

# THE BEDLAM BIBLE

*"A Strange History of Madness  
Inside the Eighth Block Tower"*

BOOK TWO: WHITE FUZZ

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**The Bedlam Bible — Book Two: White Fuzz**  
*Including the story: White Fuzz*

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BOOK TWO:

WHITE FUZZ

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# *White Fuzz*

*She dissolved just yesterday, and though I can't fathom ever forgetting her, I've decided to write down the details of our meeting, of those few precious hours, for the hours changed me...*

When I awoke, the room was dark and I was lying on my couch, fully clothed. Must have fallen asleep sometime in the early evening, though I wasn't sure exactly when. I slid across the cool leather sofa cushions and reached up to turn on the lamp. A soft orange light bathed the walls, somehow making that cold, haggard place seem cozy. Immediately my eyes were drawn to the pages of a notebook resting open-faced on the coffee table in front of me.

Scribbled in bold black ink were the words, “white fuzz.”

There was no memory of ever writing these words, or even thinking them, though the handwriting was indeed mine. This wasn’t unusual, as I often jotted down half-formed ideas in the middle of the night, nearly fully unconscious. Some of the best things I’d ever written started with some odd pseudo-profound bullshit scrawled drunkenly inside that notebook.

*Often I wondered if I was mentally ill.* They say those with severe neurological disorders are totally unaware their problems are due to faulty brain functionality, either that or they recognize the difference between themselves and the rest of the world and are in total denial. Supposing I was mentally ill, I’d have to say I’d be a mix of both—totally unaware, yet also in denial. I didn’t know how it’d be possible to be both of those things simultaneously (I’d never claimed to be a doctor), but I couldn’t deny feeling both in control and something akin to rapidly unraveling, at all times, every day. The line drawn between being a “regular” guy with “regular” problems and someone with full-blown mental illness seemed hopelessly blurred. I’d spent most my life walking down either side of the diagnosis.

“White fuzz.”

The words meant nothing to me, *or had they?* Though I couldn’t think of a possible meaning behind them, I couldn’t deny the words felt attached to me, as if they had its grip on something deep

within, something far below the surface, *something hidden*. Suddenly I felt sick gazing upon each individual letter and turned away. On the cushion beside me, my cell phone buzzed.

“What are you doing?” read a text from an unknown phone number. The amount of close friends I’ve had all my life could be counted on one hand, and their information was saved in my phone, however getting a message like this was hardly odd, as I apparently had a phone number that once belonged to a pretty popular fellow. I received calls and texts from at least two people a week that I didn’t know personally, all looking for someone else, so without thinking too much about it, I wrote it off as a wrong number and ignored it. I stood up and went to take a piss. When I returned, I was surprised to see I had four new text messages from the same unknown number.

“Are you busy?”

“Want to come over?”

“I have cheese and wine.”

“Expensive cheese. The good stuff. The wine is kind of cheap though.”

I started to write back, to let them know of their mistake, but before I could hit send, my phone buzzed again. This time the person wasn’t sending a text, they were calling. I paced back and forth a few times before answering. I wasn’t sure why I was so nervous answering a call from a wrong number, perhaps it was just due to grogginess, but looking back on it now, I can’t help but think it must have

been intuition. Nevertheless, my hands trembled as I accepted the call and put the phone to my ear.

“Hello?” I said, hoping the sound of my voice would be enough indication for them to hang up and never call again. It wasn’t.

“Hey, why aren’t you answering my messages?” a female voice asked.

“I was trying to, but you were sending them so quickly. I didn’t have time to respond,” I said.

“Oh, I didn’t realize. I apologize. I’m so, so sorry,” she said, actually sounding apologetic, and not condescending at all.

“Who is this?”

“Lynda, with a ‘y,’” she said.

“Do I know you?”

She just laughed.

“Do I?” I asked again.

“No, I don’t think so. Maybe, though. What bars do you go to? Ever been to Al’s?”

“I’ve been to Al’s, yeah.”

“Yeah, Al’s! I thought I recognized you.”

I pulled the phone from my face to make sure I hadn’t accidentally answered a video call. I hadn’t. *What did she mean she recognized me?*

“Wait, you don’t know me. So why did you call me? Is this some sort of prank? What’s happening here?” I asked.

“Do you want to come over? I have wine and cheese. Expensive cheese...”

“Yeah, yeah, the good stuff. I read your messages.”

“So are you coming or not?” she asked. Her voice sounded bubbly and innocent.

My initial reaction was to say “hell no” and hang up on her, but something kept me from doing it. Perhaps it was loneliness, or maybe just boredom. It had been a while since I’d done anything worth talking about, after all. Still, I knew better than to just jump into a strange situation totally blind.

“I don’t even know who you are or what you look like,” I said.

“I already told you, I’m Lynda, with a ‘y’. Want me to send a pic?” she asked.

“Yeah, okay. Yes.”

“Okay, give me a sec,” she said. I could hear the sound of the phone snapping a picture. Seconds later, I received a photo of a beautiful young woman, a couple years younger than me, in her late twenties. She was making a goofy face and flipping off the camera.

“Did you get it?” she asked.

“Yeah, I got it, but I’m still skeptical. How do I know you didn’t just pull this picture off of some website?”

“Seriously?”

“I mean, it would be just as easy. How about this...send me a pic of you holding an ink pen in your mouth. That way if the girl in the two photos match, I’ll know it’s really you,” I said, feeling slightly embarrassed over my paranoia.

“Fine. Hold on a minute. Let me find a pen,” she said. I could hear her shuffling through

drawers. About a minute later I received a video message on my phone. In the video, the same girl from the previous picture was holding an ink pen in her fist while running her tongue erotically up the shaft of it. She put the end of it in her mouth and began to make pumping motions, as if she was giving a blowjob. She took the pen out of her mouth and laughed.

“Is that enough proof for you?” she asked.

I laughed.

“Yeah. Sorry I’m so paranoid. It’s just so easy to fuck with people these days.”

“No worries. I get it. So are you coming over?” she asked again.

I sighed, and against my better judgment, accepted her offer.

“Where do you live?” I asked.

“Eighth Block.”

“Eighth Block? Are you fucking kidding me?” I asked.

“Fuck off, guy!” she said, actually sounding angry. “I know it’s a shithole, but we’re people too. *Entitled prick...*”

“Hey, no, no, you’re taking it wrong. I live in Eighth Block too. I’m just surprised we live in the same building is all. Surely I’ve seen you around here at some point.”

“You have. We met at Al’s, remember?” she asked.

“I don’t think that ever happened. I would have remembered.”

“Are you trying to make me feel like I’m crazy? We’ve definitely met. I know we have.”

“There’s no way. I’ve only been to Al’s twice, and both times was with a girl I used to date who would have made it *very awkward* for us if she saw us chatting. She was the jealous type.”

“Oh, I know who you were with. You were standing outside with her, out back by the garden. She went inside for a beer or to use the restroom or something and you and I made eye contact. You were so cute too. You kept looking up at me like you wanted to say something, but you were too shy. Then your girl came back and that was that.”

I chuckled to mask my frustration.

“You know, as much as I wish I *had* seen you that night, whomever you’re thinking of wasn’t me. I’m sorry. I haven’t been with that girl in years, and back then Al’s didn’t even have a garden. That was put in more recently. Within the last year or so. We’ve never met. Trust me, I would have remembered. The one thing I have is a great memory.”

“It was you! Jesus, you’re so stubborn. You obviously just don’t remember. Don’t feel bad. It’s not like I’m mad at you for not remembering,” she said, then laughed, probably harder than she should have.

“Are you okay? Have you been drinking?” I asked, not trying to sound like a dick, just trying to fill in the gaps.

“I told you I have wine, silly,” she said, then let out a short giggle. “Are you coming over now or what?”

I looked at the time. It was almost 2 AM.

“Sure, I’ll come over. Where do you live?”

“Eighth Block.”

“Christ, I know that. What apartment?” I was starting to wonder if she was purposefully testing my patience.

“518.”

“Seriously? That’s weird,” I said.

“What?”

“We live on the same floor. It’s just odd we’ve never—” I stopped myself to avoid getting into another discussion about how we had or hadn’t met before (we hadn’t). “Shall I bring anything?”

“Just your dick,” she said, bursting into laughter. “I’m kidding. I mean, I know you’ll be bringing your dick anyway cause it’s kind of attached, but I’m not going to fuck you tonight. Sorry. *Christ*. Bring more wine.”

“I don’t have any—” I started, but was interrupted by a howling noise out in the hallway.

“Did you hear that?” she asked.

“Yeah. What the fuck was that?”

“It was me,” she said. “Come over right now.” She hung up the phone.

I wasn’t much of a drinker, so I wasn’t sure if I even had any alcohol to bring over anyway, but surely I’d look like an asshole if I didn’t bring *something*. My

only other options were to not drink and risk her feeling I was *above it* or *too good* to drink or something, or I could have just drank her wine, but that also seemed like a jerk thing to do. I checked the fridge and was surprised to see four beers left of a six-pack. *Modelo*. Norman must have left them here last time we had movie night. It's his brand. I swiped the cans from the fridge and did a quick run around the apartment, making sure I wasn't forgetting anything. I felt like such a nerd for being as nervous as I was. I pulled on my sock cap and buttoned up a light coat. I knew I wouldn't be going outside, and it wasn't cold in the building, but the coat and the cap, as asinine as it sounded, calmed me. They served as a sort of security blanket for whenever I felt uncomfortable, which, let's not lie, was damn near everywhere, all the time, in every situation. The only times I ever truly felt comfortable enough to walk about without them were the times spent inside my apartment, completely alone. *Again, were these "regular" people problems?*

I stepped outside my apartment, into the hallway, and had to break off a chunk of gathered salt from the doorknob in order to lock up. I wasn't sure if the hallway salt was coming down faster than usual, or if I just hadn't been leaving my apartment as much as I used to, but either way the feeling was unnerving. Looking up at the top edges of the walls, I could see the tiny salt crystals as they pushed through the sheetrock, but couldn't tell if the pace was abnormal or not. The fact that there were large

piles of salt gathered at the baseboards certainly suggested something was afoot, but it also just could have been poor maintenance, because, let's face it, Eighth Block wasn't a tight ship operation. Salt should never pour out of the walls to begin with, but it was, and *because* it was happening, it should have been properly swept up and disposed of regularly. I wasn't sure of the physical or mental repercussions one would experience living in salt, but common sense told me it couldn't have been good. Again, I felt like a complete dork for even worrying about the salt situation while there was a beautiful girl down the hall practically begging for me to come over, but I couldn't help myself. I planned to file a complaint with the building superintendent the morning of the next business day.

I stood outside the door of apartment 518 for at least a full minute before knocking. My heart suddenly felt too large for my chest and the pressure on my ribcage felt as if all the bones that made it up were going to snap in half. I couldn't breathe. I spent the minute outside her apartment trying to gather composure. I couldn't let her see what I spaz I was until at least the third time we'd see each other. It was sort of a rule I imposed on myself.

I took a deep breath and knocked.

Almost immediately, the door opened, but only about six or seven inches, then stopped. To my surprise, instead of seeing the beautiful girl from the picture and video sent to me earlier, I saw an

overweight tabby cat stepping out from behind the door to greet me in the hallway. I bent down to pick it up and it excitedly jumped into my arms, rubbing its head against my chest and shoulders. It was either a very loveable cat, or it was just completely starved for attention. I ran my fingers through its dark fur and pushed the door open.

“Hello?” I said into the darkened living room, still standing in the doorway. The only light seemed to be emanating from a dim lamp, resting on an end table against the far wall. Immediately a putrid stench filled my nostrils. It was a smell I had never experienced before, so I couldn’t begin to describe it or compare it to anything else. I’d soon find out it was the stench of death.

I took a step inside and that’s when I spotted her, the girl from the picture, and she was even more beautiful in person. However, unlike the bubbly attitude and innocence the picture suggested, this girl seemed troubled, worried, and carried a deep sadness within her. Her big beautiful green eyes stared only at the floor, and she was biting her fingernails. It took her a moment to respond to me.

“Oh, um... hi,” she mumbled, still looking at the floor. I was hoping the awkwardness was only due to the fact that we didn’t know each other, and not because she had just gotten some terrible news in the minutes between our phone conversation and our meeting.

I held up the beer cans and the cat leapt from my hands, onto the floor.

“I brought Modelo. You’re free to them if you want ‘em,” I said, walking toward the kitchen. “Do you care if I put these in your fridge?”

She looked up at me for the first time, tugged nervously on the ends of her long blond hair, and smiled. I stopped walking and returned the smile. I wasn’t sure what exactly we were doing, but the moment we shared was nice. As the night went on, I’d come to find these moments, when the two of us would get caught up in each other, lost in the other’s eyes, would be the only feelings of inner peace, a true calm, I’d ever experience. It was as if the two of us finally found a home within ourselves in which we belonged. The feeling was an odd one to share with a total stranger, but as a general rule in life, I tried not to question things that felt right. I couldn’t think of a worse way to waste precious time.

After a long pause, she finally answered my question.

“Sure, go ahead,” she said, motioning toward the fridge. She smiled, bigger than before, and it was the kind of smile that always drove me wild, the kind of smile that looked as if she had twice as many teeth as a normal mouth. *Like a wolf.* I’ve always had an odd fetish for teeth, and with women, the bigger the smile, the more attractive they were to me. Between her eyes and her smile, I was already feeling much more at ease than I had when she first texted me.

Getting to the kitchen was no easy task, as the place was in absolute shambles. There were dirty clothes, books, and empty candy wrappers in

large piles all over the floor, and by the looks of things, it had been this way for quite some time. There seemed to be little paths that led to all the rooms in the apartment, the kitchen, the bedroom, the bathroom, but the paths were really just areas that had less shit piles than the rest of the floor. The carpet was almost completely covered with *something*, all over the entire apartment. The only visible patches of carpet were covered with tiny bits of cat food, as if she fed her cat by placing handfuls of kibble randomly throughout the place. I wondered if the putrid smell that hit me when I first walked in had anything to do with the mess, or if it was something else, but I didn't say anything out of fear of coming off rude. Still, I found it odd she'd even invite me over knowing her place looked the way it did. For a moment I thought to invite her back to my place. I was never known amongst friends for being a clean freak or anything close, but my place was nowhere near as messy as hers, and I thought maybe the two of us would be more comfortable in a less cluttered (less smelly) environment. I refrained from offering at the risk of sounding mean and pretentious, two traits I wasn't proud or particularly fond of having, though I did a good job of hiding that part of me, mostly. I wasn't even aware they were real issues until I was called out on them by an ex-lover. It took years, and several other people calling me out on it too, before I ever accepted it as a true personality flaw of mine. But I recognized it, I accepted it, and for the most part I tried to squash it, or at least I'd kept those

feelings buried deep inside for as long as I could stand it. Sometimes it was a real struggle though.

I opened the fridge and was surprised to see it was mostly empty. Only a few cans of ginger ale and a stack of about four or five thick sirloin steaks were inside. I pulled one of the Modelo cans off and stuck the rest in the bottom of the fridge, next to the ginger ale. I shut the door and walked back into the living room.

“You must really love steak,” I said, laughing as I pulled back on the tab of my beer. She was now sitting on the couch.

“My dad does. It’s all he ever buys,” she said, still looking sad. It was around this time I had first noticed she was wearing pajamas. I wasn’t sure how I hadn’t noticed before, but I guess her beauty and getting caught in her eyes kind of threw me. Usually I was very observant.

“You okay?” I asked.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” she said, and gave me a fake smile. I wasn’t sure what to say next.

“So... what are you drinking tonight?” I asked.

She motioned her hands over the two bottles of wine resting on the coffee table, unopened.

“Oh, from our phone conversation I thought you had already started drinking,” I said. She shook her head.

“No, I just woke up whenever I texted you.”

“Speaking of, how did you get my number?”

“Are you upset?” she asked, her eyes widened.

“No, that’s not what I mean. I’m just curious how you got my number,” I said. “Did you get it from someone here in the tower?”

She shook her head.

“I texted a random number. It just happened to be yours,” she said, reaching for one of the wine bottles. She studied the bottle for a second and became frustrated at the sight of the cork. I suspected she either didn’t drink much, or was used to much cheaper wine, the kinds that had twist off caps. I took the bottle from her hand, removed the cork with my pocketknife, and handed it back to her.

“Thanks,” she said. “Do you care if I drink straight from the bottle?”

I shrugged my shoulders.

“It’s your wine. Do whatever you want with it,” I said.

She laughed and took a swig.

“Would you like some cheese? It’s the good stuff. Really expensive,” she said. The way she kept using the same words to describe the cheese made it feel as if the lines were rehearsed. They just looked like regular slices of cheese to me anyway. Not that I was complaining. It was just an observation. I didn’t know much about cheese. I knew some types could get expensive, but I would have never been able to determine the quality or the price of the cheese by looks alone. It all just looked like cheap, regular old cheese to me.

“No thanks. Maybe later?”

She smiled and took a bite of one of the Muenster slices.

“So you just texted a random number?” I asked.

“Yeah. Why? Is that weird?”

“I don’t know. I’ve never done it before. I just think it’s weird that you actually randomly texted someone that lives only a few doors down from you, in the same apartment building. What are the odds of that? Do you text random people often?”

Something shifted within her. She was visibly uncomfortable with the question.

“I feel like you’re judging me,” she said.

“What? No, it’s not like that. I’m sorry if I made you feel that way. I was just trying to have a conversation. We can drop it,” I said. She placed the wine bottle on the coffee table and stood up.

“I have to use the restroom,” she said in a monotonous voice and walked out of the room. I leaned back on the couch and took a sip of beer, telling myself if things didn’t start to go a little smoother, *and soon*, then I’d go back home immediately after finishing off my first can. The mood and the energy between us were rapidly fluctuating between feeling *awkward and uncomfortable* to *comfortable and secure* and back again. It was difficult keeping up with my feelings and emotions being this close to her. Just then a painful thought entered my mind: *was this love? Or at least the very beginning of it?* I wasn’t sure I’d ever truly felt it before, so I couldn’t be certain. Things felt different with her. Just being around

her, staring into her eyes, it felt intoxicating. *Was that what love felt like?* I felt like such a fool pondering those thoughts mere minutes after meeting a complete stranger, but I couldn't deny they were there. *People fall in love at first sight, right? That's a thing. It happens.* I became frustrated with myself. *It wasn't love. I didn't even know the girl, and she certainly didn't know me.* I tried to slap myself back into reality, figuratively, of course, but my mind continued to wander.

"I'm sorry about the smell!" she yelled from the bathroom.

"What?" I said instinctively, even though I had heard what she said. I wasn't sure why I did that, but I did it often. *"Regular" person problems?*

"I said I am sorry about the smell! I don't know what it is. I think Baby killed a bird out on the balcony and hid it somewhere inside here. I haven't been able to find it."

I deduced Baby was the name of her cat. If it wasn't, then I was afraid to meet this "Baby." The toilet flushed.

"I think it may be in here," she yelled. "Smells like burning flesh."

At first, I wasn't aware she was subtly calling me in for help. I sat on the couch, thumbing the tab of my beer can and staring at a half-eaten bag of seeds labeled "sunflower nutmeats." Personally, I'd never heard sunflower seeds called that before, as the sunflower seed was just that, a seed, not a nut, so the peculiarity of the word "nutmeats" fascinated and confused me enough to distract me from the

situation happening in the bathroom at the moment. A piercing screech brought me back into reality.

“You okay in there?” I yelled from the couch.

“Yeah, just trying to move the washer,” she yelled, sounding distressed.

I chuckled at the thought of her tiny body heaving a two hundred pound washer across the bathroom floor, then stood up and went to help her out. When I opened the door, I was greeted by her round ass, right at eye level. She was perched upon the washer, leaning over behind it, trying to get a good look at the two feet of space she'd just cleared by moving the machine. The bathroom was much smaller than I'd anticipated, much too small to double as a laundry room as well. I was surprised how different the layout of her apartment was to mine, given we lived on the same floor, but the building was old, and architects did things differently in those times. I tried to step back, respecting her personal space, but the room was just too small. I stared helplessly at her ass, at the way the multi-colored zebras illustrated on her pajama bottoms seemed in a way to be hugging her every curve. For a split second I fantasized jerking the waistband of her pants down around her knees and burying my face into her wet gash, tonguing hungrily at her cunt, but immediately suppressed the feeling. I was a man, after all, and a man's brain was wired just like an animal's. When faced with either hunger or lust, a man has to remind himself to be decent. Those who failed in suppressing their

instincts were almost always labeled as monsters, and those who succeeded, well, those were the ones known as good men. I always thought of myself as one of the good men, but I'd be lying if I didn't say I had my moments of shame.

"Any luck?" I asked, peering over the rim of her ass cheeks.

"No, not—wait," she said, then stretched her body even farther behind the machine. Her knees slipped on the slick surface of the washer lid, pulling her pants halfway down her backside, exposing her naked ass. She screamed as she fell back a few inches. Instinctually, I grabbed her legs to help her regain control, and immediately after doing so, dread sunk in. She'd assume I was a creep for sure. I was a total stranger, hugging her half-naked ass in her bathroom in the wee hours of the morning. *Jesus. Why had I come here?*

"Is my ass hanging out?" she asked, not sounding embarrassed at all.

"Um," I mumbled. "Yeah. Yes, it is."

She laughed and made no attempts at covering herself.

"I found a box," she said. "Pull me up."

I pulled her up and helped maneuver the box out from behind the machine. It was an odd looking box, mostly black with a brown leather handle. There were large obsidian stones glued all around it and a small brass lock at the center, holding the box shut. She spun around on the washer and held it in her lap, staring at it long enough to make me uncomfortable.

“What’s in the box?” I asked.

Her eyes shifted when I spoke, as if she was trying to block my words from coming through. She never answered. Instead, her face drooped and appeared sad. After several long moments, she undid the lock and opened the box. I tried not to be rude, but my curiosity got the best of me. I peered over the lid and peeked inside. Two large, yellow, preserved chicken feet were resting in grooves cut out of stiff black foam, and they were wired together crudely, with a foot at each end, like some wicked phone receiver. She touched one of the feet and tears welled in her eyes. Not sure what to do, I put my hand on her shoulder to console her. She looked up at me and smiled, and as she did, a tear streamed down her cheek.

“My fiancé raped me, got me pregnant, then disappeared in the middle of the night,” she said. I was stunned and did not know how to respond, or even how to react. I just shook my head and pulled her close. She pushed me away.

“He gave me this on my nineteenth birthday,” she said, looking at the box. “It’s supposed to ward off evil spirits or something. I don’t think it works.”

“Your nineteenth birthday? How long ago was that?” I asked.

“Ten years ago. Well, almost. I’ll be twenty-nine in August,” she said.

“What was it doing behind the washer?” I asked.

She turned her eyes away from me again and they began to roll around, as if she was lost inside

some deep thought. I tried to move into her line of sight, to perhaps snap her out of her flashback, but she was completely unaware of her surroundings. When she finally came to, she answered my question.

“My dad,” she said. “He hides things from me.”

“Your dad? Does he live here?”

She nodded.

“Is he here right now?” I asked, worried about how loud we were being.

She shook her head.

“He’s in Louisiana.”

“What’s he doing all the way down in Louisiana?”

“He’s staying with my mom for a while,” she said. “He’s very old. I have to take care of him. That’s why I live here. *You think I live here with him because I want to live here?*”

Her last question felt unfairly accusatory, as I had said nothing that implicated such a thing.

“No. I never said that,” I said. She shook her head, and turned her gaze toward the floor.

“That’s why I live here, to take care of him,” she said.

“Okay,” I said.

“That’s why I live here and that’s why I don’t have a job. My job is taking care of him,” she said.

I nodded, trying not to say anything that could’ve been mistaken as judgment, even though it was painfully clear she was lying, by the odd way

she repeated certain sentences, as if she was trying to convince not just me, but also herself.

She stroked the box in her lap, as if it were a newborn child, and hugged it tight against her breasts.

“This is my grandmother’s old house,” she said, changing the subject. “Everything on the shelves and on the walls all belonged to her. That’s why everything in here is so old.”

I hadn’t noticed before, but she was right, the décor hanging on the walls was ancient. Everything dated from 1940 or earlier, and the antique aspect was really the only common theme among the décor, as nothing really seemed to go together. There were all sorts of colors, items, and styles of paintings found on the walls and the shelves that clashed with one another, as if the place was a shrine of the times, a museum, rather than an actual lived in space. The way her eyes flickered around the room had me nervous, like she was about to slip into some PTSD-induced coma, or already had, so I closed the box, resting again on her lap, and made a suggestion.

“You wanna go in the living room and maybe watch a movie or something?” I asked, not really caring if we watched a movie or not, just trying to bring her back to reality.

She smiled awkwardly and nodded her head. I helped her off the washer and led her out the bathroom door. When she exited, I stayed back.

“I’ll be right out. Give me a second,” I said, then lifted up the toilet seat and took a piss. When I

finished, I locked the box up and returned it to its place behind the washer. I wasn't sure what the hell the object was inside the box, or even what it meant to her, but it clearly wasn't bringing about a positive response. My thought was to put it away in hopes it would bury those ill feelings deep within her. It had to be better than her experiencing a flashback every time she went to the bathroom. I washed my hands, then went to meet her in the living room.

"Here, I think we should watch this," she said, handing me a loose DVD. The disc was dirty and heavily worn. It didn't seem playable. The words "Buffalo '66" were written across the topside.

"Nice! I've been meaning to watch this for some time now," I said. "I'm guessing you've already seen it?"

"Yeah, I've seen it a few times," she said. "I hate it."

"You hate it?"

"I still want to watch it," she said.

"Why would you want to watch a movie you hate?"

Her eyes started to roll again and her eyelids flickered. She shook her head and snapped herself out of the trance. She smiled.

"Put it in," she said, and walked over to the couch. I looked around on her shelves, wondering if this was the only movie she owned. It appeared so.

"You know, I have a ton of blu-rays at my place. I can run and get something else. It's not a problem. I'm sure I have something you'd like."

“For fuck’s sake, just put the movie in!” she yelled.

“Seriously?”

“Yeah, *seriously*,” she said, mocking me.

“Okay then,” I said, deciding against pointing out her obvious shift in attitude. Somehow I just didn’t think it would help make the situation any better or less awkward. I tried to clean the disc as best I could with the tail end of my shirt, but it didn’t come any cleaner.

“I don’t even have anything to play blu-rays anyway,” she said.

“How am I supposed to know that?” I asked.

“Look around. Do you see a blu-ray player?”

I looked around, more looking for something to play the DVD in my hand than entertaining her. When I found it, I had to laugh.

“There,” I said. “Right there is a blu-ray player.”

“What? Really?” she asked.

“Yes,” I said, pointing to disc tray of the player. “Says so right here.”

“Fine. I get it. You know more than me,” she said. “You’re so much smarter. You’ve proved your point.”

“Wait, what?”

“Grow the fuck up,” she said, then turned away from me.

“What the hell is going on here?” I asked. She was ignoring me now.

“Maybe I should just go,” I said.

“Is that what you want to do?” she said, not making eye contact with me.

“No,” I said. “I want to watch this movie with you, but you’re being difficult.”

“Oh, yeah, I’m the difficult one, right?” she said. “You’ve been difficult my entire life.”

Though the statement made no sense whatsoever, I could see it in her eyes as she stared at me that she truly believed what she was saying was true. I knew little about posttraumatic stress disorder, but enough to suspect it was living and breathing inside her. The object from the box clearly triggered something in her brain that really pissed her off. Instead of responding to her ridiculous accusation, I decided to change the subject.

“I’m hungry. Are you hungry?” I asked.

A glaze gleamed over her face and immediately she was smiling again.

“I have cheese. Really good cheese.”

“No, I mean real food. There’s a Chinese place that delivers here. It’s really good and they’re open late. My treat,” I said.

“I know the place,” she said. “I order from there all the time. I have a menu around here somewhere. Let me grab it.”

She walked into the kitchen and shuffled through a drawer. When she returned, she was holding the menu in her hand.

“Do you know what you want?” she asked.

“Sesame chicken, white rice, and an egg roll. I get it every time,” I said.

“Shall I call them up?” she asked.

“If you’re ready, yeah.”

She dialed the number.

“Yes, I’d like to place an order, please,” she said. Her voice sounded different now, high-pitched, like a cartoon character. “Delivery. Yes, it’s Lynda in Eighth Block, right. Can I get a single order of mei fun noodles, a side order of steamed broccoli, a single order of hot and spicy general tso’s chicken, three egg rolls....um...and a family order of crab rangoon?”

I couldn’t believe how much she was ordering. Surely this tiny girl couldn’t put that much food away in one sitting.

“Don’t forget the sesame chicken combo,” I said.

“Oh, and I need a sesame chicken combo with white rice and another egg roll,” she said. “And a family order of potstickers too, with four fortune cookies, please.”

I walked into the kitchen and tossed my empty beer can into the trash. She hung up the phone.

“Do you want anything from the fridge?” I asked.

“No, I’m still working on the wine,” she said.

I opened the fridge and grabbed another Modelo.

“So, that was a hell of a lot of food you just ordered,” I said, laughing. I stood in the doorway of the kitchen. Baby ran over to me and began rubbing her body against my legs.

“What can I say? I’m hungry,” she said.  
“You’ll help me eat it, right?”

I laughed.

“I’ll do my damndest,” I said. “We should get the movie started too. It’s already pretty late...or early, however you look at it.”

I pushed play on the remote and turned the television on.

About a half hour later, the food arrived.

“Here’s the cash,” I said, digging into my pocket for my wallet. Lynda immediately seemed frazzled. “You alright?”

She shook her head.

“Can you answer the door?” she asked.

“Uh, sure. No problem,” I said. “Is everything okay?”

“I can’t go out there. Into the hall. I can’t do it,” she said, rocking nervously in her seat. “Are you mad at me?”

“Mad at you? Why would I be mad at you?” I asked.

“Because sometimes...I can’t do things,” she said. I nodded as if I fully understood what it was she was saying, stood up, and answered the door. I didn’t feel we knew each other well enough to push her to be more specific.

An hour later, the movie ended, and we were lying together on the couch, stuffed, with plenty of leftovers.

“Wow,” I said.

“So, what did you think of the movie?” she asked.

“I absolutely loved it,” I said. “What don’t you like about it?”

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“You told me you hated the movie. I was just wondering why you hated it.”

“What? Why would you say that?” she asked, turning toward me. “I love that movie. It’s my favorite! That’s why I wanted to share it with you, silly.”

She had me questioning my own sanity, even more than I had on my own.

“Stop,” I said. “Please. I know you said you hated it before we even put it on, alright? Be real.”

“I am real,” she said. “I’m as real as it gets.”

I believed her.

“I only said that because every single boyfriend I’ve ever watched it with all hated it. You’re the first that actually got it. I could tell by how much you laughed. Every other guy took it too seriously. They didn’t see the humor.”

“Wait, so I’m your boyfriend now?” I asked, forgetting all the other words she just said.

“You don’t want to be?” she asked.

“I don’t know. We don’t really know each other. We’ve only watched a movie together.”

“You only date people you already know?” she asked.

“I mean, generally, yeah,” I said, feeling awkwardly vanilla in the moment. “You don’t? You only date strangers?”

“Everyone is a stranger,” she said. “Even the ones you claim to know.”

I couldn’t argue that logic. In fact, I felt she hit the nail directly on the head. I actually thought about it often, how fake everyone around me seemed to be. Society forces us all to become some strange version of ourselves that simply isn’t accurate, so it makes all of us uncomfortable and awkward as we interact with one another. Some of us are so crippled by these thoughts that we feel anxiety just at the idea of leaving our homes and going out into the world. Her words made me think of my hat and jacket, and how I was still wearing them, lying on the couch with her, and her in her pajamas. Then I thought about her fear of answering the door, of going out into the hallway. As strange as she seemed to me at times, when I really thought about it, we actually shared a lot of the same phobias and symptoms, though we expressed them a little differently. If she was crazy, then so was I. *Fuck that “regular” people problems bullshit.*

I thought about her words again and etched them into memory. *Everyone is a stranger...*

“You’re right,” I said, squeezing her tight. “I’d be honored to be your boyfriend.”

She smiled and kissed me on the cheek. I looked into her eyes and felt connected to her in a way I'd never quite experienced with another human being. In that moment, we felt electric and bound, impossibly twisted into the most complex of forms, twisted until the lines between what was her and what was me were hopelessly blurred. The feeling was reminiscent of the bond a couple usually felt during sex, but we were achieving this only through eye contact. If our chemistry was truly this strong, then sex with her would surely be otherworldly. The answer would come in time, I thought, but at the moment I'd have been satisfied with just a kiss. So I kissed her, deep and passionately, and I was surprised to find her taste was unlike anything I'd ever experienced before. I suppose 'taste' isn't really the proper word to use here. In all honesty, she didn't really have a taste at all besides a hint of wine. I suppose it would be more accurate to say she had a peculiar...*texture*. Her saliva had a density to it that seemed unnatural. As my tongue maneuvered about inside her mouth, it felt more like dipping into a can of salve than it did a human. I had to push the thick slime of her saliva up against the walls of her jaw in order to even find her tongue writhing within it.

A bell chimed, interrupting our kiss. It was her cell phone. She pulled away from our embrace, and as she did, several strands of mucus stretched from my mouth to hers. I quickly wiped them away, but she just let the strings on her end fall to her skin, as if she hadn't even noticed. The glow of the cell

phone screen was almost blinding. I wasn't sure how she wasn't bothered by it. She received a text message from a person named "BarrySix" that said, "Time to take your meds." I didn't mean to look, honest. The brightness of her screen caused my eyes to draw toward it, much like a moth to flame. That said, now that I had looked, in the back of my mind I was wondering who this BarrySix was and what meds it was she was supposed to be taking. She tossed her phone onto the coffee table and pulled me close again.

"Wait, wasn't that important?" I asked, trying not to tattle on myself for disrespecting her privacy.

"No," she said, then locked her lips onto mine. I pulled away. Her tasteless honey dripped from her lips.

"Shouldn't you take care of that?" I asked.

"Take care of what?"

"I mean, go take your meds. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to look, but I can wait. It's fine."

"It's not important," she said. "I'll take them later."

She kissed me again, but could tell immediately I wasn't really into it this time around. She threw up her hands and sprang to her feet.

"Why are you acting so weird about this?" she asked, frustrated.

"I don't know," I said. "How is it not important? You have some guy texting you at god-knows-what-time to remind you to take them. Sounds important to me."

“Are you seriously getting jealous, uh—,” she struggled with my name. She snapped her fingers as if that would help her to remember.

“This is dumb,” I said. “I’m sorry. I think I should go now.”

As I stood, she ran and blocked the front door with her body. She stood there for a few seconds and I did nothing but stare at her in utter confusion. Her eyes filled with tears and she collapsed to the floor.

“No! No, you can’t! No!” she screamed. I calmly watched as she squirmed about on the carpet, throwing what seemed to be a temper tantrum.

“Why are you so angry with me?” she said through dramatic sobs.

“I’m not angry at all,” I said. “What makes you think I’m angry?”

“You’re just so jealous and upset. Why are you leaving?” her sobs seemed to be growing louder with every sentence.

“Why do you keep accusing me of being angry with you? Do you think I’m an angry person?” I asked. I never thought of myself as an angry person ever. In fact, I prided myself on how tolerant I was in most situations.

“Yes,” she said.

“What have I said that comes off as angry to you?”

“Just look at you. You have your coat and your hat on. You’re walking out on me. You’re leaving me here alone. Why do you keep leaving me alone,—”

she struggled with the name again. I don't think I ever even told her my name. I laughed.

"Look, I'm not angry," I said. "I honestly don't even know what this is. You're confusing the hell out of me. I just think if we're already arguing with one another, and we've only known each other for mere hours, then maybe it would be best for the both of us if I just went home so we could put this night behind us. But I'm not upset."

"Please, don't go. Just give me one more chance," she begged, still sobbing on the floor. "Don't break up with me!"

"You don't even know my name!" I yelled, not in anger, but in the pure absurdity of it all. "Christ! Is this really happening?"

She began rocking back and forth against the door.

"You're so full of rage," she said. "You can't even see it."

"You're making me out to be some sort of psychotic," I said. "Look, I don't have anger issues. I'm totally fine. I just want to go home, please. You can keep the beer. I don't really drink much anyway."

I waited for her to move aside so I could access the door, but she didn't budge. Instead, she curled up like a fetus and proceeded to suck her thumb. *Was she really sucking her thumb*, I thought. *There are adults that actually do this?*

I shook my head in disbelief and looked around the place. It was then that I spotted the two saddles in each of the far corners of the room. They

were large and made of dark brown leather, and each sat on their own wooden sawhorse.

“You have horses?” I asked.

“Horses?” she said, sounding confused. I pointed at the saddles.

“No, not yet,” she said.

“What do you mean not yet? Are you planning on getting some?”

“Of course. Horses are beautiful,” she said.

“But you live in an Eighth Block apartment. Where will you keep them?”

She laughed.

“You’re silly,” she said, and was suddenly all smiles again. “So are you staying?”

“Why two?” I asked.

“What?”

“Why do you have two saddles and no horses? One saddle and no horse is strange enough, but two saddles and no horses, that’s just mad.”

She turned away, looking now at the floor, and held her finger to her lips, as if to shush me. Her eyes were rolling again.

“You okay?”

Her eyelids flickered.

“It’s for dad. The other one is for dad,” she said. The words came out sloppily and drenched in fear, the word ‘dad’ in particular felt unnaturally heavy rolling off her tongue.

“I take care of him,” she said. “That’s why I live here. I cook and clean and take care of him. He needs me. He needs me here with him.”

She was fooling no one. The girl could barely take care of herself, judging by her surroundings and the late night/early morning text messages reminding her to take her medicine, of which she ignores totally. *And cleaning?* That simply didn't happen. Not in that apartment. By the looks of it, the junk piles have all existed and have been trampled upon for at least several months now. I didn't question her though. I didn't like to think of myself as a judgmental person. I had my moments, sure, like now, but anytime I felt myself judging another person, even silently and in my own head, I did my best to shut it down before it ever got the chance to leave my lips. Besides that, she was clearly distressed and I didn't want to pile any more on her. Anytime she'd bring her father up in conversation, the manner in which she spoke changed drastically. Suddenly her sentences seemed loose and carelessly spat, spoken in a way that suggested she was trying to sell me something, even though I was convinced she wasn't entirely certain what it was she was selling in the first place. There was something odd about this relationship between father and daughter, but in all honesty I had no desire to scratch that ticket, just as I'm sure she had no desire to explain it. Whatever the truth was though, it felt dark, and it felt wrong.

I thought it best not to push the subject any further.

"He'll be back soon," she said.

Tears swelled in her eyes to the point they broke and traced down her cheeks. She remained

silent, as did I, and I watched her eyes dart back and forth, stuck in some awful memory. Being trapped in an apartment with so many triggers, it was no wonder the girl was so broken under the skin. Calling me into her apartment may have been nothing more than a plea for a distraction, someone to come and free her mind from the prison of her home, but what she really needed was someone to take her out of her surroundings, even if just for a short while.

“Hey, I’ve been thinking,” I said. “How about we head over to my place? Get a change of scenery for a bit. How’s that sound?”

“I can’t leave. The hallway,” she said.

“What if I carry you?” I asked.

She looked up at me, her face wet and glistening, and flashed a smile. She nodded her head.

“Okay, yeah,” she said. “Let me get my things.”

I helped her to her feet and she wiped the tears from her face with the bottom of her pajama top, exposing the underside of her naked breasts. I pretended not to notice, even though she seemed like the type of person that probably wouldn’t have been embarrassed regardless. She walked into her bedroom and I followed. Her room was even worse than the rest of the house in terms of both cleanliness and stench. The air was thick and difficult to breathe, which had me convinced she was living in a space between walls heavily infested with mold.

“You know, if you take some of that salt from out there in the hallway and bring it in here, it would take care of that mold problem in no time. That’s why they keep pushing it through the middle of the building. Nothing can live in salt,” I said.

She started shaking her head, and quite dramatically I might add. She walked past me briskly and slammed her room door shut.

“I can’t go out there. I told you that a thousand times,” she said.

“I mean, I could help you,” I said. “Black mold is dangerous. You don’t want to mess around and keep living in it. Have you read the side effects?”

“Are you trying to kill me?” she yelled, throwing a book at me, which just happened to be the closest object within her reach.

“Hey, what was that for?” I asked.

“Why are you so angry? Christ,” she said. “Will you please just calm down!”

“What?”

“Calm down,” she said. “Just calm down. This is getting absurd.”

*You’re telling me*, I thought.

We needed to get out of this room, and the sooner the better.

“I’ve got to get out of here. You coming with or no?” I asked.

“I told you I’m coming,” she said. “I just need a couple things.”

She reached down and picked up a tiny black backpack off the floor. I was surprised she was able to find it so easily in the mess that surrounded her.

Dirty clothes, cat food, kitty litter, empty soda cans, you name it, completely covered the carpet, her bed, and her dresser. But what I found most peculiar was the amount of empty orange pill containers stashed around the room. In all the mess, easily half of it was made up of these empty pill containers. She shuffled through the chaos, occasionally picking up one of the orange containers and shaking it, presumably looking for one that still contained her meds. When she found it, she stuffed it into her bag, along with a paperback book, some wadded clothes, and her toothbrush, which she curiously found on her bed and not in the bathroom.

When I invited her over, I didn't intend for her to stay the night, well at least not to sleep over. Not that I was upset, or that it bothered me to discover it was what she wanted, I just didn't like the thought of her assuming that's what I meant. Most guys would probably have invited her over for the sole purpose of sleeping with her. I was never like that. I respected women too much. The only way we'd have sex tonight, even with her sleeping over, would be if she threw herself at me. I'd lose all self-control. I'm respectful, but still a man, after all.

"Can you grab that blanket there?" she said, pointing at the mess on her bed.

"Don't worry about that," I said. "I have plenty of blankets at my place if you need one."

"No, I need it now," she said. "To wrap my body."

For the first time that night I decided not to question her bizarre request, not even silently and

in my own head. The more time I spent with Lynda, the more I realized there was no fun in analyzing her actions. It was more fun to experience her, to breathe her in while she was still within reach, cause something deep in my gut told me she wouldn't be around for long, in my life, or in the world for that matter. Something told me that night with her would be a flash in a pan, and something I'd never forget. Some people felt that way naturally. I could never quite explain it. Other relationships could last for years and leave less of an impression than someone who'd burst into my life, almost always unexpected, and certainly uninvited, and hit with such force I felt hopelessly shattered in the aftermath. I've had people change my life in a single conversation. Those people came few and far between, and at that point it had easily been several years since experiencing anything like it, but still, *Lynda was different*. She was an enigma, and questioning the actions of an enigma is like throwing black paint on a priceless piece of art—it destroys it. Questioning the mystery ultimately showed I was unable to see and appreciate Lynda for what she was—a unique woman, unsullied by the outside world. Her flaws, the flashbacks, whatever terrible things she'd seen, all of it played into her uniqueness, and therefore, in a sort of macabre way, it was exactly why I found her so beautiful. Why did I ever feel the need to break her down into little pieces, into something that felt comprehensible and familiar? Why did I feel the need to pin labels onto the cloth of her breast? To

box her in? To define her? I was a child of society and as much as I wanted to believe I broke the mold the world had made for me, there was still a great deal of my thoughts and actions that were rooted inside those worldly ideals. As disappointed I'd get every time those thoughts became exposed, I'd often take comfort knowing I was at least very aware of this flaw, and I was quick to make corrections in my behavior. So at least there was that.

I brushed off the junk piled high upon her bed, mostly dirty clothes all pulled inside out and reeking of sweat and cat urine. I pulled one of the blankets until it was clear of debris and bundled it up in my arms, carrying it close to my chest. When I made eye contact with her, Lynda was shaking her head.

"No, not that one," she said. "The thick one. The comforter."

I laughed.

"I don't keep it that cold in my apartment," I said. "It's summer. I really don't think you'll need it."

"You don't get it," she said. "It's for the hallway. I need to be wrapped up to make it to your place. The thicker the blanket, the better."

I nodded and collected the comforter up in my arms, tossing the thinner blanket to the floor. I figured she wouldn't care. How could she?

At her front door, she held her little backpack close to her chest and told me to wrap her up. I did

just that, making sure all was covered except her head, so she could still see.

“The head too,” she said. “I need to be completely covered. I can’t risk it.”

I covered her head.

“You’re still gonna carry me, right?” she asked.

“Of course,” I said, getting used to the clueless feeling that bathed in my brain the majority of the night. I heaved and pulled her body up to my chest, so that she was lying in my arms like a child. Maneuvering through the doorway, while also trying to keep Baby from running out into the hall, proved challenging, but I managed to pull it off masterfully. I decided to run down the hallway, thinking the faster we made it through, the less frightened she’d become, but it nearly proved to be disastrous. Halfway to my door and my shoe slipped on one of the many salt piles lining the edges of the floor. I was able to catch myself without falling, thankfully, however it was enough of a scare to cause her to become concerned.

“What was that?” she said, in a panicked voice.

“Nothing,” I said. “Everything is fine. Almost there.”

“Don’t run,” she said. “If you trip, I could die.”

“I won’t run,” I said. “We’re here anyway. Bad news, though. I can’t open the door.”

“Don’t put me down! Don’t put me down!” she screamed hysterically.

“Don’t worry, I wasn’t planning on it,” I said. “Can you reach into my pocket and get the key?”

She was silent for a moment, as if she was contemplating some other way to get the job done.

“You’re getting heavier every second,” I said. “I can’t keep doing this. We’re going to have to do something.”

She threw the comforter off her head, turned over, and dug her hands through my pockets. She did it quickly, as if she was searching for pennies at the bottom of a pool, anxious to find them and get back to the surface as swiftly as possible. She struggled to locate the keys though. In a panic, she darted back and forth from pocket to pocket, occasionally brushing up and sometimes even squeezing my penis through the lining. I gave her the benefit of the doubt at first, assuming she must have done so on accident, or completely unaware of what it was she was grabbing, that is until she finally found the key and spoke up.

“I saw your penis earlier. I’m sorry,” she said.

“What?” I asked, even though I heard every word she’d said.

“I watched you while you were in the bathroom,” she said, pushing the key into the deadbolt. “I saw your penis and it’s very nice. You should be proud.”

I didn’t know how to respond.

“I’m sorry. That’s weird, I know,” she said. “But I felt guilty for watching you and thought you should know.”

She pushed open the door and buried herself in the comforter again. I walked into the apartment and placed her on the couch, then went back and

shut the door. I went into the bedroom and took off my coat and hat, checking the mirror to make sure my hair wasn't too out of sorts. When I made it back into the living room, Lynda was up on her feet, going through the books on my shelves.

"You like to read, huh?" I asked.

"Yes, I love it," she said, holding up a book titled *The Kangaroo Notebook*. "You have so many books, but I've never heard of any of them."

"Yeah, I guess I don't read too much mainstream stuff," I said. "Right now I'm really into Japanese literature. Kobo Abe is one of my all-time favorites."

"I can tell," she said. "You have a lot of his work."

She seemed more comfortable in my place than she had in her own home. She put the books back in their place on the shelf and continued exploring. She skimmed through my movie collection, smiled oddly, then made her way over to the desk, thumbing through the stack of notebooks resting atop. Her rudeness, going through my things without my permission, had me feeling uncomfortable. I hadn't planned on having company over. If I had, I would have tucked certain items away, like my writing notebook, for example. It was still resting open-faced on the coffee table. I was much too insecure about my work to share it with anyone, especially an almost total stranger. She couldn't see it. I simply wouldn't recover.

When she wasn't looking, I snatched the notebook and shoved it beneath the couch cushions.

She picked up one of the masks that lined the wall above my record player, a pink one that resembled some generic alien bug of some sort. Like a lot of the decorations in my house, I wasn't entirely sure of the history or meaning behind it, I just appreciated its peculiarity. I often bought décor at thrift stores and secondhand shops, without really knowing too much about the history of specific items. Not to mention most of the things decorating my apartment weren't traditionally used as décor anyway, like the masks. *I mean, really, who decorates their home with Halloween masks?* I suppose thinking on it now, it could be said that I give a home to odd and curious items that would otherwise likely never have a home, and the more I surround myself with such unconventional beauty, the more I feel at home myself. *"Regular" people problems.*

"I like it here," she said. "It feels warm to me. Feels like home. It's weird how much this place reminds me of my parents' house, well, before they got divorced."

"Really?" I asked. "Your parents decorated like this?"

"I mean, not exactly, but they had similar things. Several of the paintings you have in here are ones they had."

The paintings I owned were actual paintings, not prints. They were originals of my friend Luke's. It would have been impossible for her parents to have owned any, let alone have them hanging up in their home. I didn't say anything though.

“Like that one,” she said, pointing to the triptych piece hanging above my television set. “They had it hanging above their bed. Klimt, right?”

It looked nothing like a Klimt. Besides, I was more of a Goya and Francis Bacon kind of guy. Most anyone who spent more than three seconds inside my place could have probably guessed as much. I clearly had an affinity for the grotesque. For instance, most of the picture frames hanging on the walls contained stills from my favorite horror films instead of family photos, and not to mention I owned a life-size replica of the severed robot skull from Richard Stanley’s sci-fi/horror film *Hardware* (I placed it precisely on the bookshelf to where its eyes were staring directly at my favorite spot on the couch. Every movie felt a little more intense with that thing gazing at me). But let’s say that wasn’t enough. Well, perhaps the framed 70s and 80s extreme horror posters lining the walls would have given it away? You can’t just see posters of movies like *Videodrome*, *Hellraiser*, *Evil Dead 2*, and *Scanners* and not think the person decorating their home with them wasn’t a teensy bit odd. Klimt wasn’t an artist for oddballs. Klimt just didn’t belong in such gloom, no matter how you looked at it. His paintings were too flowery and happy and romantic. I tried giving her the benefit of the doubt, thinking she must have mistakenly said Klimt while actually thinking of the works of someone else, someone with a totally opposite style, but I just couldn’t bring myself to actually believe it. She truly meant Klimt. *Klimt*.

At this point I started to wonder if I was perhaps being a bit too analytical for my own good. Was I being pedantic? Neurotic? Sure I was. It was sort of what I did, what made me *me*. Why did she say Klimt? Was it the only artist she knew? Even so, surely she wouldn't assume I'd be impressed with how terribly uneducated she was regarding the works of a single artist. It was a curious thing, indeed. I couldn't help wondering if she was a habitual liar. It would certainly help put things into perspective.

*I was judging again. Not only that, but judging her all based on assumptions. Damn it.*

"Tell me about your parents," I said.

Immediately her expression changed. I should have known better than to bring the subject up. *Stupid.*

She pursed her lips and her eyes started rolling, darting left and right and left again. She shook her head as if to say 'no.'

"Okay. I'm sorry," I said. "No worries. I shouldn't have brought it up."

I sat on the couch and reached for the tv remote resting on the coffee table. Lynda still had the same sad, worried expression on her face. She looked at the mask she was holding in her hands and studied it for a second before putting it on.

"I like this feeling the mask is giving me," she said. "I feel powerful wearing it. I don't feel scared anymore."

"Scared? Of What?"

“My father. I walked in on him doing things to my sister. Bad things. Awful things,” she said.

Honesty poured from her now.

“Fuck. Really? That’s terrible. And I’m sorry you had to see that,” I said. “Wait, is this the same man you live with? Or a stepfather?”

“My father. The man I live with,” she said, speaking now in a monotonous voice. “He had his fingers inside her.”

“Christ,” I said. “That’s fucking disgusting. Did you tell your mother? Or the police?”

“I told mom,” she said. “But she didn’t believe me. There was a huge fight. She never looked at me the same after that. When my parents eventually divorced, she wanted nothing to do with me, so she sent me away to live with him.”

“Holy shit. That’s a nightmare,” I said. “What about your sisters? Did they stay with your mom?”

“My sisters?” she asked.

“Yeah, what happened to them?” I asked.

She shook her head, her eyes scurrying.

“I don’t have any sisters,” she said.

My heart sank. *So had all of his happened to her? Was she sharing the same living space as her molester? Why was she still living there now that she was a full-grown adult? Was this still happening?* So many questions...

“Can I see your penis again?” she asked.

“What? You can’t be serious,” I said. It seemed like such an odd thing to say after the conversation we just had, but when I thought about it, maybe it was just her way of escaping the moment, to focus

on something different. She looked at me longingly through the eyes of the monster alien mask.

“Yes, I’m serious,” she said. “Pull it out. I want to see it again.”

I shrugged my shoulders as if to say, “*why not?*” and unzipped my pants.

“You’re sure?” I asked again.

“Will you just fucking pull out your cock already? Sheesh!” she yelled, then laughed.

I returned the laugh and undid the button on my boxers, pulling my dick out through the fly of my pants. It rested there on my leg like some dead animal washed up on the beach. It felt so unromantic and unarousing. I couldn’t see her face for the mask, but her eyes were squinting as if she was smiling. *Was she just fucking with me? Having a laugh?* I immediately felt uncomfortable and started to tuck my cock back into my pants when she finally spoke up.

“How big does it get?” she asked, sounding genuinely curious. “Can you make it hard?”

“What is this? Some sort of game?” I asked.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, I just feel on display here, like an exhibit,” I said. “If you want it hard, you’ll have to make it hard yourself. I’m not going to sit here and masturbate while you’re just standing there, and wearing so much I can barely see any exposed skin at all. You’re even wearing a mask for Christ sake.”

“What, so you want to see me naked? Is that it?” she asked.

“I think it’s only fair,” I said, pointing at my flaccid penis. “Besides that, it’s the only way you’re going to get *him* to do anything.”

“I’m cool with that,” she said, unbuttoning her pajama top and tossing it to the floor. “But the mask stays.”

“Really?” I asked, distracted by her enormous, perfect breasts bouncing as she removed her panties and pajama bottoms. “Okay.”

I was surprised to see so many tattoos on her body. I guess she just didn’t seem like the type of person to go out and get tattoos, or go out and do *anything at all*. I counted at least eight of them: two on her upper chest, one on her right breast, four on her back and sides, and a large one on her left calf. From what I could tell, they weren’t images or symbols I was familiar with. I assumed either the artist was just really terrible or that the symbols were exclusive, something that only had meaning in her own mind. Perhaps they were even her own designs.

“Why are you staring?” she asked. “You think I’m ugly, don’t you?”

“What? No, no, no,” I said. “Just the opposite. I think you’re beautiful. You’re body is perfect. I was just admiring your tattoos. What do they mean?”

“My tattoos?” She looked down at her naked body, as if she too was seeing it for the first time. She shrugged her shoulders. “I’m not sure what you mean.”

“Those symbols, do they have meaning?”  
She shook her head.

“No, I don’t think so,” she said. “How would I know?”

Like with most of the failed conversations of the night, I decided to drop it. She looked down at my lap and smiled. She almost looked embarrassed.

“Looks like he’s getting there without us,” she said. I noticed my cock started to swell as soon as I saw her breasts. I couldn’t get over how perfect they were, like they were manufactured, despite the fact they were obviously completely natural. She had a thin waist and large hips, and her ass was a bit on the heavy-side, which incidentally was exactly the body type I was most attracted to. The longest ends of her blonde hair reached just below her nipples, and curled naturally along the curve of her breasts. Standing there bare before me, she looked absolutely perfect.

To my surprise, and if I’m being honest, to my *disappointment*, she didn’t waste any time on foreplay. She hopped right onto my lap, pushed my cock inside her, and bounced away. Immediately I noticed how different it felt inside her than it did with other women. Like her mouth, her vagina was excessively wet with thick goo, as if she filled herself with an entire bottle of lubricant somehow without me noticing. As she bounced on top of me, the goo leaked down my legs and balls, even managing somehow to make its way up past my navel. With every movement the goo stretched in long threads from my body to hers, as if they were tiny hands forcing her thrusting hips down upon me. Staring at the transparent strands was taking me out of the

moment. I had to close my eyes and focus if I was ever going to please her.

That proved to be quite the challenge.

Turns out sex was yet another trigger for her. It took me longer than it probably should have to notice, but once I finally caught a glimpse of her eyes through the mask I could see she was in a trance again. Her body was still rocking on top of me, but her mind was someplace else, and if I had to guess, that other place was somewhere hopeless and terrible. Seeing her like this took all the excitement and pleasure away from the moment. I now felt like sex was not something she wanted, that she was only fulfilling some sort of expectation, and instead of pleasure it brought only mental and emotional abuse. Of course, I was only speculating, but maybe she was just used to men treating her this way. Perhaps she was only fucking me to get it out of the way, so she could relax and not live in fear of the inevitable sexual situation that was always brooding while hanging out with strange men. Or maybe I was coming at it all wrong. Was this her escape? By having sex with me, or any other random asshole, was she only escaping sex with her father? As difficult a thought it was to swallow, especially while I was inside of her, I couldn't help but to wonder if it was a real possibility. Not only did it seem possible, but it was also the most rational scenario I could come up with.

With the thought surfacing, I knew we had to stop.

“Hey, uh, Lynda,” I said, trying to chose my words carefully. I didn’t want her thinking I wasn’t attracted to her, cause that would be the furthest thing from the truth. “I’m sorry. I get real nervous the first time I’m with someone new. You think we could rest for just a second?”

“After you come inside me,” she said, not missing a beat. She bounced even more rapidly on my cock now. She felt incredible.

“I can’t come inside you,” I said. “There’s too much risk. We don’t even know each other.”

“You’re already inside me and you’re not wearing a condom,” she said. “If you’re worried about risks, you should have thought about that before you stuck your dick inside me.”

She had a point, but still, I couldn’t allow myself to come inside her. It was too reckless. And besides that, I would be a mental mess for the next few weeks, sitting in my apartment, staring at the walls, silently hoping there was no interruption of her monthly cycle. I couldn’t have a child, not now, and especially not with a stranger.

She shoved her tits in my face, pushing one of her nipples into my mouth. I sucked on it hard and she moaned.

“You gonna come for me?” she said, playfully. She lifted up the mask so that only the bottom half of her face was exposed. She smiled and whispered, “Cum for me, *daddy*.”

I knew it was wrong. The moment that last word left her lips, I knew I wasn’t the one fucking Lynda anymore, her father was. It was wrong, but

she said it at just the right moment. Her words, her movements, the perfect curves of her body, the excessive wetness, all the elements came together at just the right moment and set me over the edge. I came hard, but not inside of her. Instead, I pulled out and shot my seed all over her torso and breasts. I was so worked up, some of it even managed to get to her face.

“What the fuck, man?” she shouted, jumping up to her feet in frustration. “I told you to come *inside me!*”

“I’m sorry,” I said. “I’m just not comfortable with that.”

“I’m on birth control! It’s not like I’m trying to get pregnant!”

“I never said you were trying to get pregnant. Why would you imply that?”

“Well, what else is it then?” she asked.

“What’s the big deal?”

“I need you to shoot your load in me in order to get off,” she said.

“Really? You only get off once a man comes inside you?” I asked.

“Yes,” she said.

“That’s the *only* way?”

“Jesus Christ! I just told you, it’s the *only* way!” she shouted. “Why the fuck didn’t you just come inside me?”

She turned around and walked over to the desk. She walked with intent and purpose. That, combined with anger, was never a good thing. I’ve

been at the receiving end of a woman's rage several times before. It never ended well for me.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

She said nothing. Instead she grabbed something from the clutter resting on top of the desk and made her way towards me again. When she got close enough, I could see she was carrying a pair of scissors.

"What the fuck are you doing with those, Lynda?" I asked, standing up and moving away from her as quickly as possible.

"Why didn't you just come inside me, uh...hmm," she was trying to think of my name again. I was still trying to remember if she ever even asked what my name was in the first place.

"Franklin! My name is Franklin!" I shouted. I thought if maybe she put a name to the face then she would see me as a real person, and not just something she should hack to death out of petty frustration. "What are you doing, Lynda?"

She puffed up her lungs and stomped her feet, looking as if she was struggling to keep from screaming. Her hands shot up into the air and she ripped the mask from her face, revealing the wild eyes of a woman gone mad.

"Lynda," I said, talking calmer now. "Put the scissors down and talk to me. What's going on?"

Her fingers wrapped around the ends of her hair, and before I even realized what was about to happen, she did it. She lifted the scissors and cut out a significant portion of her hair, all in one snip. I stood in silence as she did this, not really knowing

what to do, and too afraid to go anywhere near her while she was still holding the sharp object. She fell to her knees and the scissors slipped from her fingers and stuck into the floorboards, deep enough to stand upright. She again curled up into a fetal position and stuck her thumb in her mouth, but this time she was naked and laying in a bed of her own hair.

“Are you sucking your thumb?” I asked, starting to get annoyed with her behavior.

“No,” she said, her speech muffled by the thumb in her mouth.

“Okay then,” I said. It was only then that I realized I was still quite exposed. I never bothered to tuck myself away or to even clean myself off, which was highly unusual for me, because after sex I almost couldn't wait to get back into my clothes. It was a security thing. Being naked always made me feel incredibly vulnerable and ill at ease. I thought about how peculiar my own actions had been that night, especially sexually. I was never the type of person who would have agreed to take my cock out so that a beautiful, fully clothed woman could gawk at it. As frustrating as Lynda was at times, she really brought something out in me that truly was much needed. I felt oddly comfortable around her. Like I could do anything my heart desired and I wouldn't have to worry about feeling judged for it. It got me wondering if that *one thing* was really all that was stopping me from feeling comfortable out in the real world, the world outside my little Eighth Block apartment: *the feeling of being judged by others.*

Had I really put so much stock into the opinions of strangers? I didn't like to think so, but after that night, I kind of felt like there was definitely some truth to that.

Before I got the chance to return my dick to my trousers, Lynda had already crawled over to me and was sucking on the end of it, trying to get me hard again. Admittedly, it didn't take long.

"Do you have your phone?" she asked, pumping my cock with both hands.

I nodded.

"Take a video of me sucking your cock," she said.

"Really?" I asked. "Why?"

"You don't want a video of me going down on you?"

I felt in that moment like I had let down my entire gender. Of course I would love to have a video of her sucking my cock. I was just thrown off by her request. I'd never had a woman ask me to film her in a sexual situation before. This was all new to me, and I was reacting to it all like a total jackass.

I pulled the phone out of my pocket, loaded the camera app, and pushed record. I wasn't sure exactly what angle, so I just held it still for a minute or so, then moved it to another position. I repeated this practice as often as I could remember, but it wasn't my top priority, of course. She was really good at giving head. I knew I wouldn't last long.

Abruptly she stopped and walked away.

“Are we finished?” I asked, wondering if I should stop recording.

“No, I’m just going to try something,” she said. She was hunched over the scissors sticking tall out of the floorboards. I was getting nervous.

She came back with a handful of severed hair. She wrapped it around my dick and jerked me off with it.

“What is this?” I said, laughing.

“An experiment,” she said. “How does it feel?”

“Incredible. Really, how the fuck did you know how to do this?” I asked.

“Come in my mouth,” she said. “And really do it this time.”

She balled the hair into her fist and jerked violently on my cock. The silkiness of her hair felt unbelievable on the sensitive skin at the tip of my penis. I couldn’t hold out any longer. I tore her hand away and jammed the end of my dick into her mouth, all the way against the back of her throat. I came a mouthful, and she swallowed every last drop.

“Holy fuck, you taste good,” she said. “Like really good. Like I would order this at a restaurant.”

We both laughed at the absurdity of ordering a load of semen at a restaurant.

“Next time you come, we’re saving it. I want you to save all of it, as much as you can,” she said. “I’m gonna make muffins with it.”

I stopped laughing.

“Wait, are you serious?” I asked.

“Yes, of course,” she said. “It’s really sweet. I’ve never had anyone taste like that before. I want it on everything.”

Leave it to Lynda to turn a funny moment into something deeply weird and awkward. Again, she left me speechless.

“Let’s watch the video,” she said. Her eyes lit up like two spotlights. I pulled up my trousers and walked over to the couch. She crawled onto my lap playfully, like a cat, seemingly more comfortable in the nude than she ever was in clothing.

“Play it,” she said.

I played the video. The footage was shaky and nearly unwatchable, though every twenty seconds or so the angle would adjust and sometimes it looked okay, I suppose, but no matter the angle, the lighting was always a little low. It was too dark to make out all the details, but all in all it wasn’t a terrible first sex tape. Besides that, it helped me to realize the beauty and sexiness of silhouettes. Not seeing all the details was somehow just as sexy as seeing everything. Turns out I had a silhouette fetish. *Was that even a real thing?*

The recording ended.

“Fucking hot,” she said. “Put it up on Instabook.”

“Are you kidding?” I asked. “I have family and co-workers on there! I can’t do that. And besides, I’m pretty sure there’s a rule against stuff like that. I could have my account suspended.”

“Ooooo, *your account might get suspended...*” she said, mocking me. “Then put it up on some porn

site or something. Lots of ‘em take submissions. It’ll be hot.”

“Really?” I said, silently trying to decide how I felt about it. She’s right, it would be hot knowing people were watching us in such a private moment, but there was also an undeniable fear rising in the back of my throat. What if someone I knew watched it? Even if they couldn’t tell it was me (at no point was my face featured in the video), was I okay with someone I knew watching and masturbating to a video of me getting a blowjob? It was a strange thought for sure. I’d have to think more on it before making a decision.

“If you don’t want to, we don’t have to do it,” she said. “But if you ever do post it online, will you at least take my tattoos off somehow. Blur them out or edit them or something?”

“I thought you didn’t have tattoos,” I said, being a smartass.

“What?” she said, looking at me as if we hadn’t had that conversation about her tattoos earlier.

“Nothing. It’s nothing,” I said.

“Really, take out the tattoos,” she said.

“Definitely,” I said, and buried the phone into my pants pocket. I looked at her breasts again. I couldn’t help myself. I hadn’t noticed it before, but a long, thick scar ran across the width of her left breast, the kind of scar that went deep and brought a lot of pain when it was carved in. It had me curious.

“What happened there?” I asked, nodding my head at her left breast. She looked down, and upon

seeing the scar, she immediately folded her arms over her chest and turned away from me.

“Nothing,” she said.

“Shit. I’m sorry. That was rude of me.”

I couldn’t see her face, but I’m sure her eyes were going wild again. Like a lost child looking for a familiar face in a crowd of strangers, for somebody, anybody she could trust.

After several moments of silence, she spoke.

“I think someone tried to cut off my breasts,” she said.

“Fucking hell. I’m sorry,” I said, realizing how difficult it must have been for her to actually speak those words aloud. “Why would someone do something like that?”

My question was followed by another long moment of silence.

“I don’t know what happened,” she said. “Probably fell out of a tree or something.”

She turned back towards me and smiled.

“I thought you just said someone tried to cut off your breasts?”

She looked at me strangely, as if she honestly had no idea what I was referring to, and shook her head.

“You must have misunderstood,” she said.

There was no misunderstanding those words. They were the kinds of words that ripped into minds when they were spoken, words that embedded themselves so deeply into psyches that they became scars themselves. Her words were forever a part of me now. I knew, without a doubt, it

was what she said. *Someone tried to cut off my breasts.*

“I don’t think so,” I said, but under my breath, so she couldn’t hear me.

“Are you angry with me?” she asked. “I feel like you’re angry right now.”

“Lynda, no. I’m totally fine,” I said. “Look at me. Really, everything is okay. Just breathe.”

She sighed and fell backwards, her back flat against the couch cushions.

“Where’s my baby?” she asked.

“You have a baby?”

She sighed.

“My cat. Where is she?”

“Your apartment. Do you need her?”

“No, but holding something tiny in my arms always helps me feel better.”

“You’re not feeling well?”

“I need to come or I’m going to lose my mind,” she said. Instantly I felt like an asshole for failing to please her. Getting a girl off the first time we had sex was always a bit of a challenge, but even more so with Lynda. Clearly she had some form of PTSD or something similar, and if I had to guess, I’d say a lot of those issues stemmed from sexual abuse. That definitely made pleasing her a little tricky. With other girls, all I really had to do was experiment a little with technique and in no time I would find an “in,” something that really drove her wild. I honestly didn’t know where to begin with Lynda, and the way she put me on the spot didn’t help matters either. It’s a lot of pressure.

I decided to go down on her. I grabbed her legs and pulled her to the edge of the couch, hoping to walk that fine line between playful and aggressive. Most of the time, if I managed to keep a good balance between the two, it proved to be pretty effective in getting girls off. I spread her legs apart and took turns softly kissing them both, progressively tracing a little farther down her legs with every kiss, until finally reaching her gash. She was dripping before my tongue even came near. I wasn't sure if I was turned on or repulsed. *Did I really want all that in my mouth?* Normally I didn't mind going down on a girl. Most of the time I actually enjoyed it. This time though, I wasn't sure how I felt. Part of me loved seeing her get that wet, that excited, yet another part of me felt anxious wondering how much more would come out of her when she finally did have an orgasm. *Did I want this stuff spurting into my mouth? What if it got into my eyes? Should I take out my contact lenses just in case?*

I shut myself up. The girl just swallowed a mouthful of me. The least I could do is swallow a mouthful of her. It was only right.

I dived in, and didn't hold back. I felt as if I'd buried my head inside a snail's cunt.

Of course, in true Lynda fashion, there was a problem, and within minutes she pushed my head away and ran to the bathroom in a panic. I wasn't surprised in the slightest. It was always something.

I grabbed my shirt from off the floor and pulled it on over my head. I sat on the couch in

silence for a minute or so. My mind was racing. She needed to go home. This wasn't working. The two of us just didn't click. I felt like such an ass feeling this way after just having sex with her, but I couldn't deny it. It felt wrong. The universe certainly didn't seem to want the two of us together. *Were we forcing it? Already, within only hours of knowing each other, were we pretending to like each other just to make it work? Just to feel warmth from another living human being? Perhaps to feel a little less lonely?* Maybe that really was it. We were just two severely lonely people—unhappy, and bored with ourselves. That was it. Must have been it. We were just a couple sad bastards keeping each other company because, in a really sad, depressing way, using each other somehow made us feel better about ourselves.

*Fuck.*

I made up my mind. As soon as she opened that bathroom door, I was going to hand her her clothes and offer to walk her back to her place. I'd explain everything at the door, wish her the best, and come back home. This wasn't a healthy practice for either of us, so shutting it down immediately was the right thing to do. If she wanted to continue this sick game with someone else, that was on her. As for me, I wanted to walk tall. Surely I was a better person than to allow that type of behavior to continue. *Surely.*

With my mind made up, I stood and walked down the hallway into the bedroom to fetch my coat and hat. Passing the bathroom door, I could hear a

peculiar shuffling resounding from the other side, followed by the slamming of cabinets and drawers. *Was she seriously going through my personal belongings?* I couldn't think of another explanation for the rustling.

"Hey, you okay in there?" I asked. She continued to shuffle through the cabinets. I could hear her muttering something but couldn't make out exactly what it was she was saying.

"Lynda, hey...what's going on in there?" I asked. "Do you need something? Maybe I can help?"

She continued to mutter the same words over and over again. I pushed my ear against the door to hear her more clearly.

"White fuzz. White fuzz. White fuzz. White fuzz. White fu—"

*White fuzz.* The words I scrawled in my notebook. *She must have my notebook!* My blood was boiling.

I pulled the wallet out of my back pocket and removed a credit card from one of the inside sleeves. I wedged the card into the slot between the door and the jamb, just next to the brass knob. The door popped open, and I wasn't prepared for what I was about to see.

Lynda spun around in shock. She seemed to have just snapped out of a trance. Her perfect breasts were now smeared red with blood. Her arms were cut in multiple places, from her wrists all the way up to her elbow. There were easily twenty wounds in total, between both arms. There was so much blood pooling on her skin it was difficult to

tell how badly she was injured. The two of us just stood and stared at the gore in horror, not knowing what to do or say. She looked down at her arms, as if seeing them for the first time, and wept uncontrollably. She fell to the tiled floor, but just before she hit, I managed to grab her under the arms and brought her down gently.

“What the fuck happened to your arms, Lynda?” I asked, but before she had a chance to answer, I spotted my razor on the edge of the sink. The blades were clogged with thick shavings of skin. Blood was everywhere, all over the sink, the floor, the backside of the door, and the toilet. It was a shocking scene to walk in on, to say the least. I picked up the razor.

“Are you fucking kidding with this?” I asked, not really sure what I was hoping to accomplish by scolding her. She cowered on the floor, as if afraid I was about to strike her. I had never hit a woman in all my life. I knew as much, but I had to remind myself that she didn’t even really know me. To her, I could have been anyone, and capable of anything.

I offered her my hand. She was hesitant, but she accepted it, and I helped her to her feet. I grabbed the hand towel from the rack and dabbed the blood off her arms as best I could. I wanted to get an idea of just how badly she was injured. It didn’t seem serious, but still I felt the need to call for an ambulance, just to make sure. I pulled the phone out from my pocket.

“What are you doing?” she asked, sounding panicked. Her breaths quickened.

“Calling for an ambulance,” I said. “You should be examined by a professional.”

She grabbed the phone from my hands and threw it out into the hallway. It hit the floor hard.

“Why the fuck did you do that?” I asked.

“Do you know what they’ll do to me if you call them?” she yelled.

“Help you. That’s why I was calling,” I said.

“They’ll put me in the psych ward!” she said.

I tried to choose my words carefully.

“I say this in all seriousness, and in hopes that it will get you to think rationally, but don’t you think you might benefit from that? I mean, this is clearly not healthy behavior,” I said, motioning at her arms.

“Look, I’ve done this before. It’s not a big deal.”

“That’s even more worrisome,” I said. “You need help. Let’s get you help.”

“*My dad!* My dad doesn’t have anyone to watch him! He needs my help! Who will take care of him if they keep me there?”

I certainly didn’t believe that line of bullshit anymore. Instead of responding, I just ignored it.

“I’ll even go with you to the hospital so you’re not alone,” I said.

“Goddamn it! No!” she yelled. “I can’t go back there! They can’t help me! Don’t you see?”

There was something so incredibly sad about all of this. The truth was, I believed her. Even though she wasn’t straightforward about her reasoning behind not wanting to go initially, it wasn’t difficult to see that the psych ward was

nothing new for her. I got the feeling she'd spent quite a bit of time there, based on her reaction. From my perspective, it looked like the girl needed help. Standing bloody and naked in a bathroom belonging to a guy she just fucked that she met only hours ago and can't even remember the name of, well, if she couldn't see *now* how much she needed help, then she would never see it. Fucking hell. What I once found endearing about her, I now found sad and a little frightening. Something was wrong here. Something needed to happen. *But was it my place to make the call?* Hell, I barely knew her. Surely she knew what was best for her, at least more than I could have possibly known. If we were friends and knew more about each other's pasts, I would have definitely forced her to get help if I felt it necessary, but the reality of the situation was that I didn't know this girl. I couldn't make the call. I had no business making the call. I examined her wounds again. The bleeding was less severe now than it was just minutes ago. She wasn't bleeding to death. If I just cleaned her up, she'd be fine. I was sure of it. So that's exactly what I did.

I asked her to get into the tub and she did. Small droplets of blood ran off her arms and slid down the walls of the bathtub on either side, turning pink as they'd hit the water. Once the tub was filled about halfway with warm water, I took a washrag and gently cleaned her wounds. She hissed at me a few times, and even splashed water on me once out of anger, but I scrubbed all the blood and bits of dead hanging flesh clear from her arms. I let

out the water and wrapped a towel around her wet body. She remained sitting in the tub while I dressed her wounds. I had no idea what I was doing, or if I even had the proper bandages to work with. I had a small roll of gauze that I wrapped thinly around her arms because I didn't have enough to properly cover them both entirely. In the end, it didn't look great, but it would do.

I walked into the bedroom and went through the drawers, picking a t-shirt and a pair of boxers out at random. When I returned to the bathroom, Lynda was stepping out of the tub and drying her body with the towel. I handed her the clothes and she looked at me in a confused manner.

"What are these?" she asked.

"I figured you didn't want to get blood all over your clothes. I don't mind you wearing some of mine," I said.

She unfolded the t-shirt.

"What is this? Aliens? What the fuck? I can't wear a t-shirt with fucking aliens on it. What are you thinking?" she said, sounding pissed off. The t-shirt was green and only displayed a very basic, simple design of an alien head. Even if she was afraid of aliens, the shirt was nowhere near realistic. It was a simple cartoon. I didn't get what the big deal was.

"Go into the bedroom and pick something out from the drawers then. I don't care what you wear. Christ," I said. She walked into the bedroom.

I was getting tired and ready to call it a night, especially after having experienced the horrors of

that last half hour. Besides that, I wasn't particularly anxious to see what Lynda would do next either. The night was turning a bit too nightmarish for my liking.

"Look, if you're not going to go to the hospital tonight, then I'm going to make you stay here with me," I said. "I don't feel comfortable sending you home to that empty apartment with all that just went down. You okay with that?"

"I know," she said. "That's why I brought all my stuff."

I shook my head. *A fucking nightmare.*

"You coming?" she yelled from the bedroom.

"Oh, no no no," I said. "We're not sleeping in the bedroom. Sorry. You and me. The couch. Head to foot."

She stepped out of the bedroom and into the hallway.

"Are you fucking serious? That's dumb," she said. "That bed is huge."

"And you and I will end up fooling around again if we sleep in there. That can't happen again tonight. Things are too fucked up. I just want to sleep."

"Then why can't one of us sleep in the bedroom and one on the couch?"

"Because you can't be trusted," I said, saying each word as if they were tiny sentences. "Sorry. I'm really not trying to be a dick. Look at yourself though. If we sleep in different rooms, then I might as well just let you sleep at your place down the hall."

“Can I have a glass of water?” she said.

I nodded and pointed to the kitchen, hoping she'd serve herself. Under these particular circumstances, I certainly wouldn't want her to walk into a place like the kitchen alone, with all the dangerous objects she'd be in such close vicinity of, but my kitchen was open to the living room, so I was able to monitor her every move from where I was standing. I figured there wasn't much risk in letting her fill her own cup of water. As she dug through the cabinets, I pulled a couple blankets and pillows out of the closet and threw them onto the couch. Most nights I slept on the couch anyway, so I wasn't really making any adjustments on her account. The bed was big and comfortable, but it just felt too empty and depressing to sleep in the bedroom alone. The couch was for single people, and for people who couldn't be trusted alone with themselves as well, apparently. This is where we belonged, Lynda and I, if we belonged anywhere at all.

She placed her cup in the sink and we settled down to rest, head to feet, just as we had discussed. As tired as I was, it shouldn't have taken any time at all to fall asleep, but Lynda was restless, and every little move she made jolted me awake (believe me, she made plenty of them). I tried ignoring her at first, but her tossing grew more violent and erratic with every passing second. I broke as soon as I noticed she had started crying.

“What the fuck is it now?” I snapped. It came off a bit harsh, but I didn't mean anything by it. I

always got a little grumpy when I had trouble falling asleep.

“My arms feel like they’re on fire,” she said.

“That’s what it feels like when you shave your skin off with a razorblade,” I said, realizing how insensitive I was being and not really caring. “What did you expect?”

“No, it’s because you didn’t put these bandages on right, you fuck,” she said. “You just wrapped me up without putting any sort of medication on or anything. The gauze is sticking to my wounds and making the pain worse. Removing the bandages will be even more painful than the fucking razorblade.”

“I’ve never had to take care of an adult child before, sorry. This is all new to me,” I said. “You should have just gone to the hospital. They would have been able to take care of you there.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means I don’t know how to take care of wounds like that. I haven’t been trained. The people at the hospital have. They would have fixed you up proper.”

“That’s not what you meant, you prick! You fucking asshole!” she said, throwing the covers off and stomping her way towards the hall.

“What are you doing?” I asked, ripping away the covers to chase after her.

“I’m going to fix these fucking bandages!” she yelled. When she got to the bathroom, she slammed the door, right in my face. I wedged my foot inside just before the door shut completely and forced it open again.

“Leave me alone! This is a bathroom! Don’t you respect privacy?”

I laughed.

“You can’t be fucking trusted, Lynda! As long as you’re here, every move you make will be monitored. If you want a bath, need to take a piss, a shit, whatever, I’ll be right here.”

“Fucking pervert!” she yelled, folding her arms over her chest, as if she just caught me staring at her tits. She was wearing a t-shirt easily 3 times too big for her, so most of everything contained within it barely had a shape to it anyway. I wasn’t staring. There was nothing to stare at.

“No, you know exactly why it has to be this way,” I said. “If I let you shut this door, you’d probably saw your goddamn head off or something.”

“That’s not even possible. I’d never be able to get even halfway through before I’d be dead. You’re fucking stupid.”

“Christ,” I said, rubbing my temples.

“You’re a failure, you know that?”

“What the fuck are you talking about now?” I asked.

“You gave up on your wife and your kids and now you’re alone, rotting away in Eighth Block Tower. You make me sick,” she said. There was a fire in her eyes. True rage. I had no idea where this was coming from.

“Try again, Lynda,” I said. “You don’t know anything about me. I’ve never been married and I certainly don’t have any children.”

I knew what she was doing. She was trying to hurt me. I'd been in enough relationships to know that in the middle of a spat, there was always a breaking point, the point when you had to make a conscious decision to either walk away and get over yourself or to say something terrible to the person you love, to break them down, just to get them to feel a bit of the sting you were feeling. Almost always the sting became so much more than just that. Hurtful things, they tended to fester, and sometimes they'd even end up creating a wound that was too big to sew shut, causing the person to die a bit inside. I'd had my fair share of hurt in the past, and I certainly had dealt a lot of my own too. I wasn't perfect. But Lynda knew nothing about any of that. She was grasping at straws, trying to devastate me on a level only someone I loved and trusted could ever access. It was childish and cruel. Coming from her, I guess I should have expected as much.

"Do what you've got to do and lets get to sleep. Fucking hell," I said.

I stood in the doorway and watched as she unwrapped the gauze from her arms. I saw a glimmer of shame in her eyes as she did it, as if only then she was realizing what she had done to herself. Her arms looked terrible. I'd never seen anybody inflict so much harm on themself before, and perhaps what was even more shocking to me was that it didn't really seem to be over anything at all. What made her do such a thing to herself? I was afraid to ask.

She rubbed petroleum jelly over her arms and when she was finished, I helped wrap her back up.

“Can we please go to sleep now?” I asked, looking desperate, surely. I wanted nothing more in that moment than to finally get some sleep. She nodded and we took our places back on the couch.

After a few moments of silence, I spoke. *I just had to know.*

“What made you do that to yourself, Lynda?”

She sighed, but didn’t hesitate to give an answer.

“When I was like eleven or twelve, I was down on my mother’s farm and my cousin came in to visit. He was a few years older and was always so cruel to me. One day he tied me up in the barn and let different animals take turns licking my pussy.”

“Jesus Christ,” I said. It’s all I could say.

“It makes it hard for me to enjoy oral sex,” she said.

I just nodded, even though it was dark and surely she couldn’t see me.

“Are you mad at me?” she asked.

“No, Lynda. I’m not mad at you,” I said. Seconds later, I was asleep.

No longer than a half an hour later, I was awakened by a faint tugging at the waistband of my pants. I lifted myself up and looked down at the end of the couch for Lynda, but she wasn’t there, or at least she wasn’t visible. Then something beneath the covers started to bob up and down. I pulled the

covers away and saw it was Lynda, and she was sucking my cock again. I pushed her away.

“For fuck’s sake, Lynda,” I said. “No more of this!”

“Ow! Hey, watch it, asshole! Don’t touch my arms, they’re on fucking fire!” she shouted at me.

“What are you thinking with this?” I said, tucking myself away again.

“I don’t know,” she said. She held up a black notebook in front of her face and tossed it onto my chest. “I found this inside the couch. I didn’t know you were a writer. That’s hot. I really dug the mermaid story, even if it was kind of sad.”

She pulled at the waistband and pulled out my penis again, stroking it until I was hard.

“I sucked you off as ‘a guy in my apartment building’ before,” she said. “That was fun, but now I want to suck you off as ‘a writer.’”

She took my penis into her mouth again as I laid back and wondered why god had made men so weak.

I bent her over the counter in the kitchen. She swept everything off the surface and onto the floor with her arms. She howled in pain, but it was barely audible over the crashing of utensils.

“Jesus fucking Christ, that smarts,” she said, trying to guard her arms. I was too busy pounding her from the backside to respond. At this angle, her pussy was as tight as I’d ever had and she felt incredible. I smacked her ass hard enough it left a

welt in the shape of my hand. I was half unconscious, but I was really feeling it.

“Come inside me,” she said.

“Fuck, not this again,” I said, pumping faster.

“Just fucking do it already,” she said.

“The more persistent you are, the weirder it gets. You know that?”

“What’s so weird about coming inside a woman’s vagina?”

“That’s not the weird part, it’s *why* you want it. There’s some ulterior motive here. It doesn’t make any sense,” I said, realizing in the moment it was the first argument I’d ever had while having sex.

“Ulterior motive?” she said, laughing. “I just think it’s hot as fuck, but you won’t give it to me...”

“Oh, I’ll give it to you alright.”

“Inside me?”

“Stop! I don’t even know you!” I said, smacking her ass again. She spread her ass cheeks apart and I pushed even deeper inside her.

“I already told you, I can’t get pregnant. I’m on birth control. Besides that, I’m on my period.”

“You’re what?” I asked. “Are you serious?”

“Why would I lie about that?”

“I went down on you! Why the fuck didn’t you tell me?”

She laughed.

“How does it feel to get your wings, sport?”

“You’re disgusting,” I said. “Wow.”

It didn’t stop me from finishing though.

“Fuck! Yes, get it!” she shouted. “If you don’t want to come inside me, fine, whatever. Just tell me before you pop, okay?”

“Whatever,” I said.

A minute or so later, I tapped her on the shoulder and she spun around and fell to her knees all in a flash, as if the entire time she was preparing herself for this exact moment and nothing else. I wondered if she had even enjoyed the sex part of it at all. I looked down at her and was surprised to see she had a glass measuring cup in her hand that she’d gotten from somewhere on the countertop. She took my cock in hand and pumped vigorously until I ejaculated into the cup.

“Fuck,” I said, trying to catch my breath.

She looked disappointed.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“This isn’t enough for muffins,” she said.

“You’re serious about the muffin thing, huh?”

“Why wouldn’t I be?” she asked.

I just laughed.

“You got any more in there?” she said, wiggling my softening prick.

“It’s my third time in just a couple hours,” I said. “I’m tapped out.”

“Hmmm, well maybe it’s enough for just one muffin,” she said. “Sorry, you can’t have any.”

“You think I want to eat my own cum muffin? No thank you. I’ll pass,” I said.

She laughed and set the measuring cup on the counter, still keeping her place on her knees on

the kitchen floor. She watched in awe as my cock deflated right before her eyes.

“Penises are so weird, man,” she said. “How does it feel to go soft like that?”

“Normal, I guess,” I said. “I don’t really know what you mean.”

She playfully bat at it a few times, like a cat with a toy mouse, and laughed as it slapped against my leg.

“You should get it pierced. You have the dick for it, you know?”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“You could get a wicked ladder right here,” she said, rubbing her finger along the topside of my penis. “I just think it’d look good on you.”

“I don’t feel like I’m a piercing kind of guy,” I said.

“What does that mean?”

“I guess I’ve just never had one, so it would be awkward making that first leap into that world,” I said. “Especially *there*.”

“Your balls are weird,” she said.

“What? What’s weird about them?”

“They’re the same kind of skin as a nipple. It’s weird. Look what it does when I touch it.”

She touched my scrotum and immediately the skin wrinkled as it tightened around the area she touched. We both laughed.

“Now touch me,” she said, heaving her chest out so I could easily access her nipple. I touched it and the areola reacted just the same.

“You’re right, it’s the same stuff,” I said. “That’s so weird. How have I never noticed that before?”

She continued staring at my naked genitals, and the longer she stared, the more scientific her studying seemed to become. Her eyes traced every curve, wrinkle, and vein, taking mental snapshots for some unknown use later on. It was as if she had never seen a man naked before, or at least never been able to examine one for so long. I didn’t mind. As uncomfortable as I typically was unclothed, I actually was quite fascinated with her bewilderment. Watching her in full-on discovery mode was somehow endearing to me.

“I’ve only had two cocks that were too big for me,” she said, not lifting her eyes from her gaze. “They were so big they made me bleed.”

She ran her finger over the head of my dick, as if petting the head of some grotesque lizard that was so ugly she actually found it cute. I couldn’t believe she was actually looking directly at my penis and talking about other penises she had taken on in the past. New one for me.

“No offense,” she said.

“No offense? What does that mean?” I asked.

“Nevermind,” she said.

“Now what is this? Are you saying you’re not happy with my size? Cause earlier you certainly seemed fine with it.”

“I didn’t say I’m not happy with it. It’s fine. I like it. It’s just that I’ve had two that were so big they made me bleed.”

“You’re saying that like it’s a good thing. Do you want to bleed?”

“I don’t know. Sex is weird. I don’t really like it.”

“Aren’t you on your period? How do you know I’m not making you bleed too?”

“Seriously?” she asked.

“Yeah, seriously,” I said.

“You’re not making me bleed. Trust me.”

I pulled up my pants in protest. It was a stupid thing to get upset over, but it was as if she was intentionally pushing my buttons.

“Are you getting upset? Goddamn it! What’s wrong? Why are you upset with me?” she said, starting to lose her cool again.

“Fuck, not this again,” I muttered under my breath.

I walked out of the kitchen, hoping she’d follow me. My goal in that moment, above all else, was to get her away from the wood block of knives sitting on the countertop. The plan worked. She walked towards me until she was uncomfortably close to my face and just stared at me with those angry eyes.

I thought it best to break the silence.

“I’m not upset, it’s just that I’ve been with plenty of women and none of them have ever complained about my size before. They’ve always seemed pretty pleased, truth be told.”

I immediately felt like an asshole for saying that last line, but my ego was fractured. I had to pat myself on the back. She certainly wasn’t going to.

“Women say that shit all the time to guys,” she said. “It’s what women do.”

“Oh yeah, well aren’t you a woman? You’re not saying anything like that to me.”

“Is that what you want? Some fake ass girl to lie to you and tell you only things you want to hear?”

She had a point. After all, I wanted nothing more in life than to have a good honest partner at my side. All my previous relationships failed because of dishonesty. Finding a truthful person, especially one willing to tell me things I *needed* to hear, rather than things I *wanted* to hear, felt damn near impossible.

“No, that’s not what I want at all,” I said. “I’d like to find someone honest to spend the rest of my life with. It’s all I’ve ever wanted.”

Without warning, her eyes flared in fury and she screamed so loud a dog on the next floor down started barking.

“All the girls you’ve ever fucked faked their orgasms because they felt sorry for you,” she yelled, straight into my face. “You’re terrible in bed!”

At this, she spun around and walked away from me, rocking her hips dramatically.

“This coming from a girl who’s forced me to fuck her...*how many times tonight?* I honestly have lost count,” I said.

She spun around and returned to her spot, directly in front of my face.

“You can’t even come inside a woman like a man is supposed to!” she yelled. “Why can’t you just be a fucking man? Huh?”

She stiffened her fingers and jammed them straight into my chest as hard as she could. I pushed her hand away, careful not to touch her bandages.

“Don’t you fucking touch me!” she yelled, loud enough the neighbors surely heard it, which was her intention, no doubt.

“Are you insane?” I asked, already knowing the answer to my question. “You’re the one touching me. I’m just trying to get you to stop.”

“Be a man, you fucker! Be a fucking man!”

“By doing what exactly? Coming inside you? Fuck that. You and I, that’s never happening again. Fuck off.”

She spit on my face, a healthy amount too. It felt like her DNA was everywhere. I wiped it away as best I could with the backside of my hand.

“Where did you learn to do that? A movie?” I asked. “I didn’t think people actually did that in real life.”

“You need help,” she said.

“I need help?” I said, then laughed. “What is it I need help with, Lynda?”

“You’re the angriest person I’ve ever known,” she said. “Look at how you’re acting. You should be ashamed of yourself.”

“I think you’re having trouble comprehending what’s actually happening here,” I said. I’d always get a little assholeish while dealing

with ridiculous people. It was childish of me, I won't deny it, but she was asking for it.

"I'm comprehending just fine," she said. "You've been angry with me all night. I've had to walk on eggshells around you since the moment you walked in through my door."

"You're so full of shit," I said. "What did I do tonight that made you think I was angry? Before now, I mean."

She thought for a second in silence.

"You're seething with anger. Your blood was boiling before I ever met you. Rage seeps out of your pores. I could sense it right away. You're not fooling anyone, you know."

She held her head down, as if in mourning, or like a mother witnessing her once good son falling into some deep oblivion, fearing he may never return. It was complete bullshit. She was either a genius for trying to turn the blame on me, or completely out of her gourd. My money was on the latter.

"Take a breath for a second and really think about everything that's gone down tonight. In every circumstance, you've been the one who has been quick to anger tonight," I said, hastily trying to think of something, anything, to say that would get her to calm down before she blew up on me again. "If you're having a bad night, it's really fine. It happens. I'm not here to judge. We can talk about things civilly. There's no need to attack one another."

“Like I would take advice from you. You’re nothing but a pathetic, sad excuse for a man,” she said. “Women see through you. That’s why you’re so lonely, living here all alone. Women don’t want you. You’re not man enough for any of us.”

My heart was racing. I didn’t know how to act. I just sat there, taking it all in. I couldn’t wait for her to go home, but was also afraid to tell her to leave. *Christ, listen to me...maybe she was right, maybe I wasn’t man enough after all.*

“What do you want from me?” I asked. It’s all I could say.

“I want you to be a man,” she said.

“How?”

“Hit me,” she said, turning her face to the side. She slapped her fingers against her cheek. “Right here. Do it now.”

“You’re out of your goddamn mind,” I said. “I’m not going to hit you.”

She balled her hand into a tight fist and clocked me right under the jaw. I fell back, tripped over the coffee table, and tumbled to the floor. I had to check my jaw to see if it was broken. It wasn’t. She didn’t seem to be experiencing any pain whatsoever, despite how hard she hit me.

“Be a fucking man and hit me!” she yelled. Her words were followed by a long sharp shriek.

“You’re going to get the cops called on us! Shut the fuck up already!” I said, as quietly as I possibly could while experiencing such deep frustration.

“Good! I hope the cops do come!” she said.  
“I’ll have you arrested so fucking quick!”

“On what grounds? You’re the only one who’s done anything illegal tonight,” I said.

“Me? What did I do?”

“You just assaulted me!” I yelled.

“Yeah, well you threatened to hit me!” she yelled, again loud enough so that the neighbors would hear.

“I did not!” I yelled, speaking more to the neighbors than to her. “I did not hit or even threaten to hit her! She’s a fucking lunatic! You’re hearing all this, right? Can’t you tell she’s fucking insane? She won’t go home!”

This broke her down. She fell to her knees and began sobbing uncontrollably. I looked down at her, unsure if I should kneel and try to console her or just leave her be.

I left her alone, and stood and watched as the oversized shirt she was wearing heaved up and down with every depressing gasp she took—her bloody, slashed-up, crudely bandaged arms nearly hidden beneath her.

Then the strangest thing happened, an impossible thing: she started *transitioning*. Into what, I wasn’t sure, but right there before my eyes the girl became something different entirely. Her skin began to seep moisture, but not in the typical way humans perspire, instead it appeared to be expelling something thicker than sweat. *Glazed* would be a more accurate term to describe her appearance in those moments. Her bandages

became soaked and grew heavy, peeling off her arms almost immediately, as her wounds seemed to be ejecting this strange liquid even more so than her pores. At first I was confused, being witness to all this, but then the thought occurred to me that I had seen this strange substance before, tasted it even: it was the same stringy ethereal ooze that soaked her mouth and tongue, and that covered the lower half of my body as we had sex. Although I recognized it, I still wasn't sure what it was. As it soaked through her clothing, I thought I should offer to help in some way, but wasn't sure exactly what it was I could do. Instead of saying a single word, I just grabbed one of the blankets off the couch and draped it over her shoulders, for no real reason whatsoever.

The first things to go were her hands. They seemed to melt together and absorb into her face as she wept. I'd never seen anything quite like it. Her face became lost in the mess of it, and I didn't know it then, but it would be the last time I'd ever see it. For a moment, I thought I'd seen her eyes protrude through the gelled flesh that became of her hands, but what I'd seen wasn't her eyes at all, but new appendages entirely. Two tentacles, each equipped with a small black orb at its end, now jutted out about a foot or two from her forehead (it was hard to tell their exact length due to them constantly expanding and contracting). Below them was a set of smaller tentacles, each absent of black orbs, that didn't seem to extend as far as the other set, staying at around just a few inches from her skull. Her skin

sported a new greenish-grey hue as well, complete with large dark spots running along the length of her. Before long, her sobs became nothing more than muted bellows.

She was metamorphosing into something new, something inhuman: an oversized *limax maximus*, or more commonly referred to as a *leopard slug*. Why that particular creature and why at that very moment, I'd never know for sure, but I suspected it had something to do with *giving in*.

I didn't realize it that night, but after going over the events repeatedly since they occurred, I couldn't help but to see Lynda in a new light. She was a prisoner, not only to herself, but to every person she'd ever come in contact with. It seemed obvious afterwards that her anger was nothing more than a mere projection of the anger relentlessly directed at her, from her mother, her father, siblings, ex-lovers, any and everyone that was in her life up to that point, whoever those people may have been. When I thought of all the terrible things she'd said to me throughout the hours I knew her, I couldn't help but to see those people shouting those very things to her, or at least similar versions. She was a victim of abuse, and her failure to communicate and act rationally around new friends or even strangers stemmed from her struggle with symptoms of PTSD...and I was no better than any of her abusers either, at least that was how it felt initially. Surely I couldn't estimate the amount of abuse dealt to her throughout the years, and even if I were able to somehow travel through her entire

history and see it all with my very own eyes, I feel strongly my part in her downfall would pale in comparison to others, specifically her father and at least one ex-boyfriend, the one who left her the box of memories that was so mysteriously hidden away behind the washer in her apartment. This is all speculation, of course, after all I didn't know her but for a mere few hours.

What I did know for sure was that the things I said to her that night were nothing more than immaturity and spitefulness on my part. I wasn't proud of it, and for a few hours after our peculiar encounter I was much harder on myself than I am now, but I never said anything out of hatred, because I never hated the girl. Everything that was said came out of frustration, and I couldn't help it. Despite whatever level of mental abuse she'd been exposed to at that point, the truth was she was an utterly frustrating and difficult person to be around. My best guess was that by becoming a slug, she had somehow discovered a way to manifest those projections of many years of frustration and anger into an actual physical form. As absurd as it may sound, there really was no other explanation for it.

*Well, there was the curious presence of black mold in her apartment, but surely that had no effect on her physical transfiguration.* Perhaps it affected her mentally and emotionally, but not physically. *It couldn't have, right? Or maybe the mold had affected my mind in the short time I was exposed to it? Could I have really just imagined all this? If so, how much of it was real?*

No. I saw it, clear as the night sky.  
She was a *human* that became a *mollusk*.  
*Simple as that.*

It happened right before my eyes, so I couldn't question it.

*And I took care of her the best I could.* I cleaned her wounds, wrapped her arms in bandages, and even suffered through hours of pure mind-numbing frustration only so she wouldn't have to spend the night alone. *That counts for something, right?* It has to. Bad people don't do things like that. I couldn't live with myself if I thought I was the sole purpose for her doing what she did next. The images of those next few moments, I don't think they'll ever escape my mind. *I couldn't be held responsible for that...*

I didn't see the result of her complete metamorphosis until after she squirmed out from underneath the blanket. Her clothes were missing, and at first I assumed they must have come off sometime during her transformation, but curiously enough they were nowhere to be found afterwards. My only explanation for their disappearance was that she absorbed them throughout the process. *What else could have come of them?* It really wasn't important in the grand scheme of things, so I quickly chalked it up as one of the night's many unsolved mysteries.

Along with her clothes, her hair, limbs, and all identifying features had all but vanished...well, except her tattoos. Turns out they weren't tattoos at all, but instead portions of the pattern now found

on her new lubricious skin. That certainly explained the reason for the odd symbols, and why Lynda was so surprised to have seen them herself. They had probably just popped up on her skin only moments before I had asked about their meaning.

After exposing her freakish form to me in full, she writhed along the floor, slowly making her way across the room. She left behind a trail of slime as she moved. She only looked back once, and that was at the moment she arrived at the front door. The way she looked at me, it was hopeless and helpless. She wanted me to open the door. She was ready to go home.

Had I taken a moment to think, I wouldn't have done it. You see, in that moment, I thought about everything else: the tattoos, the thickness of her saliva, and how seemingly she'd begun her metamorphosis sometime before I'd even come to know her, but what didn't cross my mind, and what really should have been the *only* thing on my mind, was her irrational fear of the hallway. It turns out the fear was warranted after all.

*Salt.*

When she looked back, motioning for me to open the door, she was silently pleading with me to put her out of her misery. Had I realized as much in those precious seconds, I don't think I would have granted her her wish, at least I don't think so. I barely put any thought into it. Perhaps I was so mentally exhausted from our experience together, completely drained to the point where when she finally offered to go home, or what I thought at the

time was her offer to go home, I jumped at the opportunity for a good night's sleep, thinking only of myself and my own needs. *I was nothing but a pathetic, sad excuse for a man. Women saw through me. That's why I was so lonely, living here all alone. Women didn't want me. I wasn't man enough for any of them. She was right. Lynda was so right...*

Stupid me, I took hold of the knob and opened the door. Lynda made no hesitation, not even for a goodbye. She probably would have dived head first into a salt pile had she been able to, she was so ready to leave this earth. Part of me felt as if I should have been happy for her, for she was no longer a prisoner of herself [*white fuzz*], or of the world [*white fuzz*], but standing there, watching her flesh bubble and singe as the salt crystals dissolved her mutated body [*white fuzz, white fuzz, white fuzz*], I couldn't help but to feel sad for her. Seeing the horror show as it took place, my body went numb. I didn't make any attempt to save her. Once I realized what was happening, I couldn't get myself to move at all. I was stunned. Traumatized. I'd just witnessed possibly the most disturbing suicide to have ever taken place, and from that moment on, nothing felt the same.

*White fuzz.*

I shut the door and sat on the sofa and don't remember breathing for at least twenty minutes or so after that. I spotted her tiny backpack on the floor, next to the coffee table. I picked it up and shuffled through the contents. I pulled out her

prescription meds, hoping it would be something to knock me unconscious for a while, but I didn't recognize the pills or the name for them inscribed on the label. I wondered if they were anti-slug pills or something and if all this was caused by her simply forgetting to take her meds. But she didn't forget. She was reminded. I could never forget to remind myself that no matter the explanation, Lynda wanted this. I returned the pills to the pack and fell back against the couch.

Every piece of furniture, every object in my apartment now reminded me of her. The bookshelf, the bluray player, the desk, the kitchen, the bathroom (still spattered with her blood, for Christ's sake), the bedroom, the couch, and even my goddamn writing notebook.. *White fuzz. White fuzz.* I gathered a handful of the hair she'd cut from her head earlier and wrapped it tightly around my fist. I feared I had just fallen madly in love with a ghost and that I'd never get over losing her.

I pulled out my phone and stared at the black mirror for a few seconds. I needed a distraction, something to keep painful thoughts at bay. The only thing I could think to do was invite someone over. Not a friend, or someone who knew me, cause I was too afraid of how they might react to my story. This wasn't typical behavior for me, not in the slightest. I couldn't have them thinking I was losing my mind. Besides, truth be told, I didn't have many friends anyway, and the few I did have would have been pissed if I was to call them so early in the morning. I thought it best to try my luck with a stranger.

Dialing a random number, I noticed something peculiar manifesting in my peripherals. Curiously a pattern of dark green circles had surfaced on my forearm. I couldn't say the sight surprised me in the slightest.

"Hello?" the voice on the other line answered.

After a moment of hesitation, I spoke.

"Do you wanna come over?"



*The residents of Eighth Block will return in:*

# THE BEDLAM BIBLE

*"A Strange History of Madness  
Inside the Eighth Block Tower"*

BOOK THREE: FLICKER

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