

DE... .. PARTURE

(GOODBYE !!!!)



By

Gusts Karlsbergs

WHY I LIKE IT: *Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes... Gusts Karlsbergs', "Departure," is the kind of story that almost scares you how well crafted it is. It's surrealism is palpable; its ridiculousness and incredulity only topped by the fact that neither of those terms mean a damn bit here – while reading its real; the sheer audacity of the story both humorous and a demonstration of a broken human; that the humanity and care that it takes to actually make another person both terrible and likeable within a story represents a demonstrable sense of control, talent, editing, and awareness of audience.*

Most people don't think about fucking a giant teddy bear (I'm still not even sure whether literally or figuratively). Most people don't think about leaving their lives by climbing into the skin of their teddy bear after being caught in a stall by security. Most people aren't treated like a human toilet by assholes while cut and bloodied in a bush.

There is a despicable-ness that permeates throughout this story, but there is also a beauty in sadness, in loneliness, in not getting the mental help that one needs and being tossed away to

fend for yourself for hope, in knowing that you see your life going nowhere and wanting to escape.

Sometimes we all need our version of life recognized.

Sometimes we all need a teddy bear.

Maybe not to fuck, but semantics.

"Departure," is a story with a lot to offer.

Karlsbergs is a writer who has given you something to read.

Read it.

QUALITY QUOTABLE (for the love of language...)

With every part of my body I knew this had to be the end, my life had become too burdensome, it weighed me down like rock filled pockets and I thought I would drown even in the rain. With both hands I reached deep into Roger's asshole, spread his cheeks and made the hole as big as possible. It was time to depart from the world forever. I shoved my head down his gashed opening, pushed with my legs, pulled with my arms, crawled, twisted and turned until my whole body was inside of the bear. His skin fit perfectly, better than anything else I've ever owned.

Departure

by Gusts Karlsbergs

I refused to leave on my own and they carried me out on a stretcher instead, I think it was probably for the best. They forgave me but I wasn't ready to listen and kept pretending to be the

same way and it hurt them more. I've escaped all distress by acting dumb and this was no exception. They had always treated me as the end product of my words, my fiction was their reality. My movement was choreographed – it was slow, it was crude. My thoughts were dim-witted on purpose. I laughed when they cried and cried when they laughed. They often spoke about me in front of me and I just sucked my thumb like a child until it was raw red or shat myself and they had to clean me up. I made it hard for them to change the subject. They were always on me – watching me, thinking me. They took me for walks in a large stroller and put the seatbelt on and everything because they worried I would spontaneously roll under a car or bite a passerby, probably some fuck old gray haired cunt or alike. I guess I sought to find myself there because I failed to do so somewhere else. Now they kicked me to the curb, almost split my head open. I was on my back defenceless, wiggling like a cartoon turtle unable to get back on my feet. They chucked my things from the fourth floor window and only the pillow came for my head but I had hoped for something heavier, I had shut my eyes, I was ready to die but it probably wasn't their intention. At that moment I tried to be funny but they did not understand it and it made them fume even worse. They spat in my face and shut the door forever, they implied the latter without saying it. I imagined them changing the lock too, not that they had ever entrusted me with the key anyway. Maybe the gesture would be worth something to them but then again it was only my imagination. Who knows what they'll do. Maybe they'll move and I will lose them forever. It was my fault, I wasn't angry, they had every right. I was too much for them but I was too much for myself as well. It was unbearable being myself, to wake up every morning and to know everything that I am not. I think it was only fair but maybe I took it too far, maybe I should have told my parents I wasn't a total tool. I should have wiped my own ass at least and they did a bad job anyway. I always smelled like shit. And they were horrible at trimming my beard too. It

was always uneven and ragged as if blustering winds had swept across my face. I looked fucking ridiculous and had to blush every time girls passed by my stroller on the street. No! I couldn't be like everyone else. I had to be what I wasn't to be at least more than what I could become if I tried. I was the beginning and downfall of the first words I ever spoke. I didn't want to grow up but I let the world grow up without me. In panic I turned to the first bystander that was closest to me, a bearded old fellow in a uniform that reached down to his knees, probably some perverted connoisseur of shitheads' theatre who'd enjoyed the show from the very moment I had hit the dirt cold stone, grabbed the bottom of his tunic and spilled my first words, the same old words, maybe my favourite words and possibly my last words but only time will tell, all over his black, spotless shoes: *me-do-po-po, me-do-po-po!* But he didn't believe it, he didn't feel sorry for me, he didn't wipe my ass, didn't apply the baby powder, didn't take me in, didn't feed me, didn't read me a bedtime story, didn't give me a goodnight kiss, didn't love me. He kicked me until I let go of his tunic. He left and the others did too. There were more of them and they all turned away and disappeared by retreating to themselves first but not immediately out of my sight. *Don't go! Where's my standing ovation? Fucking degenerates!* They didn't want to see me albeit, like an actor on the stage at the end of the play, it was me, it was finally me. Then I heard more things come down from the window but I didn't have to look to know what was left there. I scribbled at night sometimes and it was the stash of my stories they had uncovered whilst I was taking a shit in the morning. My mom had burst into the bathroom crying and frantically flailing them in my face as if she had caught on fire or acid had seeped into her cunt. I thought I had hidden them well but they must have noticed the ripped seam in my teddy bear's asshole. In the strong gusts of wind, still high above me, I heard them flutter away from me. I never imagined it would end like this.

Where's Roger? I screamed up to the window. I called my teddy Roger.

Roger was quite large, almost real-bear-sized and once we entered the establishment I realized it would be hard to maintain a low profile. I had to shit for the second time that day and it was a fucking emergency but I couldn't just run straight to the restroom that had a red "FOR CUSTOMERS ONLY" sign above the door and had to pretend to do some shopping first instead. Almost everyone stared at the stupid bear. If it weren't for the gang of little children in the playground nearby I would have left him in the stroller by the storefront outside but I worried Roger would be long gone before I would get back and therefore decided to take him with me instead. I frantically placed several random items in the shopping basket to look inconspicuous and balancing the bear in one hand and the basket in the other, wobbling and stumbling as if I had shat myself already, reached the toilet and locked myself in. But I couldn't have been halfway done when someone knocked on the door.

Sir, I'm very sorry to bother you...

Occupied!

Sir, I understand...

Go away!

Sir...

What?

Is everything alright?

Yes! Go away.

Are you sure, sir?

What? You're right, no, I'm not! Thank you for double-checking it. I just remembered that I'm currently being held at a gunpoint by a terrorist group with proper AK's and ski masks. They are all watching me shit. Call 911!

What?

Of course I'm fucking sure! I'm taking a shit. Leave me alone!

I'm sorry, sir, but...

Who the fuck are you anyway? Do you often hang outside restrooms? Are you a pervert or something?

No sir, it's one of the security personnel. I'm Mike!

Well Michael, how 'bout you fuck off? I'm taking a shit, buddy.

Yes sir, I'm sorry sir, but there are other customers in the line too.

I'm a customer!

I understand that but you are taking an awfully long time in there. I'm tryin' to be reasonable here. Do you need help with anything, perhaps?

Would you mind wiping my ass after I'm done? That'd be great!

Sir, how much longer do you think you will need?

I was halfway done before you rudely interrupted me. I might have to start all over again.

Start again? What? That doesn't make any sense, sir. And you've been locked in there for an hour already. Are you sure everything is alright?

Yes! Go away!

I... I can't, I'm afraid. Sir, we suspect you might be doing something else in there...

What?

...something disgusting. And we really hope that's not the case.

What are you saying?

But if we are right, quite frankly, we would be very disturbed to say the least. We really hope we are wrong about this, sir.

Just spill it already!

We saw the products you took before entering the restroom, sir.

What products?

You took several bottles of lube and a packet of condoms.

So what? They're not illegal.

Sir, are you doing something inappropriate with the bear?

What the fuck?

We saw the ripped seam, sir. Please drop the act. We know you are having sex with the bear.

Please open the door!

Fuck! Why does everyone notice the seam all of a sudden?

We are politely asking you to leave the store, sir.

I'm not fucking the bear. That's absurd!

We will be forced to call the police, sir. We don't want to bring any charges yet. This is your one chance. Just go, please.

But I'm not done yet!

I was crying and my pants were still around my ankles when they breached the door. They ripped Roger from my hands and with a quick kick to my legs brought me from the toilet seat to the ground. It wasn't just Michael, there was a whole team of men dressed the same and three of them bounced on top of me. *Target down* someone excitedly roared in his walkie talkie and the same message replayed on another device somewhere farther back in the store out loud. Someone also gave me a few sharp kicks to my already injured ribs. I think I passed out from the pain for a moment because I vividly remember being surrounded by sand dunes and distant stars. There were some young ducklings too, stumbling and slipping on black ice that eventually opened up and brought them under. They couldn't swim or get back up and drowned. Their mother was somewhere in the night sky, circling the moon in sadness. Even if it all lasted forever I was no longer there. A yellow stream of light permeated my train of thought and woke me up. It was some asshole shining his black dildo-, cop-like flashlight in my eyes. I also saw a different security guard with his gloved fist in Roger's asshole probably looking for evidence that I was a

perv. They took me by the shoulders and facing the ground I was disgracefully dragged outside. Several scared onlookers were following me with their smartphone cameras and for a moment I allowed myself to believe that I was destined for stardom after all. I mustered some strength and desperately howled out:

IF YOU ARE GOING TO PULL UP MY PANTS, PLEASE, FOR THE LOVE OF GOD, DON'T FORGET TO WIPE MY ASS FIRST!

Hey John! Look what I found in the bushes.

What is it?

It's some bum. Look!

Oh yeah! I see him. [Laughter] William, come over here too!

What's wrong with him?

We don't know.

Should we ask him?

I think he's unconscious.

Shit, he's bleeding too.

His skin is all torn and shredded.

Looks like a giant briar of some sort.

He's all twisted and tangled in there. Do you think he can get out?

I hate bums like this. I hope not.

Why does he smell like shit really bad?

Cause he's shat himself, probably.

I might have to vomit.

What a fucking loser!

Is that a giant teddy bear next to him?

And are they both sitting in a giant stroller together?

[Laughter] They probably took that steep hill, lost control and crashed in the briar.

Let's wake up Malcolm. He will love to see this too.

Malcolm! Wake up! We found some shit-smelling bum in the bushes. He's got a giant teddy bear and a stroller.

Huh? What? I need to piss. Let's go back to the dorm.

You will piss later. Come and look first.

Look, Malcolm!

Guys, I really need to piss.

What the fuck, Malcolm! This bum in the bushes is really special and you just want to leave? We came out to party, let's fucking party. Here, take a shot!

Better take one more!

Just keep drinking, Malcolm.

Let's decide what we should do with the bum now.

We definitely can't just leave him out there like this.

Any ideas?

Malcolm?

How about we all piss on him?

[Laughter] *Good idea, Malcolm!*

Brilliant!

Genius!

Let's piss on the bum!

Horrified, because I had appeared out of nowhere and had begun to look like a deranged nomad, she swiftly and forcefully yanked her bags together, accidentally tore a handle off one of the bags and her stuff, mostly empty bottles, scattered across the floor. She dropped to her knees and tried to put her stuff back but then the bag's bottom gave out and the rest fell out as well. She started crying and desperately transferring her junk to the remaining bags that were still intact. The whole process was flawed and took several minutes. She even took a piss break right in front of me in the middle of all this chaos. After her pathetic blunder was over, she was defiantly

standing on top of the toilet seat in the corner of the public restroom, holding her bags in front of her as if they could shield her from the wicked dark world and the intruder from without. Her thick cocoon of clothes and trashbags emitted a strong smell of booze and she heaved heavily. We looked at each other for a while. She was shit-faced and could hardly stand. She spoke first.

You're here to take advantage of me, bastards?

No, mam.

What about the bear?

No, mam. It's just a toy.

If you really want, I will lift up my shirt, I've got no bra underneath, see, go ahead, touch my breasts, bastards.

I won't touch them, mam!

What about the bear?

He won't either, mam. It's just a toy.

Stop the bullshit! I know why you're here. Come, spit in my mouth.

No, mam!

If you want to go for my vag too, I won't scream but you must leave the bear outside. I don't like the way he's looking at me.

No one's here to hurt you, mam.

Alright, the bear can watch but you better don't take too long.

Mam, I ain't gonna do nothin'.

Fine! The bear can partake in this as well. Maybe I'm starting to like him.

I'm sorry, mam, but...

Go ahead, bastards!

NO!

Just pull it out, give it to me already! I see it's rock hard. Stop wasting my fucking time.

Nothing's hard and I'm not after you, mam.

Nonsense! And why is the bear's dick not out already either!

Please leave the bear alone, mam!

Where the hell is it? It's all smooth down there!

But, mam, I already said it's only a toy. He doesn't have anything down there.

I just found a hole! Can I finger his hole?

Please don't touch the hole, mam.

Why the hell not? What's it for then, bastards?

Prose. A little bit of poetry too but I don't think you'd understand.

You're no good. I hate you! You are pathetic. I can smell sadness all over you and I don't like it.

I'm just very tired and I don't really know what's going on in the world anymore.

Are you demented or something? You came for me!

No! I only came here because it was raining, I was cold and alone. I think I will go now.

I'm taking off my clothes.

Please don't, mam. I won't look!

You think I'm ugly, bastard?

I'm leaving!

Come back! Don't take the bear from me. Let me embrace him at least. I won't put anything in his ass, I promise. I'm lonely as well and I want to hold somebody so much, just for a little while.

Don't do this to me!

When I piggybacked the bear out from the public restroom, it had started to snow outside in the park. A thin wet layer of snow had coated the stroller already. My feet were still soaking wet from the rain before and it had been days since I had eaten anything. It didn't look good. I couldn't escape the trajectory of misery I had started a long time ago, I had made too many errors to turn anything around, everything just withered in my path. There won't be a standing ovation, no escape, no relief, no becoming, no purpose, no resolution but only sad desolate silence at the very end.

There were long plastic tubes going down my throat. A dirty, smelly man inserted them in my mouth every morning and took them out in the evening when he made the daily rounds as the janitor. They used the tubes to feed me, they also fed me drugs and possibly alcohol. I was

always in bed but it was never a cosy affair. I felt very little, none of my limbs had any sensation left and my eyes and nose sensed only a little more of the same. There were sometimes streaks of sunlight in the room but they didn't warm the damp eerie place. I didn't complain because the plastic tubes had become comforting to me, they absolved me from much of the suffering during the day and I was rarely conscious anyway. However at night, when the tubes were removed, I would be encumbered by the star and cigarette burn dotted blankets that would weigh on my chest with hot and damp pressure and it was often difficult to breathe. I rarely slept at nights but sometimes I was brought back to the desert regardless. I would walk on the black ice among the sand dunes and look for the place where the ducklings drowned but I never found the fatal opening in the ice and it never opened up for me either. The lake was frozen solid and looked the same everywhere. I would skate back and forth on the ice all night long, never truly falling asleep until it was daytime and I would be cradled by the drug and alcohol infused tubes and lose consciousness altogether. But then it was all taken away from me one morning abruptly.

Wake up, friend. It's time to go.

You are the janitor!

Get out of the bed.

But I haven't had my tubes yet!

You ain't getting them today. The boss is angry with you.

What boss?

Your employer, of course! Get up!

But am I not in a hospital? I don't think you can kick me out like this.

I don't know what you think but this is a brothel, friend.

But I'm terribly sick! What am I doing here?

You're a whore, of course.

It can't be!

But you ain't working with us anymore.

I didn't consent to any of this!

When we found you, you were barely alive. You were begging to do anything and we employed you here. Don't spin this against us now. We saved your life, friend. You better be thankful.

But I didn't know this was a brothel. I'm a writer!

No, you are only a pathetic prostitute.

But how? I wasn't even awake most of the time!

That's right, friend. You were the "coma-patient-experience" at the brothel.

I've been raped?

No, that's the problem, friend. Nobody paid for you. That's why we're kicking you out. You only stunk up the place with your sadness.

But it couldn't have been that bad?

You cried practically every night in your sleep. I've never met a bigger loser than you.

No one wanted to fuck me?

I'm sorry.

Did anyone at least consider it?

A few looked at you but immediately changed their minds. We've never had a whore that couldn't get even a single lay. And we've had really bad ones, trust me.

Do you think it was because of my beard?

What?

Do you think if I'd go to a barber I'd have a chance then? I should have never let my parents trim it!

Don't worry about your beard, friend. The problem with you is much deeper than your appearance. You just don't tick like the rest of us.

But why wasn't I thrown out sooner?

Because your teddy bear did very well. Customers stood in line for him. Everyone wanted a piece of his ass.

Roger? What have you done to him? Is he alright?

Unfortunately some sicko cut him up with a knife yesterday. He's lost all his fluff. He won't be making money for either of you anymore.

Oh god! Roger, my sweet little Roger! What have they done to you!?

I'm really sorry, friend. I'm sure he was a good bear.

The evening light was dim, mute and indifferent to the rain. Umbrellas had popped-up all over the streets like colourless mushroom caps, the gutters were full and water came straight down from the roofs like waterfalls, storm drains were out of order from the excess water and cars were sailing the roads like boats. It all felt like a big cleansing and therefore I didn't hide from the rain. I had the worst and only hangover of my life and needed to cool down. Roger lay across my lap like a giant cumfilled condom. The cum was slowly but surely dripping out from his gaping asshole in the rain. We didn't shy away from the faces in the windows either. We were surrounded by apartment blocks and angry parents gave us condemning looks, probably because we sat in their children's playground but no one dared to go out in the storm to kick us out. With every part of my body I knew this had to be the end, my life had become too burdensome, it weighed me down like rock filled pockets and I thought I would drown even in the rain. With both hands I reached deep into Roger's asshole, spread his cheeks and made the hole as big as possible. It was time to depart from the world forever. I shoved my head down his gashed opening, pushed with my legs, pulled with my arms, crawled, twisted and turned until my whole body was inside of the bear. His skin fit perfectly, better than anything else I've ever owned. I was ready to leave the playground, the city too and start everything over, maybe work at some amusement park, but then I felt something at the very bottom of the right sole. I reached inside of the bear's leg and pulled out a small, crumpled piece of paper. It was an excerpt from one of my old stories I thought I had lost to the wind forever. It was only the story's very end.

...it will be better, it will get better, wait and look for me on a sunny day down south by the canyon, on a bridge that hangs high above a river. We will embrace, laugh and kiss. We'll live on a farm that overlooks the river and milk the cows in the morning. And one day we will hold

our little child in our arms together and when he's old enough, we will point to the bridge and tell him the whole story of how we escaped, met and fell in love.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *One night, probably a couple of hours before dawn, my demented and mostly naked grandfather walked into my room while I was asleep. He was scared, lost, incoherently asking for directions and, without recognizing that he was talking to his grandson, politely asked me if I could show him his way back. I don't know what place he thought it was, or where he wanted to return. The next morning he was all there again. Dressed and fluent with words. We said good morning to each other but little else and had breakfast together. I accepted it all immediately; I saw no point in dwelling on it or looking for profound answers, which is a bad habit to begin with anyway. Departure came to me in a similar way. I wouldn't remember it now and it wouldn't matter except for what's written already. A watered-down Pynchon, Palahniuk-light, Cormac McCarthy without the western stuff, pre-Catch 22-Heller, J. K. Toole but only for keeping it in the shitter, G. Grass with fewer Nazis but a stupid bear instead, or simply a dumbed-down D. F. Wallace. I know what style and ideas Departure has borrowed from other authors but none of them influenced any of it directly. I couldn't name them all and I even tried going over my bookshelves, or maybe I just can't be trusted with anything anymore. I'm simply waiting for my own turn to wander along the hallways at night now, until either a new story emerges or someone brings me back to my room. And I will accept it just the same because I already have. Departure has its moments and I'm glad it's out there.*

AUTHOR BIO: Gusts Karlsbergs currently lives and works in Riga, Latvia. He has recently received a MA in philosophy. His literary interests primarily revolve around modern and postmodern literature.