

Crawlspace Crawlspace

a server for
not love, loneliness, self-deprecation, sufferers and sadists.
and its inevitable and tragic conclusion.

re.occurrence

(leo mara)

III

bath

I rested for two days inside my home.

The first thing I did when I escaped the scene of the assault, was take a bath. Rather than shower to clean the blood away, cry, sob, blame myself, I ran a bath and stripped down. I soaked in the steaming water. Let the slight burn distract from the cuts and probable fractures. I was afraid to sink my face under the surface. Instead, I brought handfuls of water to my face, wetted the blood and let the taste sit on my teeth-marked tongue.

Eventually, I'd passed out. My body resisted no longer.

When I regained consciousness hours after, for a moment I'd forgotten what had happened. I was confused why I was sat in cold, pinkish water, face hurting, the sun beginning to rise.

After two days of long baths, minimal food, of sitting at the table in my kitchen in the chair that I usually reserve for guests, and thoughts around versions where the Cape ended my life, I left. I carried myself to a walk-in centre. I swore I'd register for a general practitioner and wrote down a fake name and address. The first that I could come up with. The swelling, and the cuts and bruises would heal. They were healing in as short as these two days. I needed medication for my head. I needed something because I had an insufferable headache. A constant pain so awful I questioned whether a lobotomy was reasonable comparison.

The doctor who prescribed pain killers, asked that I wait inside the centre and speak with a police officer about the assault my injuries heavily implied happened.

I agreed to wait. I sat on a foldout chair in a separate, quieter space away from the waiting room for two minutes before I snuck away.

Paint

Her stance was un-majestic. She stood over me, her bare feet planted either side of my thighs. With her head back, she poured the seven-hundred-and-fifty millilitre pot of interior wall paint down onto her throat. The stream of dense white paint flowed over her fine necklace and down her bone-showing chest, into and over her bra. It continued down her stomach and slowed pace at the ridge of her straight-legged jeans where it splintered into smaller floods and drips, drowning seams, spilling into her pockets. It spattered her feet, decorated my legs and otherwise pooled on the large square of card and the plastic sheet set down under us to protect the fake wood floors.

Letting go of the tin, she brought her legs together and unbuttoned her jeans, rolled them down to her ankles and stepped out of their denim sleeves.

In her underwear, she descended over me. She took off her pants and mine.

The fumes were intoxicating.

Light (II)

The white daylight watched us through the barely effective curtains. It exposed the detached hairs, the dead skin and pale dirt and the coverings and constellations of unpreventable dust that hung in the air any time

he crossed or uncrossed his trousered legs, or I sneezed, or he scratched his cheek or nose. It laid on the glass surface, the dust. The surface of the coffee table as well as the high arms of our chairs.

Conversation kept us in the room with a TV. A room downstairs, away from the narrow and steep stairs leading to where I suspected a prepared bedroom awaited.

We stayed in the chairs I pointed to in his house when he asked if and then where I'd wished to sit. This was where we spent hours. Long past sunset and past the regular window of opportunity I have to consume dinner before it's certain it will upset my stomach.

We spoke as though the server was not our broker. Not as if it was shameful, but rather like it wasn't the truth. I understood that he pretended our meeting was happenstance. Birthed from coincidence and attended within an existence of not questioning the context, nor the objective. His character was unflinching. The only instance of fracture was his sudden investigation into my experience of the server when, in character, I'd not made any mention of interaction with it. He pushed for anecdotes. He appeared eager to hear about any unconventional meetings I'd comfortably disclose the details of. No meeting on the server was conventional.

"Do you usually do this in a uniform?" I asked, before I went any further than few tales of similarly odd conversations and roleplay. My impression was that this man might have been an investigator of some kind. A pretender. Under the guise of a reserved participant in the server's stripped royale of allure, fake lore and foolish attempts at love. Was he looking to expose illegal ongoings? To prevent violence? Seek the Capes. Arrest the extremists.

"What sort of uniform?" he replied.

I steered course, "What do you want to know?", and in that moment, felt unnerved, but all the same prepared to confess what I'd witnessed and what I'd been a part of.

"Do you think I'm looking for something specific?"

It was an elusive back and forth of unanswered inquiries.

"Would you tell me the truth. If you wanted some certain admission, or to know if I've been part or a witness to anything that isn't?"

I'd reconsidered the purpose of his seeming investigation.

Maybe it wasn't on the sunshining side of law. Maybe his intension instead, was self-fuelled.

How best to describe what happened.

When the conversation slowed, the 'mood' changed. It changed fast.

We arrived at the house at three in the afternoon, spoke for hours, spoke in the chairs as I remembered until the time on my watch was past seven. I don't recall any closer to the exact time when senses deteriorated. When I met the terrifying physical and psychological state that I've not ever experienced again in my life. Not before and been sure not to again after.

I was discomforted by the sudden and noticeable deterioration in both logic and memory inside my own process of thoughts. I did what's common. I ignored the first symptoms because this was uncharted.

A little lightheaded, I leant gradually forward in my chair. When I did, there were sudden fast, small pains all through my abdominals. I became nauseous. I thought about what I'd consumed. But the usually straightforward ability to think was intermittent. My glass was left on the glass table. Two cubes of ice and the smallest puddle of alcohol left in the bottom. I felt an imbalance in temperature. Cold and nauseous to then feel heat come over me and cause sweats. The symptoms worsened at an emergency pace. The pains in the muscles in my lower torso were searing. It all hurt so much that I forgot how to breathe rhythmically. I was panicking before I realised. And before I realised, he had disappeared from the opposing chair. Left in front of me, and somehow without my acknowledgement. It'd felt as though his evacuation wasn't for any good reason like he'd gone to get water or to the landline to call nine-nine-nine.

The pain became unbearable. I tried to control my breathing while I soiled myself.

Eventually, I needed to close my eyes, and I collapsed...

In the dream, I walked. I moved, without motion in my legs. Where I couldn't feel the movement or the motivation. My own body escorted me through the scene. It brought me through a meadow. Through white flowers. Hordes of petals felt like water against me. Wet.

The place felt hostile.

Regaining consciousness, the pain started over.

I saw rope on the floor. Then the bindings and knots loosely tied to hold me to the chair arms to chair arms, legs to chair legs. back to backrest.

Not far from the 'original' scar, another knife was stuck in me. A steak knife, inserted into my abdomen during the unconscious distraction of flowers.

I wiggled right away. Moved in cautious, combatant, drained movements to attempt to free my limbs before I was no longer left alone. As I wormed out of the rope, blood gooped. Thick spillage leaked from under the knife like syrup.

I prepared to make a choice. Did I attempt to minimise blood loss and find a landline, hopefully close. Or try to exit the house and get as far as possible.

Crawlspace (III)

In December, there was another redesign. '00' was changed back to '0'. The 'not love' was unchanged. 'Crawlspace', placement, font, colour, was unchanged. The page after 'register' and 'login' were now backgrounded with a polished brochure of moving images. A few without obvious interpretation. A shirtless, cream trousered black man sprinting through Vienna streets in the rain. Upside down and in reverse, hot tea flowing from stone teacup into teapot delicately held by a waistcoated server. On colourless sand, a tortoise dragged itself toward another, smaller tortoise.

Further categories were added.

masochism abrasion claustrophobia partialism (limbs) katoptronophilia (mirrors) pteronophilia (feathers)
acrotomophilia (amputations) age play edging

And removed.

humiliation asphyxiation

The number of 'pools' multiplied. In one month, five cities (pools) increased to sixteen. The servers' seven-hundred thousand new users buried their hearts, practiced out fantasies and pretended to be okay in Manchester, Bristol, Paris, Lyon, Toulouse, Barcelona, Valencia, Vienna, Berlin, Hamburg, Moscow, Istanbul, Minsk, Sofia, Voronezh and Cologne.

It was rumoured pop artist House of Anna in her song 'Heartf*ck', with the lines 'You couldn't get further. I'll tie you up, keep you close, watch you through the server' specifically referenced Crawlspace. She was said to have registered under the name 'Heart Fluck' and have attended in person experiences in minimal disguise and put on character.

This has not been confirmed. After theory circulated, server users took to forums, desperately scripting supposed encounters. They swore to have been dominated by and have fucked a brunette-wigged Anna Gagne of House of Anna.

The server no longer catered for a minority only.

Acceptance led a march. Less shame, less need for seclusion circled 'wants'. Still my feelings were the individual was swallowed, drowned, bled out, buried and overgrown with plainer flowers.

Through communication, curiosity became trend. It became far less uncommon and so, came a further unusual discolour. The small pockets who came to this 'bar' not for popularity, could have maybe looked over, looked across the taps and have seen someone who'd suffered the same. Who would be there to ask similar questions and bravely willing to try with them together. Unfortunately, this was no longer a likelihood. How could they have seen each other? Crowds were between them. Crowds up at the bar, the same five haircuts, shoving, cuckolding, ordering Mai Tais and sanctioned spankings.

Jacob (III)

Without the draw-around curtain on rail, I couldn't have been in a bed further from the satisfactory view of the loaded carpark and across it, the neighbouring and conjoined burger house and Italian restaurant. *With* the curtain across, Jacob and I had a teaspoon of privacy. He put a few books and a bouquet of white flowers on the gathered covers at the end of my bed, accepting there was nowhere else for them. The nurse declined to be of more support. They explained there were no vases or pint glasses of origin unknown for the flowers and Jacob would need to acquire his own if he wanted to keep them by my bedside 'in better health than the patients in this hospital'.

Before we moved beyond small talk, Jacob looked again at my sorry state. The sulking bag of water on a hook. The connected tube injected into a prominent vein in my wrist which aided in the booting of the severe poisoning from my system. The almost-vanished yellowing bruises and light scabs across my cheeks, slowly healing from my scrap with the Cape a few weeks earlier. And the cloudy, brown, purple bruising, depiction of an awful storm around the stitching which closed the second uninvited entry made to my abdomen with a knife.

With wet eyes that he wouldn't look directly at me with, Jacob said, "This is going to be the last time I see you," by which he meant - we were over.

Un-indulgingly, Jacob reminded me of his greatest weakness. He could not trust another person. Causing events were devastating and he understood his healing was far from finished. With me, "you, Harry," he believed I was finally the person to help him, "save me", show him that trust could be worth its admission. He didn't need to be alone. He trusted that when I encouraged that together we abandon Crawlspace I meant my every word. And too, that this enthusiastically communicated decision of mine was other words to say that we needed only each other going forward.

He thought right, that was what I'd intended. Unfortunately, I did not disconnect myself from the server. I was what I still hoped not to be.

Jacob said his final goodbye, ruined. He fled from my hospital bedside to return to cover and to the repeatedly verified anxiety and suspicions that there was not another person sure to be faithful.

I'd not shed a single tear for Jacob. I'd never see Jacob again. I felt that. It hurt. But for whatever reason, I was stuck on the ex before Crawlspace.

over

Three months after discharge, my body functioned entirely again. Entirely except if I'd needed to bend over or lean down and pick anything up off the floor. The compression was too difficult and the muscles in my stomach stiffened, and I'd be in gastric purgatory until I next slept.

My consumption of alcohol was little to none, drugs none, and whether it was whiskey, tea, coffee, water or apple juice, I turned down any offer of a beverage from other customers and bar persons alike. I replaced alcohol with exercise again. I trusted it was effective because I'd committed to this same proactive transition years ago after the first time I was stabbed and subsequently, nearly murdered. The sprints on an indoor track, the bike riding, and intense sets of push ups, squats, and sits up replaced several compulsions and most wants.

Most.

I'll be in the bathroom.

his final message to me on the server read.

When he requested my home address, I instead offered a 'pick up' location for where I would collect whatever he'd hoped to send to me via a postal service.

I stood near to the shop's shortening stretch of birthday cards that competed with an increasing number of 'get well soon' and 'condolences'. I opened the white envelope addressed to me. Inside was a short key

and a postcard. One side of the postcard was an image of the two tortoises on sand, and on the other a QR code, hyperlink and in its copyrighted font, 'Crawlspace'. And below that, in scruffy handwriting, written over,

25 Town-Drape Apartments
Mille Close

Then the same message repeated...

I'll be in the bathroom.

Curious, I tried the door to Number 25 inside Town-Drape Apartments first without the key. As presumed, the front door was locked. This user was less daring than countless others on the server I'd encountered.

The key fit, and once inside, I didn't need to hunt for long to find the bedroom with a made bed and along the hall, the bathroom.

At the back of the bathroom, was the in-one shower and bath. The shower curtain, which was patterned and monotone, was drawn. The bath was full, but the water was perfectly still and daringly close to spilling from the edges. I saw the envelope left behind the tap before I knew what I'd discovered.

It felt too late, but I tried.

He laid entirely submerged. I rushed across the room, pulled first at his wrists to try to pull him out. It didn't work, so I put my body, my head and my whole chest deep enough down. I wrapped myself around his chest and reached my fingers together underneath him and got him out of the bath, only to flop and to fall together onto the tiles. My foot was fractured again in the process. Ignoring the throbbing pain, I stared at him. His fully clothed and soaked self. On his back. Colourless. Unresponsive.

I called nine-nine-nine and begged that they tell me what to do.

After minutes of CPR, I needed to stop before I passed out. When I stopped, I breathed heavy. I felt his chest with my hand still. Felt his heart. I hoped to give comfort. Prayed that he could feel me there whatever he was then. Could translate that I cared.

I sobbed beside him.

my mum and dad.

Know that they always did everything they could and this is not their fault.

What I took will make sure that I leave quietly and the relief of knowing there is no changing my mind is a greater feeling than any other that I have felt in a very long time.

I look now instead for belonging in the next life.

I'm sorry it was you who found me.

Crawlspace (IIII) / Tragedy

Shortly after I deleted my account and scrubbed any trace of Crawlspace from my phone, computer and mind, the server was erased entirely. Its sudden descent was broadcast internationally.

While investigating officers did pose as users and attempt to answer aging accusations of suspicious individuals on the server, there were concurrent new incidences. Like the reports before about fear in the face of epidemic, there was a version, a similar document for the server, which was then extracted from, informalised and spread across mainstream social media.

...Since 01 of January –

- 05 reports of users invited into residential properties to find suicides. (Ropes, cuts, and drugs.) 03 of 05 included note. Reason involved 'being alone'.
- More than 30-35 reports of sexual assault and abuse. (Non-consensual continuation, choking, punching, belts, pillows, even waterboarding.)
- Another 40+ reports of harassment. (Incessant messaging. Indecent photos. Locating physical address. Following. Contacting family members.)
- Confirmed 12 'Capes'. Violent homo and transphobic behaviour. Repeated targeted attacks. Demonstrations of extremist views.
- 112 conversations/communications networking methamphetamine.
- 2 homicides. (Stabbings.)

Please. Contact someone. You're not alone.
There is support for you.

Behind the small procession of black suits and black dresses, I entered Joseph's Catholic Church. I sat along the back bench, spaced from his cousins and nephews, coworkers and shaking ex-partner. The pastor, a replacement for the one who'd served for as long as I'd visited the church, younger, kinder, gestured to the parents. Mum and dad whose fault it was not, together, stood tall at the altar. They spoke about their son. They focused on his childhood and held up old photos of when he was six, eight, eleven, smiling at the flash, wielding a branch, on a cheap swing set, in a football kit.

The father held his wife and pressed his fingers to his son's coffin before leaving the church. I stayed inside after the arrangement. I stayed alone and where I was in the back row. I prayed. I spoke direct to God and confessed my hope that he knew he wasn't alone. That I followed his letter and knew if he was alive, I would've liked to have gotten acquainted.

I stayed alone in the church for some time. Thought about the people I met because of Crawlspace and what their existences were outside the server. Before and after.

The doors opened over my shoulder. Light shone halfway up the aisle, and another person came into the church. They passed me, looked at me I believe as I held my head down and felt afraid it was someone from the funeral wanting to question my attendance.

As they continued and took a seat close to the front, I recognised the person. That person who now prayed, smiled to the pastor, was the Cape I fought. The Cape who beat me.

Was there remorse?

Light (III)

Bloom.
White flowers.
From all the not love, loneliness, shame, suffocation
shots at adoration
Fang is here.