

Crawlspace Crawlspace

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

re.occurrence

(leo mara)

II

Verbal abuse (I)

“You are a piece of shit.” You are not loved. “You are not loved. You need to wash.

“Shower. Wash your fucking clothes. Are you crying? Are you crying, you fucking arsehole?”

He sat on the carpet, upright, limbs sagged, hands flopped and, on the floor, as well. At his request, I’d pulled down his trousers to below the elastic cuffs of his long black socks. His legs were apart and like I said, sagged in front of his flat stomach. He stayed there, this late-forty-year-old man. Sunken. Keeping to the floor of his own semi-detached house’s bedroom for the duration of my insults.

The insults were not extremely personal. They were improvised. I spat them out as I thought them up in the moment. I knew almost nothing about this man. This was our first encounter in person. We had sat down first, dressed, tap water and a black coffee. He had a cigarette as he told me about his insecurities. He spoke with a composed formality. Spoke with a discomfort that appeared, though it also seemed wanted. Motivated. To feel even worse. This was his decision. It was his *want*. It wasn’t my *want*. He wanted to be open to then be victimised.

I took down my trousers. “You’re a fucking coward.”

He stayed on the floor still when I left the room. It only felt appropriate to pull the door to a crack before I slipped away downstairs and thought of vomiting in the kitchen.

Plotted between spider plants and cosmology textbooks and other prettier hardbacks on shelves and sets of drawers were framed photographs. Posed shots of the same three children as they’ve aged. The mother, the father, one or the other. Never in a photo together.

Experiment / Theodore’s Scope

Mine may have denied me afterlife because of these explorations.

I believed he would. I believed he would peel off my white skin. Strip muscle with force in the most painful possible extraction. He wouldn’t touch me directly, too disgusted at the thought of having to touch me to make sure I felt agony and bled relentlessly. He was homophobic and was he wrong, he was God. I was wrong for my sexuality. I stained *his* structures, and I was a deviant and a fucking coward. You and dad and all the fathers, God, you all got it absolute. I was a fucking coward. The only hope I had, my skin eradicated, muscle grated, was he wouldn’t keep me alive too long suffering. He would want to rid the infection that I was from his Earth.

This depreciation kept me awake at night. What it didn’t do was keep me off Crawlspace.

I misunderstood my use, believing its purpose was to make me less mundane. It was okay inserting and pushing myself into situations which treaded through copious pools of nudity, and sweat, paint, anxiety, rope, rubber, because as well as consensual, it was different. And different was a desperate replacement for love.

Instructions were direct.

Go through communal garden.

Code for entrance is 0879.

Go upstairs. Find number thirty-six far end on the second floor.

Speak to no one.

The entrance will be open.

Push the entrance and go inside.

Follow the hallway left.

DO NOT SPEAK.

The plant life plotted inside the courtyard was overgrown. There were suffering Gauras amongst shapeless shrubs in the dark, light denied by the structure's enclosed design.

A green light with no sound appeared after the code. I moved inside the residence, held the cracked railing outlining the stairs, found Thirty-Six and pushed the door that was left sitting in its frame with a silver ring on the step to stop it from fully closing.

The interior was tidy. Clean. Polished appliances, wiped countertops, bowl, plates, cutlery lined the drying rack. Another person surprised me. A man. We crossed paths through the narrow hall of the apartment as he appeared to be leaving as I entered. 'Do not speak'. Neither of us spoke. Throughout, the carpet was unstained, and the scent was calm and impersonal.

The person I'd come to meet was to the left down this hallway. He waited in the bedroom. Not on the bed which was perfectly made, pastel covers pulled tight and tucked into the bedframe. Instead, he stood, fully clothed, by a long and drawn curtain. He faced the window, unphased by my quiet advance and the, I suspect scheduled disappearance of the other person.

I stood beside him. Accompanied his spectating of the below street.

There was little movement on foot. Unintentionally, I counted the bodies. A middle-aged, straight couple, walked an old retriever, talking about work on Amy's conservatory. A kid in a purposely shaken-to-be-scruffy school uniform. The collar of his white shirt was open, and the rest of the shirt falling out his V-neck sweater creased. Bobbing feet in strappy black shoes. Bobbing backpack that was too big for him. His arms straight at his short sides. There were more cars.

I stayed for forty minutes. Left when the music played out from his laptop concluded. We had, together in silence, listened to the notorious neo-classical album Scope by Agi Theodore. An album which is gorgeous but is also harrowing for unedited stretches. It is invoking. Of course, I was unsure what it was for him. Or what he was feeling.

When I left, it was raining. I passed another person on the stairs. They made equal effort not to acknowledge me. My assumption was they were next to go in.

Back inside my car, key in ignition, the wipers instantly came on. They cleared the theatre of transparent streams off the windscreen.

The radio was on. A host played a ten second clip of dialogue while a caller made attempts to name what film the audio was extracted from. I turned it off before the caller's third and final guess.

No Rest / Apocalianna's Spiral

There was no rest for four hours. We drank straight tequila out of highball glasses and soon, direct from the bottle. She wanted to dance. She wanted to enthusiastically convulse and lift, throw and wave her slim though muscular and unevenly tattooed arms. We shouted lyrics at the walls and furniture and shook to the three different versions of Apocalianna's EP 'Spiral' set on an endless loop. The three versions of the EP were only made up of altered versions of the same two songs which meant the repeat consisted of minimal variation and only a few lines of lyrics resourced in shallow waters.

She wanted to fuck. *Really* fuck. Fuck hard.

There were sporadic intervals in our violent dancing where we had intercourse. It was only missionary, yet the physical effort and the intensity was devastating. She demonstrated her athleticism. She would stop us- stop me... close to the 'mark' where she suddenly got up and pulled me up with her and we danced and shouted and drank again, chasing the same, constant pace.

The feeling wasn't going to last. Despite her impressive becoming upsetting effort.

You can't force it.

I couldn't tell by her movements, but if she was not tiring herself, then guiding and supporting the dying weight of my exhausted body must have taken a toll on her energy. I felt like a wet sack. I couldn't take any more of any of the grabbing at my jaw and my neck, shoulders, arms and genitals and the stopping and

starting and getting up after merciless riding and falling. It was worsened by the accelerating amount of tears which rushed from her bloodshot eyes, blurring her eyeliner and wetting my sweating face even more.

She tried desperately to hide the whimpers under the music. And to pretend she wasn't sobbing and convert the louder noises she made to laughter. I believe a smaller part of her was joyful. A part was having fun with me. But the rest of her was in emotional agony.

Two hours past, vomiting accompanied the punctured rotation of tequila, jumping, crying, and fucking. I was the first to spill out myself. I made it to the cramped bathroom's lino where my body folded, and my head bowed into the toilet. I inhaled the chemical scent of the blue rim blocker. I concentrated my breathing. Deep breaths. In and out. In and out, in and out like the knife before. Like my thrusts. In and out. In and out, deep breaths to hopefully frighten off attempted flight. It didn't work. The exercise was too much too intensely. I opened wide and vacated the vomit and with it, some of the emotion-provoking nausea. Deep breaths. In and out. Into the lungs. Into their bedroom, under the bed. Hide. Control my breathing.

To stop the spiralling, I finally grabbed her. I grabbed the half crying, attractive young woman by her biceps. I pulled her at me, into my own chest. My ribs were in agony. My lower stomach was falling out. I embraced her and I wished hard that the circumstances were not as they were. The circumstances being that our all, our arses, my dick and bollocks, and her well-groomed female equivalent peeped from under the waists of our t-shirts and rubbed uneasily as I tried to show her comfort.

Still, she sobbed.

Jacob / Asphyxiation

Jacob's was one of a few restaurants I frequently revisited. It was either a fifteen-minute drive, or a cobblestone and urban picturesque hour walk from my apartment. A Greek restaurant named after the name's representation in the Bible. Son of Isaac, Jacob, Ya'akov in Hebrew, gripped his brother Esau's heel in the womb. This first action foreshadowed the person Jacob would become. Beyond birth, he was a 'heel-catcher'. A deceiver, who tricked Esau and fooled him to trade his inheritance as first son of Isaac for a bowl of stew.

The owner of Jacob's told me once, that he thought his food was no heel-catch. His food was worth the birthright. We talked as well about the second meaning. Jacob the supplanter.

I arranged to meet Jacob at Jacob's. I thought it may be significant, but more so entertaining. I supposed it an icebreaker.

We started at the bar. I ordered his drink since I'd arrived first and was a third of the way into my first. He caught up, and finishing our initial drinks appeared a natural transition to move them back toward the bartender, tuck in our chairs and escort ourselves over to a table reserved.

Although we sat someways away from the entrance, I found myself imagining an incident imitating what Fang described. Through thought, I acted a handful of drafts out. Officers interrupting the scene, spotting Jacob as we ordered starters. Asking him to get up and come with them. Officers storming through the entrance, instead finding me while I tried to order. Ripping my grip from the drinks' menu, breaking my arms to force them behind my back and slamming my chin downwards against the ivory tablecloth so I'd bite my tongue. Whispering, 'We know all the dirty shit you've done, you fa-' I bleed through my teeth, and they drag me out of Jacob's, stand me up and push me into the road. Instead of a car, I'm hit by fists. I'm smashed into by force, by thrown bone. I'm beaten by men that stamp on my ankles to stop me escaping and pull me when I try to pick myself up, so my hands slide out and I land again on my chin, the blood spilling more. They turn me over. They get their fingernails inside my mouth and pry my teeth apart and stick their whole fingers into my throat-

"Not to come off as too forward..." Jacob asked, "...would you like to share a starter, Harry?"

"What would you like to share?"

"I'm a graphic design artist for Circumference."

Jacob covered his chewing. I saw he'd swallowed his beer by the reload in his throat. "I really want to say that I know what Circumference is..." He put his drink down on a coaster. "I don't. But please do tell me, Harry. What is it?"

The question was not sarcastic.

"What is Circumference?" I was surprised he'd asked. "It's a careers platform. The largest we have in this country now as well, which operates primarily in physical space."

"...in physical space?"

"As in it's not largely online."

"Like it doesn't have a website?"

"No, it has a huge website. You know, like any brand you can register an account, like Crawl-... like the server, and you can look for career opportunities and employers. Or you can be an employer searching for employees. The main difference about Circumference is that it's trying to conserve in-person interactions. They host enormous careers events, talks, and workshops."

He smiled on one side, "I value that."

I did, too. "Yeah, me too."

"You said you're their graphic designer?"

"Yes. One of. One of a few. I work specifically on graphics for their events. The promotional material. And the material that you'd see at the events as well."

"I'd like to go. I'd like to see."

"I don't go to any of the events."

"You don't go? Even just to see your own work?"

"No." I drank. "I've seen it enough by the time some of it's at the event. It's not of gallery quality- it's not-fine art, painted masterpieces... it's block colour."

"I know. How is that not art?"

"It isn't fine art."

"No, I'd say it's great art. If you wanted- If you wanted to go to see, could you get passes? Would you want to go see your art? If I came with you? Could we go? Would you want to go with me?"

"...part of a team. Bar me, it is *all* women. All very well suited for the job. The students are referred to us by parent or teacher, and we're there to offer support for students with special educational needs."

"Are you okay?" he asked.

I looked from the entrance of the restaurant back to Jacob. His detailed brown eyes were on me. They were fixed to mine. His low lips were held straight, and his elbows rested along the edge of the table. "Is something wrong? Do you want to leave-? Please- Please say, Harry, if you feel uncomfortable, please, I understand-"

"I'm sorry," I said, "I don't feel uncomfortable. I- I sank a gold spoon into the mounted ball of vanilla ice cream and through the pudding beneath. "I keep expecting police to come into the restaurant."

"Oh," he said, unsure, "What for?"

"I was dining with a woman. She was wonderful. She was good company, and she- funny, she did what I've done, and I called her out on it all the same as you. She told me that she was looking at the door on our date because officers did intervene on another of her dates. They'd taken her date away and covered the bill."

"Are you hoping to get out of paying half for what we've ordered?"

I huffed, wanting to smile.

"Did she find out what he was arrested for?"

I told Jacob the rest. The expositional message from Fang's date. How I felt sorry for her date because of her absence of an understanding response. Fears of the intent of others on the server. Fears of how using the server could be judged, could be manipulated as cause for arrest.

"I was a police officer," Jacob revealed. "For not very long at all. But what I learnt, is there'll be illegal activity happening, setup and communicated through the server. No different to the thousands of other ways to communicate."

It is not a blanket for all activity on Crawlspace, is what he next explained. “It’s upsetting to hide”. If it is consensual, then most of the activity which, publicly, would be ‘frowned upon’ is legal.

My fingers were firmly hooked around the north ridge of the steering wheel. I scratched down the license plate in pencil with my other hand on a page torn out of my sketchbook. Driving in our separate cars, Jacob led us to the hotel he’d booked for the evening.

Stopped at a red light, I saw him adjust his rear view to check I was still there.

The hotel was ‘Fifth Stay’. It was close to a concentration of high-rise offices and therefore, designed to accommodate men delivered in suits. Men who moan and who agree to leave their families and homesteads for two-to-three, three-to-five nights to attend meetings, pitches, and larger conferences. Who stay up late in nearby cocktail bars and lure lonely women twenty-years younger than their hard worked wives.

I swept my overnight duffel bag from the boot of my car, locked the car and checked to see I’d left nothing in view on the seats and tugged the handle to check again that it was locked. Jacob waited for me by his own silver five-door. He glanced about, at the trees whose roots bloated soil and rocked and shifted concrete curb and at the few stars bright and dotted beyond the short carpark’s streetlights.

At the front desk, they required forms of ID from us both. Jacob said that he’d checked in earlier, “around four o’clock”, and once they hung onto his passport for a minute, they handed it back and offered us a pleasant stay.

Taking the stairs, I slipped my driver’s license into a side pocket on my overnight bag which was slung over my shoulder.

Jacob turned the key, unlocked a room on the third floor and switched the lights on right away.

The double bed was made. The remote for the television which was mounted awkwardly in the opposite corner and a pair of clean socks balled were all that were left on the bed. The room smelt like the perfume Jacob wore. A white towel hung on the handle of the pulled bathroom door and there were prescription glasses, and sunglasses and an open zip bag placed on the desk. Beside the cheap plastic kettle was a stained mug and a used sachet of instant coffee.

“Would you like a drink? Tea? Coffee? Water?”

Once the plastic bag was over his head, he asked for the belt.

Starting to shake, I took the leather belt which I’d gripped the buckle of in my palm and had clothed taut my arm and wrist with, and I wrapped it around the opening of the colourless bag against his throat.

At first, Jacob held his breath as he laid back on the bed. He seemed to hold it for longer than a minute. The bag was still. The creases were uninterrupted. Until he let out. When he did, the plastic covering his face started to twitch. It gently fluttered like a light curtain close to a breeze.

Very soon, Jacob took a hard inhale, and the bag shot to his lips and stuck to his open mouth. Without folding his arms, he clawed at the covers either side of his legs and began to suffocate.

He had no air. He rattled. Shook like something held down while cast ironed. His chest twitched and compressed. His throat strained. His spine flexed. The noises were distressing, were weakening.

I tore the bag. I unravelled the belt, freed Jacob.

I sat in the single armchair in the room, rested a mug of coffee on my thigh. The heat was starting to transfer through the ceramic and the fabric of my trousers, causing feeling of a pinching hot ring on my skin. I envisioned it worse. As a scalding mark for shame. A punishment. A torturing reminder of what I deserved.

“You’re the first,” he answered, scratching the side of his long nose. “I have always managed this alone. Torn the bag myself. I only told one other person and they left. They left the room, and they’d not contacted me again after. Ever.

“The idea isn’t to die,” he told me. It wasn’t even to come close. It was distraction. To distract from crippling anxiety. Anxiety about the end of the world. The impendence of war, of famine, of infection.

The morning was different. The rising sun squeezed through the curtains and joined us on the bed. It blanketed my bare arms, kissed my forehead and warmed the tuffs through my hair.

Crawlspace (II) / mine

Around the time that I had met Jacob in September, Crawlspace entered the peripheral of mainstream. Registered accounts grew from five thousand to ninety thousand and the 'available locations' added Manchester, Bristol, Paris, Lyon, and Barcelona.

New 'wants'.

outdoors blindfolded costumed food conversation

and several more.

The opening '0' on the application became '00' and the font for the following 'not love' was changed.

The server advertised vacancies for

Graphic Designer x3 full time x1 part time

I was intimidated by the growth. Stressfully resentful. Signs of acceptance are sore to trust when they are a product of sudden popularity. When they were a cause of long-term insecurity.

Still, I was not yet sufficiently seduced to leave.

When I met another man at Jacob's, I broke my own rule of keeping home address a safe border apart from my exploration on Crawlspace.

He was unlike Jacob. So maybe they were cousins.

His eyes were not chestnut. They were blue and they were the only feature on his face un-attacked. The thinnest lines of blood framed his gums and his lips where they had split. His nose was yellowish and bruised. Faint patches of dirt glazed his cheeks, and his hair was swept with grease. His clothes were not dirty, nor did they have an unpleasant drift. Maybe not smart, but they were presentable.

We never ordered food. For the duration of the time that we were there, he kept his arms under the table, sipping at the froth on his pint.

He explained that he was without a home. He was with an older woman for seven years who he had fallen in love with after he first saw her play piano in the street. He guided me through scenes of their relationship. Romance. Flirting. Instantaneousness daytrips. Unconditional support after grief. The creeping irritations. The looming arguments. The violence... The first incident. She'd slapped him when he shouted. Once across the mouth. So, he tried to never shout again. He spoke quieter during fights. She was infuriated all the same. She slapped him again. On the temple, over the eyes, across the mouth. If he cried 'stop', if he asked her 'please', she pulled at his hair and yanked at his clothes and dragged him about and into furniture. He massaged the bruises after. He felt the pain more and said he muffled cries while on the toilet. When she held a knife to a side of his throat, he distraughtly accepted he could leave.

He went to a shelter for survivors, was pointed in the direction of another. One for male survivors. In this shelter he was given a bunk and was escorted by a safety officer working for the shelter to collect his belongings from his abuser's property. After three months in the shelter, he was forcibly encouraged to move on. He used Crawlspace to find sofas and floors to sleep on and beds to sleep in, willing, in exchange, to satisfy trustworthy-enough hosts' 'wants'.

I let him stay at my apartment.

As he showered, I made up my bed with fresh sheets, took a bottle of water from the fridge and put the TV on. I slipped some of my less used pyjamas and clothes off hangers, folded them and laid them on the foot.

I sat and watched two popular athletes interviewed on a British talk show with him before I moved from where I was sat up against the headboard beside him on the bed and I kissed him good night. A kiss on his forehead.

When he said, "Thank you so much," I lowered myself and brought our faces level.

I didn't ask to. I just kissed him and held it for a moment.

I left the bedroom afterwards. I threw a throw over myself on the sofa and closed my eyes and tried to sleep.

My dreams were invasive. I dreamt I suffocated. I suffocated while the bag was not over my head, but instead over the head of a person I'd not recognised who vaguely resembled my ex. I forced myself on someone else. I kissed the man that I gave my bed to, my head forced against his, pushed painfully hard. He didn't react to the pain, but his head was sinking into a pillow.

My head was throbbing when I awoke.

Jacob (II)

Jacob spoke more about his time as a police transit officer. He told me about the best and the worst encounters he had experienced and ended his selection of anecdotes with sharing the reason for his resignation.

“It wasn’t anyone’s fault,” he remarked. I scratched my stubble, was half turned toward him as we lied shirtless and next to each other in bed. A bed in another room in Fifth Stay Jacob insisted again to pay for. “It was autocratic. Given it was some years ago that I was there... it was *less* accepting of who I am.”

Jacob was not punished. He was not pinned. He resigned because it was what he wanted to do.

We spoke about Crawlspace. About the added categories and the changes to its design. How if I were hired what I would do different, to align the design of all the server’s interfaces.

We spoke about the enormous increase in users. How the server’s minority sexualities were becoming trampled by the queues of straight men and women signing up. Men looking to fuck more. To fuck unfiltered. Unrestrained. Fuck anything that might be defined as ‘irregular’. Looking to fuck someone heavier than the stick figures they’ve grinded in blue-cloaked clubs. For a hand job in a cab or on a public bus, or intercourse in an indoor pool or on the backseats of their failing car. For circumstances to allow tying up someone emotionally vulnerable. Zip tie their wrists and ankles and get dangerously close to acting on their private appetite for rape. To fuck with presumption. The presumption they have consent to be violent because of the server’s reputation. Straight women foolishly looking for actual love, ignoring the ‘not love’ in the opening credits. Thinking of the server as a communal lounge for the lesser, the sufferers. Believing this was as stable as they could capture. That this was all they deserved. And they crossed their fingers and hoped that they wouldn’t be beaten. Chose long sleeves to hide bruised arms and blame falling over for bent and broken noses and blackened sockets. Women looking for fast agreements to film and to sell the amateur porn to ad-funded websites to afford their existence and poorly fight off child services.

I pictured a literal pit during the conversation. A fuck en masse. Shoving queues down dark, graffitied hallways to a sudden drop. To fall onto piling bodies. Naked arses and elbows. I am close to the floor. I’m there, and so is Jacob. He’s there, with me, but we can’t reach each other as we’re pinned under the other bodies. The weight was suffocating and somehow while I breathed unaffected as though I’m not breathing at all, Jacob suffocated. The colour drained from his expression. Then another body fell on top. The pyramid of bones, muscle, and naked skin collapsed a little more and ogre foot to his face, knee to his shoulder, Jacob’s throat snapped.

It was going to all go wrong if we didn’t remove ourselves.

Jacob shared a friend of a friend’s supposed experience, who was hospitalised when he was locked inside a date’s apartment and beaten up by a ‘Cape’. A Cape was what a user was called, who used the server to hunt or bait, and threaten and assault gay men.

“We’re done with it.”

“With Crawlspace?” Jacob asked, looking at me direct.

“If that’s what you want as well.”

He did. He said it was. He said he felt that his search was over. He found me, and he wanted us. He emphasised the meaning of our conversations, our interest, our attraction. He said he thought maybe it was love between us when the asphyxiation was a blemish that I didn’t look to immediately repair, or runaway from or get off on.

This was the start of our relationship. Unspoken, but mutually understood that we would be faithful to one another. Look to each other for fulfilment.

This was committed.

We kissed.

Neck turned, he bowed and rested his forehead on my shoulder and kissed my skin again.

tied

Her clothes were a dark denim puddle at the end of the thick, cloud-stained mattress on the wooden panelled floor. Her head was forward. Her long blonde and washed blue hair was tied tightly back, away from her pretty eyed and lipped, numerously pierced face. The woman kept her thighs together, not that it hid her bare arsehole, as she waited in a cat's pose while the other man went to find scissors to cut the cable tie around the new DIY shop bought rope. This other man having left the second bedroom left she and I waiting together. She stayed where she was, pretending she wasn't uncomfortable in the exposing position, and twice glanced in my direction and smiled stubbornly like we'd clocked each other in public.

Instead, the man came back into the room with a knife.

He tore apart the tie and unravelled the rope. To the relief of my past-referring mind and abdomen, he removed the knife from being anywhere close to his assertion of dominance and her physical self. He tied her fresh shaved ankles together and threaded the rope through and up to her torso, letting her lower onto her breasts as he directed her arms behind her back and tied her wrists together as well.

I fell into a stare before he was finished bounding her. My thoughts weren't in the scene.

When I stepped back out of my thoughts, he was inside of her. Using the knots for good grip, it was what felt like a very long half hour of intercourse to observe. I stayed in my clothes. Belt unbuckled, my left hand was down my trousers, but I did nothing. I felt indifferent to what I saw.

I was busy, disgusted with myself.

You piece of shit.

Verbal Abuse (II)

She scratched the back of her head and picked up her wine. She drank, licked her lips, explained the specific situation she wished to perform on this occasion, with me.

"We were together. I slept with one of your friends," she spoke with her attention on the part folded-down table which was between us. To the coaster, wet under her glass. "I told you a week after it happened, and then I told you I didn't want to see you anymore." She then looked up, and looked to my eyes, "And we haven't seen each other now for a month. You're here, though. I let you in because you won't leave me alone. You begged and you're angry and you're insulting me, but you are at the same time *desperate* to have sex with me again. I'm saying *no*. And maybe you don't want to be with me either. You act like you despise me, like I'm shit on your shoe, but I can't be anyone else's. You won't let that happen/ You want to own me. You think you are the only person allowed to look at me." Her eyes go back to the table, "Do you understand? I want you to talk to me like shit, make me feel small and be big. Be cruel. And you're going to beg me to sleep with you. Beg me to bed me. If you're good at this, maybe I'll fold."

It was much harder to make myself demoralise and act forceful toward women than it was other men.

She disguised her face in the mess of bedding and jerked often as she used my fingers. I stretched my voice, pleaded, and enthusiastically pretended that I'd yell louder, punch holes in the walls and threaten her. I said that I'd eventually separate into atoms just if I couldn't have sex with her.

"Fuck you," I said, teeth grit, burying my skull. With more aggression than I knew I could exert.

To which she answered, arching and on her back, "You fucking want to," and moaned. "You're going to do what I fucking tell you- what I fucking *let* you do."

“I-”

“And you’re going to be grateful!”

“I hate you, you weak *cunt*,” I insulted. “I’ll make you fucking beg. You’ll come to me because no one else will want you. No one else wants you. No one is going to love you, you cowardly prick.”

Her phone vibrated on the bed.

She stopped abruptly. “Hold on.”

Cape

The number of junctions reduced. We were driving out of the area made up of bars, restaurants, and arcades, and heading towards less lighting. Family houses along winding streets and in between dog-walked woods, children’s playgrounds, basketball courts, and tree-rich parks.

I followed behind in my car as he led in his. It occurred to me to copy his license plate down, but instead I concentrated on the road then leaning down and looking for the rung pages scribbled all over with vague structure. The letters and numbers of tens of cars’ license plates. The meaningless of it if ever something was to happen. I wouldn’t be here any longer. It would never be found. Disposed of before a search along with my unsymbolic remains. And that would be what I deserved. A God dispatched service, carried out. Clean.

He drove cautious around the roundabout and took the third exit which led onto a road lined with narrow pavement and wide trees on both sides. He continued to drive slowly and indicated for the next right turn.

The right turn was stumped. It just fit the length of both our cars before the road changed to dirt. I saw that he’d turned the engine off as the misted red bloom of his rear lights went. He stayed inside his car. I got out first, read the big sign to our left. Printed in ugly writing, it read, ‘Secondhand Market every Sunday. 7:30 – 1:00pm’-

He got out of his car.

I wasn’t certain of the minutiae of his want. The want being ‘outdoors’. If, to him, in his car was considered ‘outdoors’. Or rather, was he wanting us to venture onto the field, into complete darkness and reach out to find each other and hope we didn’t roll over into fox shit.

“Turn around,” he spoke. And stood there, his expression monotonous.

I turned around, inadvertently read the board again. ‘...every Sunday’.

One arm came around my throat. He squeezed immediately. Holding onto his other arm, he squeezed so hard that I thought my neck would break before I could’ve accepted my demise. Surrender to suffocation. Blood rushed to my head. My periphery blurred. I felt unusual pins and needles in my fingers. I felt my lips pulsating, and I felt nothing in the centre of my palms. My palms were numb as I grabbed at his pressing arms and attempted desperately to excuse myself from the attack.

I let go.

My body physically withdrew. My arms moved down, and the tide of my consciousness headed out.

It felt like I blacked out before I was hit by a second rush. I gripped his arm again and launched my full body into the effort. As I did, his hold slipped and in a blur of violent flinching and shoves, I’d freed myself. Suddenly, I faced him again and immediately, he charged and tried grabbing me again around the throat. It was less successful front on. As he grappled me, I grappled him, too. The struggle forced us into an unloving cuddle. The top set of my teeth pried into his clothes and bashed against zip outlining his collar. As we knocked temples, he attempted to throw me down to the dirt, the force enough to unsteady me. I fell to a knee and palm and then he threw a punch. He caught me on the cheek with knuckles, rings on at least two fingers. And another punch. Into my ear which expectedly rattled my hearing.

“You infectious faggot-”

I propelled back to my feet and threw my own weight back at him which seemingly took him by surprise. I drove my head into his chin, and I returned a punch before he stumbled, slipped and fell.

I considered to keep going, but I fled. I rushed back the few metres to my car, locked myself in and started the engine.

He stood in front of the headlights. He spat at the windshield, shouted, “Fucking desperate! Lining yourselves up-!”

I reversed out of the stump.

“Making it fucking easy for us to exterminate you.”

I stopped the car.

He stood on the spot, and before he shouted anything else, I pulled up the handbrake, got out again and left the door open.

On my way over to him, he pushed out his chest, clenched his knuckles. We both swung indignantly. And were both soon bleeding from cuts under our eyes and throbbing noses. He landed an especially forceful hit to my forehead. Again, I almost lost consciousness and floated in a place which felt weightless. He took the opportunity of my lowered defences for another attempt at suffocation, grabbing me by the throat and immediately squeezing. Before he could use both hands, I resisted. I knocked him back with more punches and struggled back to my car.

This time I got in, and I didn’t get out again.