. Memories were draped in the same lonely shade. When I thought of Penelope, I always imagined her to look like a grey witch, casting spells on me with her grey wand and flying around on her grey broomstick. Being blind was damn near maddening, except for fact that I became a better hearer as a result. I know they say it's just an old wives' tale, but there really is some truth to it. Maybe it's not that I'm a better hearer, per say, it's just that without my sense of sight distracting me, I notice more with my sense of hearing. Whatever the reason, I was definitely hearing things I had never heard before my blindness came.

When the house was empty, I could hear for miles. Penelope would only leave me here alone when she thought I was asleep, so I pretended to sleep often. When she did, I could hear children playing at a playground a block away. I could hear neighbors walking their dogs [their ringing collars] outside along the streets. Those moments when I was alone were the only times I ever truly felt alive, that some small part of me was still eager to live, desiring the fruits of the world outside the prison I'd made of my own walls. However on one particular day, after Penelope left the house, I heard absolutely nothing but the humming static of the rain colliding with the earth. There was a storm brewing, and I'm not talking just a little rain either, a true storm, a dangerous storm, the type that ripped trees from roots, houses from foundations, corpses from graves [violent storms often caused cadavers buried in shallow graves to resurface, going on one final ride down the flood waters of the countryside and emptying over into some ditch or river somewhere, never to be seen again. Or at least I would have hoped for as much].

Thunder cracked overhead and shook my home. Pictures on the wall vibrated and the same vibrations traveled up my spine and reignited a flame I thought was long since gone. Chills prickled along my arms and neck as I began to feel again. Pain shot in long stems from my neck to my toes and the feeling excited me to no end. *I was able to feel again!* I wouldn't have been able to contain myself had it not been for the fact that I was still immobile, a complete vegetable. Thunder cracked again, but this time the vibrations were so powerful it caused my muscles to fully contract. *I moved.* For the first time in twenty years, I moved [however only slightly]. My neck shifted and it caused my head to fall forward a bit. It wasn't much, but it felt fantastic, completely surreal.

Hope flooded my consciousness as I waited for the next crack of the whip. The next booming thunder was even stronger than the two that had come before it. My neck muscles pulled and slung my head around like a slow moving moon revolving around its planet, until my face was planted in the fatty pillows of my chest.

With all the excitement of moving, I hardly noticed my breathing became limited. Instead of air, I was sucking in tufts of skin. A fourth cracking thunder brought back my eyesight [lightning illuminated the room and suddenly I could see colors again, but only for a second] and sent another jolt of pain down my spine, hurling my giant body to the floor. My neck bent, this time snapping, as my head became trapped beneath the mass of blubber that was my body.

The next few hours were bliss [before Penelope would find me, that is]. The suffocation and the broken neck should have killed me, but instead I lay there on the floor, happy. The rain hummed all around me, as I finally remembered the beauty of the world.

Penelope soon found me and I was able to breathe again, but my vision was gone again [the hours without air caused some permanent damage, most noticeably my skin, now visibly displaying bright purple and blue veins, broken capillaries, prominently and disgustingly, among other minor things]. The earth continued to spin, the stars and planets still had their suns and their moons—the universe as a whole remained unchanged—however, from that moment on, I was forever different. I'd never have anyone to love or even be anyone who deserved love, but I'd

always have that moment. I was happy, and although I wasn't able to physically show my feelings or my excitement, for the time being I was able to remember them, and that was good enough for me.

The next day Penelope propped me up close to the window, and I sat there, my blind eyes pointed up at the sky, hoping to conjure up a darkness overhead. I'd sit there for days on end, eagerly awaiting the next thunderstorm.

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