

# **RIGHT LANE ENDS**

**By B.R. Flynn**

*October 14th, 1983, 9:31pm*

Autumn came creeping out of Summer in the early days of October on this stretch of Northern Arizona road. At night, when the forest was not totally asleep but certainly dreaming and the mountains looked like stone sentinels, the first, tentative patches of frost awakened, making their presence known on the branches and leaves of the trees, which were already turning that magnificent shade of orange. The night sounds were soft but always present: the steady, rhythmic chirp of crickets, the eerie, lonely howl of a coyote, the somehow ominous hoot of an owl and, sometimes, the curious sound of something larger, something more primal, stalking the woods.

These sounds were drowned out by the hard, mechanical sound of something totally man-made: the loud, pounding engine of an eighteen wheeler driving down a highway that cut through the forest like a deep, penetrating wound.

Buford T. Hoggs was more than a little tipsy at the wheel. It had been a hard, long day of driving and he just wanted to get to Phoenix before midnight. And if he had drank a little more than he should have at dinner, so be it. It came with the job. He had run out of pills the night before and couldn't find anyone in Panguitch selling. He was glad to be finally out of Utah, having left the border behind him not long ago.

The headlights of the truck cut through the darkness, illuminating the winding, unfolding road ahead. Creedence was on the radio: a hard-rocking, driving track. Buford had buried his dog, Snips, a few months back so he didn't have steady company anymore. Truth be told, he was bored, and wished for a little excitement.

The song ended and the news came on. A series of sex murders was the current talk. Along several major highways in Utah and Arizona, in a matter of months, sixteen young women and girls had been found murdered and mutilated, their bodies dumped in ditches in black garbage bags. And there were always pieces missing from the girls.

Buford chuckled at the news and tried to concentrate on the road ahead, tried to concentrate on Phoenix. He had seen a sign a while back telling him that Moonstone was only fifty miles away which meant that Phoenix was only three or four hours South now. He liked to keep it warm inside the cab, even when it wasn't cold out, and now he wiped sweat out of his eyes.

"Breaker One-Niner," the CB radio crackled to life. "Talking to anyone listening out there on this God-forsaken stretch of road, over." It was a female voice on the other end of the line.

"Oh, babe," Buford said, turned off the music and grabbed the mike. "That you, Long Liz?"

Over."

"Well, if ain't Hoggtown, rolling on my stretch of road," Long Liz said. She had a pronounced Texas accent. It was sultry, sexy. "Who'd you run over this time, Hoggtown? Over."

Buford laughed. "Oh, this one was asking for it. Over."

"Of all the wheels that could be sharing my road, did it have to be you? Over."

"You're stuck with me, lady. Over."

"I ain't no lady. Look, I'm pulling into the choke and puke here outside of Moonstone. The Station. I'm going boots up, calling it a night. I've come all the way from the Big D haulin little piggies and can't see straight anymore. I was hoping for better company but I suppose you'll do. You wanna grab a beer at the diner? Over."

"No can do, honey," Buford said with no little regret. "I have got to make it to Phoenix before my eyes pop out. Over."

"Well, you can stop here and at least have a beer, grab something to pick you up before the home stretch. I'm pulling in now. Over."

"Tempting, my dear, tempting. Are you asking for company tonight? Something a little more intimate, perhaps? Over."

"With you? Not on your life. Just want to share a beer with another trucker. I'm only seein one other truck in the parking lot here. Place is dead. Over."

"Gonna get yourself a good buddy for the night, then? Over."

"Don't see any around. But I still wouldn't. Oh, but I do spy a cute little lot lizard. There she is. Over."

"You are a dirty one, Long Liz. Tell you what. Maybe I'll stop by. Destiny may sway me in your direction. Over."

"I wait with bated breath. Over and out."

Buford hung up the mike, shook his head and laughed. Long Liz was good for a few laughs but would never put out. A big tease. But he had had some good times with her in the past. He concentrated on the road once more and wished he could run into a hot young thing to warm his blood for the evening.

And suddenly, there she was on the side of the road, arm outstretched, thumb up, one long leg placed prominently out in the road ending in a sturdy boot. Buford would have sworn that she hadn't been there before. She was on the tall side, pale and freckled, with short, bright orange hair. Her black shorts were scandalously short and her leather jacket was battered, like it had traveled here by way of the Second World War.

She was sexy, incredibly raw and alluring, and Buford found himself slowing the truck down as he passed her by, watching her. He brought the truck to a stop, turned off the radio and honked the horn.

The young woman dropped her thumb, walked towards the cab. She was slow and deliberate in her walk, swaying her ass side to side. Buford shook his head but kept smiling.

Slowly - making a show of it - she opened the passenger door and climbed into the cab. She shook off the backpack she wore, put it between her legs on the floor of the cab and slammed the door shut.

Buford got the truck moving again. He shot a glance at the young woman as she pulled a pack of cigarettes out of her jacket, shook out one of them and lit up with a wicked Zippo. She looked to be in her early to mid twenties. Sexy but also hard and strong. Her arms looked formidable. Something he didn't normally like but she made it look good. And something even more exciting: under her jacket, which was unbuttoned and hanging open, she wore only a tiny half-shirt. Her bouncy breasts were fabulous and she wasn't afraid to reveal considerable cleavage to the world at large.

"Headed?" Buford asked.

"Moonstone, I think," she said.

"You think?"

"Yeah, I think."

"Well, if you think, I suppose that's okay. There's a little choke and puke there that I'll grab a drink at."

"Choke and puke?"

"Oh, sorry. A truck stop. Just a little ways now."

"Yep, I know."

"Buford."

"I'm sorry?"

"My name. It's Buford."

She nodded and smoked. Buford watched the trails of smoke as they twisted up into the air of the cab. He sighed as he returned his attention to the road.

"I don't smoke in the cab," he said.

"Want me to put it out?" she asked.

"I didn't say that."

"Then why'd you bring it up?"

"Whoa, now. I think we may have got off on the wrong foot here. Now, like I said, I'm Buford. I

didn't catch your name, pretty lady."

"It's Dee."

"Dee. See, now we know each other. Ain't that nice?"

Dee nodded. She planted a leg up on the dashboard, giving him a nice view of her pale, lovely skin. It was a beautiful leg, long and luscious. Buford found himself wondering what it would taste like.

"What's in Moonstone?" he asked.

"Come again?" she said.

"Moonstone. It's where you're headed."

"Right." She shrugged. "We'll see, won't we?"

"Then why you wanna go there?"

She shrugged again, still not looking at him. She blew a smoke ring in the air then sucked it back into her mouth, let it escape a second time. The smoke passed over her face like a mask for a brief second.

"Destiny, I guess," she said.

"Powerful force, destiny," he said.

"Tell me about it."

"I sure will. You know, there are some strange stories about this stretch of road."

"You don't say?"

"I do. Indians have all kinds of tales about this land. Tales that'd turn your hair white. I once heard tell one of 'em got lost up here in the woods, went mad and, somehow, managed to chop both his arms off. Bled all the way back to his tribe."

Dee frowned. Buford stole a glance at her. She was bathed in smoke.

"Chopped both of his arms off?" Dee said.

"Yep," Buford said. "Clean off. Right below the elbow."

"That doesn't make any sense."

"That's what makes it creepy. How'd he do it?! You know?"

"Okay."

"Hell, weird things still happen all 'round here, to this very day."

"Oh, yeah?"

"You know it. Few weeks back, I picked up a hitch. She was buck naked. Total birthday suit."

"That's exciting."

"You don't have to tell me. I popped a big 'ol woody before she even got in the cab."

"Charming."

"I'm a fucking prince, babe."

"You are, aren't you?"

He looked at her again. She was finally looking at him now and her eyes - a deep, bright, penetrating green - drilled into him. He returned his gaze to the road right away.

"Anyway," he said, "strange stretch of road, this. You hear about them murders?"

"Oh yeah," she said.

"Serious business."

"I agree."

"You mentioned destiny before. That's what I'm talking about here. These girls were meant to die, if you see what I mean. They got what was coming to 'em."

Dee said nothing. The cab was filled with smoke and silence for a moment. Had he said the wrong thing?

"How 'bout some music?" Buford said.

He reached out to turn the radio back on but Dee stopped him, snatching his hand with snake-like reflexes. He looked up at her.

"No," she said. "It would spoil the mood."

With an effort, Buford retrieved his hand from her grasp. He shook his head, confused.

"What mood?" he said.

Dee just smiled at him. It was a toothy smile. She seemed to have far too many teeth. Buford didn't like it at all.

"You look like you could use some coke," Dee said.

"Pardon me?" he said.

"Coke. A little pick-me-up. You could use one."

"Um, sure, okay."

She finally broke her gaze with him and rummaged through her backpack, coming back up with a little baggie filled with white powder. Opening the little baggie, she looked up at him expectantly.

"I don't have a little hand mirror or anything like that," he said, "if that's what you're wondering."

"Not a problem," Dee said.

She sprinkled a generous amount of the drug onto her cleavage. Buford wasn't even looking at the road anymore as Dee pushed up her breasts from the underside, presented them to him.

"Come on," she said. "Have a sniff."

"Don't mind if I do," Buford said.

He leaned over and pressed his face between those two gorgeous globs of flesh, inhaling the coke and shaking his head back and forth between the breasts, enjoying every second of it. The rush was fast and good. Real good. His head was suddenly clearer than it had been all day. He licked some more of it off a tit and sat back up, watching the road again.

"That hit the spot," he said, running his tongue along his gums, pushing grams in between his teeth.

"You're welcome," Dee said.

Buford sniffed and rubbed his nose. Before Buford even realized what she was doing, Dee climbed into his lap, straddled him. He strained to see the road around her body. She made this even more difficult for him by pulling up her tiny half-shirt, exposing her breasts to him. They were nearly perfect. Large but not too large, with puffy nipples, already hard and twitching.

He felt his penis also get hard, also start to twitch. Dee whispered into his ear.

"Let's fuck," she said. "Come on."

"I'll pull over," Buford said.

"No, keep driving."

"What, are you crazy?!"

Dee smiled. Those teeth! What was wrong with her teeth? He felt something pressing against his crotch. Something hard.

"Those girls," Dee said.

What was that between his legs? It felt familiar somehow. Buford could no longer see the road at all now.

"All those women that you killed," Dee said. "What parts did you eat? I'm just curious."

All of a sudden, he knew what was pressing up against his dick. It was another dick: a big, hard cock.

"Oh, mighty Jesus!" Buford said.

"How many of them have you killed now?" Dee said. "Sixteen? Seventeen? Were you planning on killing me, too? You were, weren't you? Yes, I can see you were. I'm in your head right now, Buford. Scary, isn't it?"

"Where do you get off having a cock?! Oh, save me, Jesus!"

The truck hit a big yellow warning sign. It lay flat against the windshield, telling them that the right lane was ending. They would be going off the road any second now. Dee smiled down on Buford. Her teeth seemed too large.

Buford screamed as Dee opened her mouth wide. She held him down, freakishly strong, as he struggled. The woman bit down on his neck. It was messy. She tore through flesh and crunched bone between her teeth, her venom mixing with his blood.

For Buford, it was a horrible mixture of pain and pleasure. He orgasmed in his pants and could feel Dee do the same. But the pain was intense and ever-present.

Finally, Dee let go of him. Blood pumped out of the huge hole in Buford's neck, splattering the cab, himself and Dee as she laughed.

She bit down again. And again.

And again.

There was a sickening crunch as Buford's spine cracked: a clean break, straight through. His head snapped to one side - the left - resting on his shoulder. He was dead, eyes rolled up into his skull, tongue lewdly sticking out of his mouth.

Soon, his head was only attached to his body by a tiny piece of skin. It flapped around as the last jets of blood in Buford's body splattered out of the stump where his head used to be. Dee laughed and let the fountain paint her red.

The truck was now completely off the road. It hit an old, massive tree at over fifty miles an hour. Dee was catapulted through the windshield, hitting a tree farther away, bouncing off it and landing on the ground.

Buford's head - now separated from his torso - came flying through the windshield first, hitting the tree and bouncing off it, disappearing into the woods. His body didn't quite make it all the way through. It was caught in the shattered glass and tore open, his guts spreading out on the hood of the truck.

The load that the truck was carrying jack-knifed, snapped and went rolling back onto the road, partially blocking it. The refrigerated car held slabs of pork, just like Long Liz's haul, and they rattled around inside, banging against the metal container. The back of the container broke open and the cold escaped out into the air. Soon, the meat would start to rot.

The wreck was apocalyptic, horrific. The sound of it was massive, like an earthquake. Dee got up, dusted herself off. Her wounds from the crash were already healing, simply sealing themselves up like eyelids closing over red eyeballs. And she just couldn't stop laughing.

*9:46pm*

Shauna Perkins inserted a coin into the pay phone and began to turn the dial, her finger in the



"9" hole. Mark - suddenly appearing beside her - slammed his palm down on the phone, disconnecting the call. Shauna's coin rattled through the pay phone and ejected into the return slot. The pay phone was located at a seamy rest stop north of Moonstone. Shauna was in her mid-twenties, pretty but not glamorous, with mousy brown hair and a compact frame. Mark was a little older than her, tall, handsome, but his eyes were wild, harried and nervous.

"What?" Shauna said.

"Who are you calling?" Mark said.

"The police."

"Are you out of your tiny skull?"

"I..."

"We can't call the cops, Shauna."

"But that wreck back there. The truck is halfway across the road. We nearly ran into it. You said it was a danger to everyone on the road. You said that."

"I know what I said but, honey, we can't call the cops. You don't think they'll ask us questions? Don't think they'll happen to look in our truck?" He was whispering now. "Or under it?"

"Well, I didn't think..."

"You're right, you didn't think. Screw your fucking head on."

"I meant I didn't think that I'd have to give them any information about myself. It would be an anonymous call. Right?"

"No," Mark said. "Too risky. Just leave it."

"But it could hurt someone," Shauna said.

"So?"

"You're unbelievable, you know that?"

"Probably why you married me."

"I don't why I married you at all."

Mark looked around. The only vehicles in the rest stop's parking lot were a motorcycle - a Harley or some kind of hog - and their pick-up truck. He walked cautiously towards his truck, took another look around and then bent down, looking under the truck. There they were, nine neatly-wrapped packets clearly holding liquid. They were all secured in place and hadn't moved since the last time that Mark had looked at them.

He nodded, satisfied, and stood up. He walked back towards the rest area proper, passing Shauna on the way.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"Taking a leak," Mark said. "Problem with that?"

Shauna shook her head. Mark stopped and stared at her.

"Answer me properly," he said.

"No," she said, "I don't have a problem with that."

"Good."

He continued on his way to the men's room. As he approached, someone came out of the restroom. Mark was surprised to see that it was a woman: a sexy, orange-haired beauty, a bit on the tall side and showing off a generous helping of cleavage. She shot him a smile but didn't say a word, just kept walking by. Mark stopped and watched her leave, paying particular attention to her ass, which swayed from side to side as she walked.

The young woman mounted the chopper in the parking lot and revved it to life. Shauna caught Mark's look and didn't approve. Soon the woman was gone, down the road on her loud, chugging bike.

"What, you don't even want to warn *her* about the wreck?" Shauna said.

"Shut up," Mark said. "Besides, she wasn't even going in that direction."

Shauna just shook her head as Mark headed into the restroom. Maybe it was his state of mind, maybe he had just been floored by the sheer vision of the woman. Whatever it was, he never found it odd that the woman had come out of the men's restroom.

The restroom itself, when Mark entered it, was large and filthy. The doors were missing on two of the four stalls along one wall, ripped away in some past incident. Mark could see a pair of feet - shaking slightly - under one of the stalls that still had a door: the last one, by the wall. Of the two stalls that he could see, one toilet was completely backed up; brown, diseased water dribbling out of it. The other stall was lined with shit, as if someone had sprayed diarrhea in every direction. The urinals, facing the stalls on the opposite wall, all looked yellow instead of white. Cracks lined all of them like spiderwebs. Tiles were missing in the floor. More than one cockroach crawled away from Mark as he approached the urinals.

He took a satisfying piss, sighing as he did, one outstretched hand placed palm down on the dirty wall. The guy in the stall down on the end sure sounded like he was having one Hell of a bowel movement. Mark could hear splashing sounds and other, less identifiable sounds. He shook his head.

"One too many burritos?" he asked.

No answer. Mark shook his head again, then shook out the last few drops of piss before zipping up. He didn't bother flushing and headed to the sinks, which were on the same wall as the urinals. He half expected the faucet to spray dirty brown water but it was clear and appeared to be fine. He washed his hands, absently looking in the cracked mirror at the last stall; the occupied one.

The man's feet were jerking unnaturally, shaking and fluttering. And was that another pair of feet he saw? Someone standing in the stall while the other man sat on the toilet?

"Mark," a voice called from the stall.

"No," Mark said but he couldn't stop watching the stall in the mirror.

"Mark, you can't ignore me."

The voice was utterly alien, as if an animal or simply inhuman voice box were trying to approximate the sound of a human voice. The voice was accompanied by a clicking sound. Mark always thought of the chittering movements of pincers when he heard it.

"I don't want to talk to you right now," Mark said.

"We need to talk, Mark," the voice said.

Mark turned off the faucet and slammed his fist into the mirror. It broke easily, shattering and falling in mirrored daggers into the sink and onto the ground. Mark left his fist in the wall where the punch had landed, bleeding in place. He shut his eyes. That old Led Zeppelin song rattled around in his head. The one with that great opening riff. What was it called?

"Immigrant Song," the voice said. "That's the one you're thinking of. My favorite of theirs, actually."

"You can't be here!" Mark nearly screamed.

"Not so loud, Mark. Don't want to worry Shauna, now, do you?"

"No."

"Good. Now, like I said, we have to talk."

"We've talked enough already, Mr. Wrench. What the fuck else is there to say?"

"Hey, no need to be rude," Mr. Wrench said.

"I'm sorry," Mark said.

He turned around, cradling his wounded hand, and looking at the stall. Yes, he could see that the second pair of feet belonged to Mr. Wrench. How could he always find Mark, no matter where he went?

"Better wrap that up," Mr. Wrench said.

"Right," Mark said.

He pulled a handkerchief from his jacket pocket and carefully wrapped it around his wounded fist. The first pair of feet in the stall continued to shake hideously.

"She knows too much, Mark," Mr. Wrench said.

"Stop with that shit," Mark said.

"You know what I say is true. You've told her too much."

"She doesn't know anything important."

"She knows that it isn't normal, what you're smuggling."

"She knows shit. All she knows is what I tell her."

"That's too much. Get rid of her."

Mark shook his head and started to approach the stall.

"No," he said. "I won't. She's my wife."

"Wives are all the same, honey. You know what I say is true."

"I won't do it! You hear me?"

He reached the stall and pulled open the door. There was Mr. Wrench, all seven and a half feet of him. Like always, he wore an impeccable suit, grey and stylish. His large, brown head swiveled around at odd angles, his mandibles clicking together. His hands were little more than wet, glistening, fuzzy sticks. Mark was surprised he could manipulate even door handles with those things. His multifaceted bug eyes sparkled in the flickering, fluorescent light above.

Mr. Wrench's appearance, like always, was hideous. But what he stood over was worse.

The man on the stall was clearly dead. He was a biker, black leather pants pulled halfway down his legs. He had clearly been anally raped: his asshole was distended and bleeding. His belly had been slashed open, guts spilling into the toilet. His neck was little more than an open wound: a huge hole, which looked bitten away. The top of his head was cracked open, broken off, and Mr. Wrench was casually eating the man's brains: his horrid, stick arms stuffing the grey matter into his maw.

Mr. Wrench scooped up another handful of brains, coming away with one of the man's eyes this time. It fell from Mr. Wrench's grasp and bounced with a sickening noise to the floor, where a cockroach crawled up to it, examining it.

"Jesus H. Christ," Mark said. "What did you do?"

Mr. Wrench swallowed his morsel, his head shaking horribly, and turned to regard Mark. His suit was still impeccably clean: not one drop of blood or gore had dribbled onto it. Mr. Wrench clicked and licked his stick hands, although Mark didn't actually see a tongue. This completed, the horrid creature rubbed his chest in satisfaction. Mark couldn't help but notice the rather large breasts that Mr. Wrench had under that suit.

"Oh, this?" Mr. Wrench said, referring to the dead body. "Not my handiwork. It was already like this when we got here. I just got a little hungry. That's all."

*10:00pm*

Father McRory drove cautiously, both hands on the wheel and eyes attentively on the road. He was driving east, from Las Vegas. Moonstone was close now, no more than ten minutes away. He sighed and took a look in the rear view mirror. There was his angel, asleep in the backseat. He guessed she was eighteen or nineteen. She had dirty blonde hair and a prominent nose, beautiful, full lips. McRory shook his head at her revealing clothes. Why did the youth of today feel the need to reveal themselves to everyone? It was shameful.

He turned on the radio, got only static at first. Turning the dial, he found a lot of nothing but hard rock music. Frustrated, he kept going until he found something on the AM dial.

"Lights in the sky!" the radio voice said. "You know what I'm talking about. Last night, a caller spun a tale about a sexy, female werewolf in New England. I don't know if any of us believed that one, but tonight I've got a man who I know you all know and love: I know you believe him. That's right, I'm talking about Clarence Howard. Clarence, why don't you tell the uninitiated a little about yourself."

"Well, Ben," a second voice - presumably Clarence - said, "I worked in military intelligence for twenty-seven years, mostly out of Dreamland."

"That's Area 51, correct?" Ben said.

"Right, we call it Dreamland. I worked there for eighteen years, mostly concealing information."

"Which you're now revealing."

"Yes, I can't in good conscience continue with the lie. Aliens are among us."

"I've been saying it for years."

"I know you have, which is why I came to you."

"Right. What do you have for us tonight, Clarence?"

"Tonight I'd like to talk about the recent wave of sightings in this area."

"It's truly remarkable, isn't it?"

"It is," Clarence said, "and all too real. These are not weather balloons, they're not hallucinations, they're not mirages. These are alien spacecraft, plain and simple."

"Old Wizard Wallace called in night before last," Ben said. "Claimed that a UFO shaped like a crescent moon buzzed his farm in the dead of night."

"I've collected eleven sightings in just the past five weeks. Now that's a staggering number."

"It certainly is."

"And yet the government has been tight-lipped about this. Not a word, or comment. That's typical of the kind of work I used to do. If you stamp enough of these people down, the story just dies, trail goes cold."

"Why now, why here?" Ben said. "Are they a threat?"

"Well, they're always a threat but I think they're here because something is going to happen, some kind of disaster."

"Natural or man-made?"

"Could be either one. There was a rash of UFO sightings in Kansas City before the Hyatt Regency Hotel walkways collapsed two years ago, killing one-hundred and fourteen people. As well as many sightings before Mount St. Helens erupted in May of 1980. And we all know about the Mothman and how often he was sighted before the collapse of the Silver Bridge. Many people believe he was an alien come to warn us."

"Right, so you're saying something's coming."

"That's what I'm saying."

"Chilling. What can you tell us about the Greys?"

"Well, the Greys..."

Static began to take over the radio. McRory adjusted the dial, taking his eyes off the road momentarily. It was no good, he had lost the signal.

"Just when it was getting interesting," he said.

He looked back at the road just in time to see the coyote, standing in the middle of the road. It wasn't crossing the road but just standing in the exact center of it, looking at him.

There wasn't time to swerve and the car hit the animal head on, pulverizing it on impact. McRory slammed on the breaks, giving himself minor whiplash. The car came to a stop and the first thing McRory did was look into the rear view mirror to see if his angel was okay.

There she was, still sleeping soundlessly. She wasn't even disturbed by the accident. McRory shook his head and opened the glove compartment. He found a screwdriver and took it with him when he left the car.

The woods crowded in on the car on either side of the road, hanging over McRory as he walked around to the front of the car. The coyote was embedded in the grill, dead but twitching. McRory shook his head and got to work on the animal with his screwdriver, trying to get it out of the grill as best he could.

After a few minutes, a motorcycle pulled up behind his car. The driver got off the motorcycle and walked towards him. It was a highway patrol officer, young and fit.

"Problem, sir?" the officer said.

"Father," McRory said.

"Excuse me?"

"I'm a Catholic priest. I deserve to be called Father."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Is there a problem, Father?"

"Nothing major. Just hit a coyote. Trying to get it off the car."

"Need some help?"

"That's kind of you but I can manage."

The officer nodded. He turned to leave but stopped when he saw the girl in the back of the car. Her hands were bound and she was gagged with duct tape, her eyes pleading and wild. The officer opened the door immediately. He ripped the tape off the girl's mouth.

"He's a psycho," the girl said. "Watch out!"

But it was too late. McRory was already behind him and drove the screwdriver into the back of the officer's neck, upwards, into the man's brain. The officer's eyes rolled up into his head as McRory turned the screwdriver one way, then the other.

The girl didn't scream: just seized the opportunity and ran out of the car and into the woods while the priest was distracted. McRory pulled the screwdriver out of the officer's head. His body dropped to the ground, lifeless, as the priest whirled around. He was too late: his angel had escaped into the dark of the wood.

"I'll find you!" he called out. "We will be together, my angel!"

Angel ran, the underbrush scratching at her exposed legs, drawing blood. She had been watching the signs as they were driving. Moonstone wasn't far.

*10:11pm*

Just for a moment, Ken Foreman thought he was back in 'Nam. There was a sudden rush of sound, a whoosh as something passed the truck, an animal of some kind. It shook the pick-up truck, rattling the tires. Foreman jolted awake, immediately going for the M-16 mounted in the back window of the cab, sure that the Viet Cong were all over him, about to pounce out of the jungle onto him.

There was nothing, of course. Probably just an elk running across the road. Foreman took his hand off the rifle and rubbed the sleep out of his eyes. He had been driving most of the day, all the way from Yuma, heading north. He had thought that he could reach Provo if he just kept driving all day and most of the night but he was so tired these days. So many sleepless nights as of late.

He had pulled over - he checked his watch - a little over an hour ago and fell asleep in the cab, the shade of the trees not exactly comforting, but sufficiently dark. The dream came, as it usually did: faceless figures, all he could see were their eyes, glowing in the dark under those big, woven hats. The

Viet Cong were little more than Shapes in his dream, relentless zombies out to kill anything in their path. Foreman couldn't think of anything worse.

He started up the truck, deciding that it would be best to stay overnight some place nearby. The sign ahead of him read:

MOONSTONE      7

One place was as good as any, he supposed. Foreman was forty-one, big and Black, still in great shape. His hair was short and thinning on top. Apart from the M-16 in the back window of the cab, there was a 9mm pistol in the glove compartment and a large hunting knife mounted on the dash. Be prepared was his motto. Well, he had been a boy scout.

The truck was revved up now and he started to pull it onto the road when he stopped suddenly.

There they were, in the woods, among the trees: the Viet Cong stared out at him with their glowing eyes. They were standing perfectly still but something was moving behind them: a roving, rotating light, not white, but a sickly yellow. The light scared him more than the Cong.

It passed behind the faceless soldiers. The sound it made was horrible, a kind of wail - soulless, accompanied by a strange buzzing. It filled him with terror. The light seemed to be scanning the road. Finally, it found the truck and fixed on Foreman himself, through the passenger window.

Foreman felt the cab begin to heat up, like the light was burning the truck from the outside in. No longer hesitating, Foreman hit the gas and practically jumped the truck onto the highway.

Moonstone was waiting for him.

*10:17pm*

The Card Shark walked along the highway, the spurs on his boots clicking against the asphalt almost musically. He whistled as he came, a dark, appealing figure: tall, dressed in black, a long coat covering most of his body, a hat shadowing most of his face, only his large smile visible. If he had had a proper name in the past, he couldn't remember it anymore. He was simply the Card Shark, and had been for as long as history had record of him.

He shuffled his deck from one hand to the other, sometimes with his hands spread several feet apart. He stopped walking when he saw the wreck on the road ahead of him.

It was an eighteen wheeler, its load overturned and open, halfway across the road. The truck itself was wrapped around a large, old tree on the side of the road, the driver's dead body halfway in, halfway out of the windshield, his head nowhere to be seen.

"Interesting," the Card Shark said.



He walked around the wreck like a man at a museum, quiet and respectful, interested but not excited. Finally, he found Buford's head, birds already picking at it. He now held his deck in one hand and a quick shuffle knocked the birds over: they fell to the ground, dead and instantly starting to rot. He smiled down at the head.

"Oh, you ran into the wrong woman, didn't you?" he said.

He shot the cards out of his hand. Some of them hovered in mid-air over the head, while the rest flew behind the Card Shark and found the rest of the body hanging out of the windshield of the truck. As the cards passed over the body, it began to disappear, bit by bit. Soon, it was completely gone, and the cards returned to the Card Shark's hand. He shuffled them again, this time looking at the face cards.

Buford's screaming face was now burned into each of them. He looked like he was in agony. The Card Shark shuttered as a small orgasm passed through his body. A good Deal always had its rewards.

He walked back out onto the road, in front of the overturned load. He shook his head.

"This won't do," he said.

He sent the cards out again and they pushed the load out of the road, onto the side, knocking over a few trees in the process. Satisfied, the cards returned to the Card Shark and he walked around to the back of the load, where the doors were hanging open. The smell of rotting pork wafted out of the hanging, swinging doors.

"Think I'll need a little help with this one," he said. "Wake up, little piggies."

He sent out the cards yet again. They flew through the open doors, into the load. The Card Shark watched the black doors, which revealed nothing of what was going on inside. He could hear it, though: could hear the sounds of chopping meat, of animal parts being stitched together, could hear bones breaking to fit certain shapes. Soon after, he could hear the wailing, hollow sounds of pigs crying out, hungry and awaiting orders. He could hear them clatter on their broken-bone stick feet towards the open doors of the load. The Card Shark smiled as the cards returned to his hand.

"Oh, Dee," he said. "I am so close to you now. Right behind you, in fact. Are you ready for me and my new, little friends?"

The Pig Monstrosities crawled out of the open doors, their make-shift heads turning this way and that, sniffing for food, for the hunt. They could smell it.

Moonstone and the Station.

So close now.

*10:25pm*

Moonstone Stop & Stay 95 was its proper name but everyone just called it the Station. Just off the highway in the far northeast end of Moonstone, perched on a plateau a ways up Moonstone Mountain, the Station was essentially a large, glorified slab of concrete that truckers could park their trucks in and catch a night's sleep. There was no motel but there was a large gas filling station on the east side of this concrete slab and a diner smack dab in the middle of it, so it was a good stopping point for truckers who were calling it a night and didn't mind spending another midnight in their cabs.

To the east of the Station was forest, dense, thick, with no easily-identifiable trails. To the south, the off ramp and highway, with more trees in between them. To the west and the north, jagged, mountainous rock ascending sharply upwards almost immediately past the concrete slab.

Tonight, only two eighteen wheelers were parked in the large resting area behind the diner. There were, however, several smaller vehicles parked around the diner, wayward souls looking for some connection or perhaps just a hot meal at this time of night.

Annette, looking smart in her waitress uniform, smoked and worried at a hangnail as she stared south, out towards the highway. She was in her thirties and had the beginnings of crow's feet around her eyes. Small streaks of grey decorated her temples, marring her otherwise deep brown hair. She leaned against the wall of the diner, on the extreme east end of the front.

"Light?" Trixie said, emerging around the corner.

Annette offered her lighter to the young woman. Trixie was no older than twenty, with platinum blonde hair, revealing clothes, visible track marks on her arms and a persistent cough.

"You startled me," Annette said as Trixie lit up.

"What has you so spooked?" Trixie said, handing the older woman back her lighter.

"That over there."

She indicated the entrance to the Station, the mouth of it, as it were. Trixie took a look and saw what Annette meant: a Harley or some kind of hog was parked right by the mouth, just this side of the Station, not in a parking space, but on the shoulder, just on the edge of the concrete slab. Someone - it looked like a woman - was sitting on the bike, smoking, looking in their direction.

"Weird," Trixie said, "but not scary."

"I don't know," Annette said. "Something's not right there."

"This whole night's off."

"Oh yeah? No tricks yet?"

"Nada. Nobodies biting."

"Only two truckers here. And one of 'em's a lady."

"Tell me about it. Nobody has drugs, either."

"I have a little weed, if that helps."

"No good," Trixie said.

"Just trying to help," Annette said.

"Saw a weird bird earlier."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah. It was massive. Looked like it was as tall as a man - a large guy, you know? Its wings were..."

She shook her head, looking dazedly off into nothingness. Annette was watching her intently now.

"Go on," she said.

"It was perched up on the roof of the gas station," Trixie said. "Just sitting there, watching me."

"What did you do?"

"Nothing. I just watched it."

"What did it look like?"

"Hard to see. It was shaped like an owl. It turned its head like an owl when it...looked at me. After a second, it spread its wings and flew away."

The two women were silent for a moment, both of them smoking away. Finally, Annette spoke.

"What do you think it means?" she asked.

"Fuck if I know," Trixie said.

"Well, you must have some idea."

Trixie said nothing, just smoked and wandered off around the corner again. Annette watched her go, sighing. When she returned her gaze to the mouth of the Station, she was alarmed to see the driver of the motorcycle already halfway across the concrete slab, heading in her direction. She was an attractive woman, tough-looking with short orange red hair. As she approached Annette, the woman tipped her a Hello and walked right past her, not entering the diner but heading around it, where Trixie had disappeared to.

"Evening," Annette called after her but got no response.

Looked like it was going to be one of those nights.

*10:29pm*

The interior of the car was loud, pounding: punk music, aggressive, transgressive,

confrontational. Roy was driving, the piercings in his face glinting in the moonlight. Freya sat back in the passenger seat, eyes closed, letting the music flow through her. The marijuana was beginning to wear off by this time and she wanted a little booze, wanted to get a little buzz.

They were both in their early twenties. Roy's hair was cut in a mohawk and died red. Freya's was black, short and spiked. Both of them wore black leather, adorned with lots of pins, patches and buttons.

Roy almost hit the girl in the road when she appeared.

"Fuck," he said and slammed on the brakes.

Freya lurched forward and upward, almost hitting her forehead on the dash. Roy actually did hit his head on the steering wheel but he managed to stop the car before running the young woman down.

"What's going on?" Freya asked.

"Some girl," Roy explained.

Freya looked out the window and saw the girl at once: young, pretty, covered in sweat, legs cut up by running through underbrush. Her hands were tied behind her back with duct tape.

"What the Hell?" Freya said.

The girl ran to the car, to the driver's side. She was frantic, pleading.

"Please help me," she said. "There's someone after me."

"Right, right," Roy said. "Get in the back. Freya?"

Freya sighed, opened her door and got out of the car to let the girl in. Angel's gaze met Freya's and she paused for a moment, then raced around to the passenger side of the car and practically jumped into the back seat.

"Thank you," she said.

"Sure," Roy said.

Freya said nothing, just got back in the car and closed the door. Roy got the car moving.

"We have to call the police," Angel said. "He's already killed at least two girls before he got me."

"We'll stop at the next place we see," Roy said.

"Do you have anything to cut this tape?"

Roy looked at Freya. The woman sighed again and produced a switchblade from her jacket. She flicked it open, made a little gesture to Angel indicating that she should turn around. The girl did and Freya cut her bonds. Angel moaned in relief and rubbed her wrists and arms.

"What happened?" Roy asked.

"This guy picked me up in Vegas," Angel said.

"Turning tricks?" Freya suggested.

"No. I was just walking along. He grabbed me. He already had two girls in the trunk, dead. I had to watch as he...oh, God, as he jacked off all over their dead faces. Jesus."

"Hardcore," Roy said.

"How did you get away from him?" Freya asked.

"He was distracted by a highway patrolman. He killed the guy and I took my chance."

"Compassionate," Freya said.

"I didn't have a choice," Angel said.

"Okay, okay, princess."

"Look, we have to stop some place to call the police."

"Yeah," Roy said, "I'm listening. There's this truck stop close by. We'll stop there."

"Good," Angel said.

"Right, your highness," Freya said.

The two women shot daggers at each other with their eyes. Roy hardly noticed and kept driving, making his way towards the Station.

*10:33pm*

Lucy - 26, round, with auburn hair and a winning smile - checked her tables in the diner. The diner itself was fairly typical of that classic American design: booths around the outside of the dining room, facing a long counter behind which one could see the kitchen and prep rooms through a generous window. Near the back of the diner, on the right side, were the restrooms, one Men's, one Women's. These were right by the entrance to the off-limits area of the diner, the kitchen and prep room and, off those, the freezer and storage room. Besides the front door, the only other way out was a back door, through the kitchen.

"You doing good, hon?" Lucy asked Gus, a large, bearded trucker who was sitting at a booth, a dog curled up on the seat beside him.

"Fine, Lucy, fine," Gus said. "I could use some coffee when you can manage. Also cut me off a piece of pecan pie, if you don't mind."

Gus never looked at Lucy as he spoke to her. His gaze never left the book he was reading: a large Time-Life book titled *The Pirates*. The cover sported an old drawing of Blackbeard standing on a beach, smoke curling from his fabled beard. The dog curled up beside Gus looked up at Lucy, tail wagging. He was a mid-size German Shepard, grey and black with blue eyes.

"Sure thing, hon," Lucy said. "Hi, Duke," she said to the dog before continuing on her rounds.

There were currently four other customers in the diner at the moment: a couple in a booth off in the far left corner, Lucy thought they looked a bit shifty but who didn't on the night shift? Then there was a funny, tall, pretty and goofy female truck driver sitting at the counter. This was Long Liz and she dug into a cheeseburger piled high with condiments, her cowboy hat getting in the way often. Finally, there was a large Black man tearing into a steak, using his fork and knife like weapons against the dead piece of meat. Lucy didn't like him, didn't trust him. Something about his eyes. He was tired, yes, you could tell that but there was something else, something less easily-defined.

Up near the ceiling, in the far left corner above the couple's heads, a television hung. It was turned on but the sound was down. An episode of *Branded* was currently on, with Chuck Connors looking stoic and serious while dealing with some situation or another. Steely Dan was on the jukebox, telling the customers that they didn't want to do their dirty work no more.

Lucy headed behind the counter once again, wondering if Annette was ever going to finish her cigarette and get back here. She poked her head through the window bisecting the diner area with the kitchen and prep area.

"Gonna need a slice of pecan pie, Joe," she said.

"You got it," Joe said.

Joe was tall, his black hair long and unkempt and currently bound up in a net, his skin dark and pock-marked. He was Navajo to the core and most of his family still lived on the reservation.

Lucy checked her watch again, shook her head and walked to the couple in the far left of the diner. It wasn't her table - it was Annette's - but they hadn't been checked on in some time and she felt that she had to check on them.

"How are you two doing?" she asked as she approached them.

"Fine," the man - Mark - said. "We're just fine."

"Uh," the woman - Shauna - said, "I could use some more coffee."

"Course, hon," Lucy said and left.

"Coffee?" Mark said.

"Yeah, coffee," Shauna said. "I need some. It's getting late and if we're going to be here any longer, I'm gonna need something to keep me up."

"You got plenty of sleep in the truck on the way here."

"Just because I had my eyes closed and I wasn't talking to you doesn't mean that I was asleep."

"So you were just ignoring me."

"Wouldn't be the first time."

"Yeah, yeah. What is that supposed to mean?"

"It means you zone out sometimes. Where do you go?"

"I... I don't know what you mean. That doesn't make any sense."

"I didn't say it made sense, I just said that it happens. Fact."

"When do I zone out?"

"Well, you did it early today, when we started out this morning. You were standing in the bathroom, you'd just brushed your teeth and then you just...went away. You stared off into space for at least five minutes. Toothpaste was pouring out of your mouth. And then... then that other stuff started--"

"Stop, stop!" Mark said.

The large truck driver across the diner looked at the two of them over the top of his Time-Life book. His look was inquisitive though not confrontational. Mark stared him down until the man went back to reading his book.

"We said we wouldn't talk about that," he said, quieter this time.

"I know, but..." Shauna said. "I don't like it. It scares me."

"Well it doesn't happen to you, it happens to me, so you don't have any reason to be scared."

"I suppose."

"You do more than suppose, you take it as read. You have no reason to be scared."

"Okay, let's stop talking about it. Now, who is this person that we're meeting here? And why isn't he here yet?"

"Well, you can't make these people do anything, you have to wait for them, right? They come to you. So, we wait."

"Do you even know his name?"

"Apparently he likes to be called Father."

"What was that?"

"Father, okay, we call him Father."

"Father?"

"Look, I didn't come up with the name. That's just his name."

"This can't be happening. How did we get involved with these people?"

"He's supposed to be able to move... exotic stuff."

"Oh, it's exotic all right. Let's just hope this Father can do anything with it."

Lucy returned with Shauna's coffee and set it down in front of her. Shauna smiled up at her.

"Here you go, hon," Lucy said.

"Thank you," Shauna said.

"Of course."

Lucy left their table and reluctantly headed towards the large black man tearing into his steak. She sighed, hoping that no one could hear it.

"Doing okay?" she asked.

"Fine," the man - Foreman - said.

He shot her a quick glance and Lucy could tell that the man hadn't been getting much sleep lately. There were dark bags under his eyes and he looked desperate, like something was chasing him.

"Okay," was all she could think to say.

Foreman nodded and went back to tearing apart his steak while Lucy returned to the counter, taking a breath as she did. She hadn't realized that she had been holding her breath as she was talking to him.

"Problem, hon?" Elizabeth Williamson - Long Liz to friends and fellow truckers - asked.

She was sitting at the counter, mutilating the large burger she had ordered and eyeing Lucy with genuine concern. Lucy smiled, trying to brush it all off but something was bothering her about that man.

"It's nothing," she said. "Thanks."

"No problem," Long Liz said. "Ya just look a little spooked is all, Lucy."

"This guy is just... I don't know, there's something not right about him."

Long Liz took a quick glance at Foreman sitting at his table, then looked back at Lucy. She cocked her head to one side, put down her burger and smirked.

"Want I should talk to him?" she said.

Lucy let out a small laugh as Long Liz smiled.

"No," she said, "that's not necessary. I don't want to clean up your mess."

Long Liz laughed now: a goofy, jovial laugh full of life. She popped a few fries into her mouth before going back to consuming her burger with relish.

"Seems a harmless enough sort," Long Liz said after a moment.

"I guess," Lucy said.

*10:41pm*

"So, what do you think?" Freya asked.

They sat in their car, in the parking lot of the Station, watching Angel as she walked from the car to the pay phone off to the right side of the gas pumps. Their parking space was in between the gas



pumps and the diner, affording them a view of both. In front of the diner, Freya saw a waitress finish a cigarette and head back into the building. She didn't see anyone attending the gas pumps. On the radio, the Avengers were belting out "We Are the One".

"About what?" Roy asked.

"About her?" Freya said, stretching out an arm towards Angel, who had just reached the pay phone.

Roy took a look, took a drag on his cigarette and turned to Freya.

"I think she has an amazing ass," he said.

"Agreed," Freya said, "but don't you think she's a little... I don't know, a little princess? Privileged? Spoiled?"

Roy shrugged. "Not anymore than anyone else."

"Thanks," Freya said, "that's a real help. So, do you think that's all bullshit, what she's saying about being kidnapped?"

"No."

"Seems like the type to just want to call attention to herself, you know?"

Roy shook his head.

"Bark bark," he said.

"What?" Freya said.

"What'd you mean, 'what'?"

"You said 'bark bark'."

"I did?"

"Yes, you did."

"Doesn't sound like something I'd say."

"No, it doesn't. So why did you say it?"

"I didn't say it."

"I'm sitting right next to you."

"Well, then, the Avengers must be changing their sound or something, adding animal noises, cause I didn't say anything."

"No, you didn't make a barking noise, you actually said, 'bark bark' like some kind of madman."

"That doesn't sound like something I'd say."

Freya looked at him, a profoundly confused look on her face. Angel banged on the passenger side window, startling Freya.

"Jesus," she said as she rolled down the window.

"The pay phone doesn't fucking work," Angel said. "I don't believe it."

"You still have my quarter, then?" Freya asked.

"It ate it."

"Naturally. I suppose we should see if we can use the one inside the diner, then."

"Yeah," Angel said.

Freya let her in the car and they drove the short distance to the diner. Roy parked the car in the far right space in front of the diner. Freya and Angel got out of the car but Roy stayed where he was, sitting at the wheel.

"Coming?" Freya asked.

"I'm gonna finish my cigarette," Roy said.

"Okay, see you inside."

The women headed inside the diner, leaving Roy alone in the parking lot. Roy finished his cigarette, lit up another one. After a moment, he wasn't alone any longer. A nondescript car pulled up near the gas pumps and parked. Roy waited for the driver to get out but he stubbornly didn't. Roy frowned, wondering what the man was doing but not for long. Movement drew his attention in front of him, to the diner, where a young, sleazy attractive young woman - obviously a hooker - walked around the building from the back. She walked a little bold-legged, occasionally cupping her crotch as she went. Roy smiled. Must have gotten fucked pretty good.

The girl entered the diner and Roy felt his gaze wander back around the side of the building, to where the girl had emerged. Standing there now - leaning against the wall of the diner - was a tall, strong, sexy woman with short orange hair. Roy was reminded of Penelope Houston, the singer for the Avengers, although Houston had blonde hair. And, presumably, she wasn't packing what this woman was packing.

The woman was naked save for a leather jacket, open, revealing her breasts, prominent and perfect. But between her legs dangled a rather large penis, red and swollen, obviously used very recently. Roy coughed on his cigarette. On the radio, the Avengers ended and the Ramones came on: "I Wanna Be Sedated". The woman stared at him, smiling.

After the initial shock, Roy found himself smiling back.

*10:47pm*

Mark splashed his face with water at the bathroom sink. His head pounded with pain. It felt like something was scurrying around in there, making mulch of his brain.

He could hear the fluttering, chittering sounds of Mr. Wrench, right next to him but this time he welcomed the visitor. He turned and embraced the creature, wrapped his arms around the sharp suit that the abomination wore and buried his head in his breast.

"Now, now," Mr. Wrench said mechanically.

His horrid insect mouth moved from side to side, mandibles clicking together. Mark looked up at him, tears in his eyes.

"I need a hit," he said. "The real stuff, uncut, straight from the source."

Mr. Wrench turned his head from one side to the other, shaking. He looked down at Mark, his multifaceted eyes twitching, focusing on Mark then looking in every direction.

"Father is coming?" he asked.

Mark nodded. "He's coming."

"He will be able to...distribute the product?"

"He says he can move the stuff, yeah."

"Dogs feed on human corpses. They wander at the edges of towns, and eat the homeless who have overdosed. Sometimes, they make a home of their hollowed-out bodies. They need to get away from the cold. Do you see?"

Mark nodded furiously.

"Yes," he said. "Yes, I see."

"No," Mr. Wrench said. "You see nothing."

"I do, I do. I see!"

"The birds are gathering. You can see them gather. They do not like the dogs."

"Give me a hit!"

"Very well. You may feed of me."

Mark backed away from Mr. Wrench, licking his lips. The horrible creature shook unpleasantly as he slowly unbuttoned his suit jacket and his shirt underneath. There, sticking out of his carapace, were two large, brown breasts. Their big, black nipples were already dripping hideous, black fluid in anticipation.

Mark couldn't resist any longer and nearly pounced on Mr. Wrench, wrapping his lips around the nipple of one of the breasts - the left one - and sucked deep. His eyes rolled back into his head at the ecstasy he felt.

Mr. Wrench - a prominent erection tenting his suit pants - shook in pleasure but also in something else, some other, alien emotion. Not disgust, not pain, but something like it. His mandibles clicked together as he put both of his wet, fuzzy insect hands on Mark's head like a satisfied mother.

10:49pm

"Unbelievable," Angel said. "This phone doesn't work, either. It's like something's against me. Against us."

"Don't be so ridiculous," Freya said. "Lines are just down, is all."

Angel shook her head.

"I need water," she said. "I need to wash my face. Bathroom over here?"

She headed in that direction before even getting an answer from Lucy, nearly stumbling into Annette on her way. Lucy picked up the phone at the counter, fiddled with it as Freya followed Angel to the bathroom.

"That's the men's," Freya said as Angel barged into the men's bathroom.

She yelped in shock and surprise. Freya tried to see around the girl but only caught a glimpse of what had startled her before the bathroom door closed again and Angel headed for the women's bathroom: a man was standing at the bathroom sink, his eyes rolled up into his head, showing only the white. His mouth was wide open, almost unnaturally so, and some kind of black liquid was pouring out of it and into the sink.

"What the fuck?" Freya said.

Angel barged into the women's bathroom and Freya followed her. The women's bathroom was dark and dank but nothing inside it was as alarming as what was inside the men's bathroom. Trixie stood at the sink, cleaning herself up. Angel pushed her out of the way.

"Excuse me," she said.

"Jesus," Trixie said.

She leaned against the wall, popped a piece of gum into her mouth and smacked on it, idly watching the two other women. Angel splashed water in her face.

"He'll be here soon," Angel said.

"The guy?" Freya said.

"Yes, the guy. He's following me. And that... thing in the men's bathroom is part of it, can't you see?"

"What's in the men's bathroom?" Trixie asked.

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you," Freya said.

"I don't know," Trixie said. "Just got fucked by a girl with a dick. That never happened to me before tonight. She paid well, too."

Freya shook her head in confusion. "What?" she asked, then: "Forget it. I don't wanna know. Look," she said to Angel, "you're going to be all right. Roy's here. All these people are here. You're protected. I'm here."

Angel looked at Freya, face still wet from the sink. They stared at each other for a long time. Angel was sweating and breathing heavily. Freya mirrored her. Licked her lips.

"Well," Trixie said, "are you gonna kiss or what?"

That broke the spell and Freya spit in Angel's face, right on the bridge of her nose. The spit rolled down to the tip of her nose and dripped off. Angel just let it, smirked.

"What?" Freya asked.

"Nothing," Angel said.

She washed her face again as Freya shook her head and left the bathroom. Trixie smacked her gum in relative silence a moment before remarking:

"You can kiss me if you want."

Angel smiled and shook her head.

*10:58pm*

Father McRory moved his car from near the gas pumps, where it had been sitting, to out behind the diner, where he parked and turned off the engine. She was here. He had seen her. She had taken up with a couple of Godless heathens who would lead her down a dark and sinful path. He had to save her from this horrid fate.

Movement caught his eye and he saw shapes moving near the trash bins: two people engaged in sin. They were actually having sex out here in the open air, in front of God! It was disgraceful.

It was a man and a woman. McRory recognized the man, he had been driving the car Angel was in, but the woman was unfamiliar to him.

Their sexual position was sinful: not missionary, but that debased form, "doggy-style". But something wasn't right. McRory checked his glasses but, no, there was nothing wrong with his sight. The woman was penetrating the man. What was going on here?

It didn't make any sense.

"Degenerates," McRory said as he unzipped his pants and pulled his erect and twitching penis from his fly and paid it much attention.

*11:03pm*

"A serial killer?" Gus asked.

"Yes, a serial killer," Angel said. "He's killed at least two other women."

Angel sat at the counter between Long Liz and Freya. Lucy was behind the counter right near the three women. Gus, Trixie and Annette stood close by. Shauna and Foreman stayed where they had been the whole time, seemingly not listening to the conversation. Joe watched the proceedings through the order window. Mark was still in the bathroom and Roy must have still been outside.

"This is hard to believe," Lucy said. "I mean, I don't mean any offense but..."

"I've seen the bodies!" Angel said.

"You're hysterical," Gus said.

"She seems to be handling it pretty well to me," Trixie said.

"Are you an expert now?" Gus asked.

"She doesn't seem to be lying, Gus," Long Liz said.

"I know what I saw, okay?" Angel said. "He's got two dead women in the trunk of his car."

"Did you...?" Annette began, then trailed off.

"We need to get the police," Angel said.

"I keep trying the phones," Lucy said. "I don't know what's wrong with them."

"Can't one of you truckers use your CB?" Freya asked.

Long Liz looked at Gus, but he remained silent. She sighed.

"Yes," she said. "I can call someone."

"Good," Freya said.

Angel nodded furiously. On the jukebox, Aerosmith's "Dream On" wailed on eerily. Steven Tyler never sounded stranger or more ominous. On the television, *Gilligan's Island* was on, black and white and beautiful. The lost mariners were looking at something that had washed up on the beach. It looked like a coffin.

"Look," Gus finally said, "I don't know if I believe you or not but I'm ready for anything and I'm pretty sure this guy here," indicating Foreman, "is the same."

"You leave me the Hell out of this," Foreman said, looking up from the remains of his steak and pointing at the assembled group with his knife.

"Fine," Gus said. "I'm ready. That should be enough."

Mark came out of the men's bathroom just then, wiping his still wet face with his hands. He barely noticed the assembled group and walked past them, joining his wife at their booth. Angel kept her eyes on him, Freya as well.

"There's something wrong with that man," Angel said.

"What?" Lucy asked.

"She's right," Freya said. "In the bathroom...he was... Something was wrong with him."

*11:04pm*

"Motherfuckers," Nose Candy said. "Teach you. Teach all of you. Won't tell me what to do. Won't boss me around. No, sir."

He stood in the small stand that was his and his alone, where he dispensed the precious fuel that truckers and other denizens of the night needed to make their various journeys. He looked out his spacious window past the gas pumps towards the diner. He knew something was up tonight. Something was different. He could feel it in the air, like a passing fart.

"Can't get one past me," he said. "No, sir. I ain't been butt-fucked like some faggot. I know the world. You hear me? Yeah, I'm talking to you, Trixie. Shaking your little ass all 'round here and not giving ol' Nose Candy so much as a little feel. Know what that does to a man? Do ya?! I bet you do. Damn fuckin' right. Bet you know exactly what it does. I can see it in that cute little cock-sucking face of yours. You know every single, solitary effect your body has on every man that sees you. You know. You fuckin' know."

He was speaking directly to Trixie but, reflected in the glass in front of him was his own visage and he spit at his own face, the spit running down the glass. He didn't like his reflection, didn't like the balding, middle-aged, unkempt monster of a man he saw there. After a moment, he grabbed his handkerchief and wiped the spit away. It proved to be just the right time, as he suddenly had a customer.

The car that had been parked out back of the diner rolled around to the gas pumps. The driver adjusted his pants and got out, approached the window. Nose Candy saw that the man was a priest based on his little white collar. Nose Candy gave the priest his best smile.

"Help you, sir?" he asked.

"Yes," the priest said. "Need to put five - no, better make that ten bucks in the ol' gas tank, if you please."

The priest passed a ten into the slot in Nose Candy's window.

"Of course," Nose Candy said.

"Worked here long?" the priest asked.

"Nine years."

"Long time."

"I don't know."

"Have you found Jesus, son?"

"Jesus?"

"Yes. Have you accepted him into your heart, son?"

Nose Candy couldn't hold it back any longer and it all came tumbling out. "What the fuck kind of question is that? Have I found Jesus? What, was he lost or something? You fuckin' faggot priests think you know everything, don't you? Well, do you know what it feels like when the girl of your fuckin' dreams is always flashing her stuff around you and you can't do a damn thing about it? Do ya?!"

The priest leaned into the window, his nose practically touching the glass.

"You know, son," he said, "I know exactly what you mean."

Nose Candy frowned, kept quiet and started listening to the priest.

*11:06pm*

Long Liz walked out of the diner, followed by Gus who, after being persuaded by the others, had agreed to accompany her. They rounded the building: Long Liz's truck was parked out back of the diner. She had been planning on sleeping in the cab but now it didn't look like she'd be getting any sleep tonight. At least, not for a while yet.

"You see Hoggtown pull in here?" Long Liz said.

"Can't say as I have," Gus said.

"Strange. I was pretty sure I had persuaded him to stop here for the night. He's been pushing himself too hard. Should be slowing down a little. Don't want to be found dead in his cab some morning, know what I mean?"

"Right."

"I sat out here for a while, waiting for 'im but nothing. I mean, I sat a long time. Then I tried to reach him on the radio. Nothing. He didn't answer. None of the other drivers seemed to know anything about him, either."

"Strange."

"Right. That's what I said."

Gus shrugged but nothing more was said about it.

They rounded the building and started for Long Liz's truck but stopped when they came upon Dee and Roy. The two sat on the pavement near the trash cans snorting coke off a small handheld



mirror. Roy laughed as Dee smiled. She caught Long Liz's gaze, held it fast.

"Don't look at me like that unless you plan on making a move, sexy," Dee said.

Long Liz scoffed and started moving again, pulling Gus along with her. Gus looked over his shoulder, smiled.

"I might be planning on making a move," he said.

"Anytime, prince," Dee said. "But I don't know if you're prepared for what I got."

Gus laughed. Long Liz urged him on and, a moment later, they were at the truck. Long Liz climbed up and unlocked the cab, Gus watching her ass the whole time. She swung the door open wide and got in. Gus stepped up and stood by the open door.

Long Liz turned on the CB, grabbed the mic, tuned it to the emergency station. At first, all she got was static.

"Mayday," she spoke into the mic, depressing the button. "I repeat, mayday, we need help out at the Station. That's the Moonstone Stop and Stay 95. Mayday, over."

More static. They waited for almost a full minute.

"What the fuck?" she said to Gus, who only shrugged. "They're usually so...prompt around here."

She tried again, repeating herself. Yet again, more static. Then, something else.

"Wendy?" a voice that was mostly static asked.

"Say again, over," Long Liz said into the mic.

"If this is Wendy, I didn't mean it. I hope you..." Static overwhelmed the line, then, "was all. I didn't think it would... Well, you know me. Have you seen the bird? I hear it's out tonight. Honeysuckle. Three flowers. Honeysuckle. Maggots. Dead phone line. Rocking chair. Mur..." Static again, then, "Station. Station. Cards. Priest. UFO. Lights."

Then there was silence. Long Liz looked at Gus.

"This is fucking scary," she said. Then, into the mic, "Are you there, whoever you are? We need help. We're out at the Station and the phones are dead. We have a girl claiming that there's a serial killer after her. Can you help us? Over."

There was silence for a moment before the radio came alive again.

"Oh, God," the voice over the line said. "The killer is not your real problem. I... Well, he is a problem, but... Arrowhead. Ask Joe about the Arrowheads. And their handlers. Raven. Tire iron. Truck. Truck. Pigs. Pretty lady. Cards. Wendy? Wendy, is that you? Wendy, please forgive me, I..."

Static overwhelmed the line. Then the static became a scream, a deep, primal wail of terror. The CB radio sparked, then went dead. Long Liz looked at Gus. Neither one of them said anything for some

time.

11:11pm

Mark's head hurt. His wife was talking to him but he couldn't hear anything that she was saying. It was like a Charlie Brown cartoon, all she was saying was "wonk wonk wonk." He looked past her to the television, where Gilligan was opening a sarcophagus that was lying on that familiar TV beach, mugging the whole time, looking around like he was going to be caught at any moment. He managed to get the coffin open. Inside was a mummy, like something out of a Universal Monster movie. Mark frowned. He didn't remember ever seeing a mummy episode of *Gilligan's Island*.

"Are you seeing this?" Mark asked.

His wife stopped talking and looked over her shoulder at the TV.

"I never liked this show," she said then looked back at him. "You haven't been listening to me at all, have you?"

"I couldn't hear you," he said.

"What are you talking about?"

"I actually couldn't hear you. You were just making weird...cartoon noises."

Shauna shook her head. "You've lost your damn mind, Mark."

"Yeah," Mark said.

"What happened to you in the bathroom? Did you go away? Jesus, did that stuff come out of you? Did those girls see you?!"

"I don't know."

"Holy shit, hon. This is bad. If the phones were working, you'd probably be in custody already. As it is, once those truckers get ahold of someone, we're both done for. I say we just leave."

Mark still looked past her at the TV. Now, someone was looking out of the screen at him, someone pressing their hands up against the glass. It was a man, bald with grey skin and pure white eyes. He was smiling.

"Do you see that guy?" Mark asked.

This time, Shauna didn't even turn around to look at the television. She shook her head in disbelief. "Are you even here now, Mark?"

The bald, grey man's mouth was now open and big cockroaches crawled out of the black hole and down his chin, onto his chest and up, over his face. Mark shook his head and pressed fingers into his temples. He closed his eyes.

"Mark, let's go," Shauna said. "Let's just drive away. We don't need any of these people. We only need each other."

Mark opened his eyes and spotted Shauna's wristwatch. He grabbed her wrist and pulled her arm towards him, hard.

"Honey, that hurts," Shauna said.

"Oh, fuck, is that the time?" Mark said. "We're late. He's here. He'll be at the pumps. We've got to go, honey."

He let go of her wrist and stood up. Everyone else in the diner looked at him. Reluctantly, Shauna got up and followed him as he started to leave the diner.

"I would stay in here, hon," Lucy called out over the counter. "Safety in numbers, you know."

Mark said nothing as he exited so Shauna turned back, shrugged.

"Thanks, but..." she said, trailed off.

A moment later she, too, was gone, out of the diner.

*11:15pm*

"There he is," Father McRory said.

Mark and Shauna approached the gas pumps just as the priest was finished filling up his car at Pump 1. He opened his arms to Mark, who reluctantly let the priest hug him.

"How did you know it was me?" Mark asked.

"I know, son," McRory said. "I know. Just like the Lord knows."

"So," Shauna said, "you're an actual Father, a priest?"

"Who is this?" McRory asked Mark, ignoring Shauna.

"This is my wife."

"You have a wife? And you brought her here?"

"Yes. Why shouldn't I have?"

"This is men's work, son. You should know that."

"Can we get this over with?" Shauna asked.

McRory looked at her, silent for a moment. Mark looked at her, too. Shauna found herself taking a few steps back. There was something about their gazes, something she didn't like.

"Zipper," McRory said.

"What?" Shauna asked.

"All right," McRory said as if he had said nothing before. "We can proceed with haste. Stay

here, female, we men will be back soon after conducting our business."

Shauna shook her head but stayed where she was as McRory and Mark headed towards their vehicle. Shauna watched them go for a moment, then looked back at the gas pumps. There was someone looking at her from the gas pump stand, a middle-aged, unpleasant man with a hideous, leering smile. He gave her a little wave. Shauna shuddered and looked away.

*11:17pm*

Long Liz and Gus were now at Gus's truck, their positions reversed: Gus in the cab and Long Liz hanging off the side. Gus fiddled with the dial of his CB radio and shook his head.

"None of this makes any sense," he said. "I can see the phones out and maybe your radio not working but mine? I keep mine in top notch shape. Clean it, get it checked regularly. But we got nothing. It's like we're the only people in the world."

"Yeah, us, a serial killer and whoever the Hell was on the other end of that line," Long Liz said, shaking her head. "Jesus, that scared the shit outta me."

Gus nodded. A moment of silence passed between them.

"Eerie," Gus said.

"Tell me about it," Long Liz said.

"No, listen."

"I don't hear anything," Long Liz said after a moment of listening.

"That's what I mean," Gus said. "Nothing. I can't hear any animals. No dogs. No crickets. Nothing. That just ain't ever the case, you know what I'm talking about?"

"Right."

"Now I wish we'd brought Duke with us."

"That dog may look tough, Gus, but he wouldn't hurt a damn fly."

"He's been known to tussle."

"With what? Chipmunks?"

Another moment of silence ensued. Both of them looked out into the nothing and contemplated the situation.

"Thinking about just leavin'," Gus said.

"Taking the girl to a police station?" Long Liz said.

"No, I mean right now. Just taking the fuck off."

"You'd do that? Leave all these others to God knows what?"

"Absolutely. No offense, but they don't mean dick to me."

"And Duke?"

"Shit. I'd have to go get him. Can't leave him behind."

"How do you think whoever was on the other end of the line knew about Joe? Knew he was here tonight, I mean? Do you think it was a prank, that he was putting us on?"

"Maybe but that...scream or whatever it was, makes me think it wasn't any kind of joke."

"I haven't spoken to Joe much. Just in passing, you know? Hello and the like."

"He's an Indian. You know how they are."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Well, you know," Gus said with a shrug.

"No, I don't," Long Liz said. "What are you talking about?"

"Nothing. Forget it."

"Whatever. I'm heading back to the diner. Maybe we should take your advice and just leave. But I'm taking at least that girl with me. And whoever else wants to come. I mean, we're basically driving tanks here. Ain't no one gonna mess with us in these beauties."

Gus nodded.

*11:19pm*

Shauna stood by the gas pumps waiting for her husband and the priest to return. It had only been a few minutes but it seemed like ages since they left. She idly looked around, at the gas pump stand, at the priest's car, then out towards the highway. There came a jarring noise, as of something heavy - or several somethings - moving suddenly in a small space. Shauna jumped and looked for the source of the noise. She found it at the priest's car.

The trunk, to be precise.

As she watched, the sound came again and the car shook, rocked from inside by...something. Shauna backed away from the car, looked around. Someone stood at the point where the highway exited into the Station, right next to a Harley or some other kind of hog, someone who hadn't been there a moment before. He just stood there, looking at Shauna.

He shuffled a deck of cards between his hands.

*11:20pm*

Roy wasn't sure where the sexy gal with the dick - he hadn't caught her name - had gone but he was alone now. Maybe she had gone into the diner to use the ladies room. Or the men's room for that matter. It was all rather a blur after the sex and the coke.

He sat on the pavement by the dumpsters. There were two of them, angled away from each other and the back of the diner. Roy sat in between them, in the shadow of the building. As he smoked and did little else, a cockroach crawled up to him, stopped a few inches away from him on his left.

"Hey, fella," he said and quickly put his cigarette out on the bug, crushing it in the process.

He laughed and then saw another one. And another. Where the Hell were they coming from?

He stood up as half a dozen roaches seemed to swarm towards him. He looked around, saw movement in the small space between the diner wall and the dumpster on his left. Something was standing there in that small space.

It was shaking.

Pink, glistening.

Roy frowned. Was it a person? An animal?

"Hello?" he asked.

There was a horrible smell in the air, worse than the dumpsters. It reeked of death.

The creature - whatever it was - moved and Roy could see it better now. It was twisted into a vaguely human, vaguely animal shape, bones splintered, flesh shredded to fit new positions. It grunted, sounding like a pig. As it teetered towards Roy, its horrid bone-stick feet clattered on the pavement.

Roy opened his mouth to scream and the Pig Monstrosity surged forward, squealing as it came. It reached out with its new, twisted hands and took hold of Roy's face, covering his mouth.

Roy gagged as the putrefying fingers were pushed into his throat. His eyes bulged as he saw the creature up close: roaches clung to its body, feasting on the flesh as it festered; maggots wriggled in its eye sockets, causing the thing's orbs to turn in strange directions. Its head was shaped not quite like a pig, not quite like a cow and not quite like a human. It squealed as it forced its hand down Roy's throat.

Roy frantically hit the thing with both hands, kicked out at its legs but it was no good. The thing's hand had passed through his neck now and had reached his lungs. His eyes watered, he could feel vomit trying to come up but not being able to, and he started to lose consciousness. Before he could, the Pig Monstrosity grabbed him by the right arm pit with its free hand and dug its fingers inside him, breaking his skin with ease. Soon, it had a hand wrapped around several of his ribs.

It pulled with all its force: both hands.

Roy's rib cage was torn clean off him, along with most of his neck and his lower jaw. Blood cascaded into the air as the Pig Monstrosity squealed, furiously shaking its prize. Roy teetered on his

feet for a moment before slipping in a puddle of his own blood and falling over. Cockroaches swarmed him and crawled into his neck and mouth hole before the merciful arms of Death enclosed around him.

*11:24pm*

"Oh, that's good," McRory said.

He sat in the driver's seat of Mark's truck - Mark himself in the passenger seat - a needle in his arm, plunging the last bit of black fluid into his vein. His eyes were closed, his expression was orgasmic and Mark found himself licking his lips. The stuff in the needle was diluted, nowhere near as potent as the uncut stuff straight from the source, but it was still good. The radio was on but the engine was off. Mark didn't recognize the band. It was an eerie song: the lyrics kept informing him that Bela Lugosi was dead, which he already knew. Didn't he? Everything was confused.

"Yes," McRory said. "I can see the parallels. I can see the face of God. Oh, he's beautiful. More beautiful than a thousand whores. I want to ejaculate all over his face. Gorgeous."

He reached out and touched Mark's shoulder. Mark wanted to shy away but was afraid what the priest would think so he stayed where he was. Finally, McRory opened his eyes, looked at Mark.

"You know its power," he said. It wasn't a question.

"Yes," Mark said.

"I can move this. No problem. All of God's children will want this. They will all need it."

"What kind of money are we talking about here?"

"Money?"

"Yeah, money. I mean, I gotta get paid for this."

"Son, you should be ashamed of yourself. You should be giving this gift to the world free of charge. That's what I'm going to do: give it out for free at my church. All of our prayers will be answered."

"You've got to be fucking kidding me," Mark said.

"Son, language," McRory said.

"We came all this way. For what? This is complete bullshit. Get out of my truck. I'll find somebody else."

He got out of the cab, started around the front of the truck and McRory got out on the other side. Mark pointed at the man as he approached.

"You've got a lotta fucking nerve!" he said.

McRory grabbed hold of Mark's finger, broke it quick and deftly. Mark shouted out in pain and

lashed out with his free hand. McRory easily knocked it away and kicked Mark in the balls. He let go of Mark's finger and the man dropped to the ground.

"I did warn you about the language," McRory said.

He kicked Mark in the chest and stomach, again and again until the man was coughing up blood. Mark crawled under the truck to protect himself, choking as he moved. McRory only laughed.

"I'll be back in a moment," he said.

The truck was parked in front of the diner and McRory walked out towards the gas pumps. He spotted a man standing just inside what had to be called the perimeter of the Station. He was shuffling a deck of cards. McRory frowned at him but kept moving.

He reached his car and saw Shauna looking confusedly at the trunk. He sighed.

"Move away from the vehicle, female," he said.

"There's something--" Shauna said.

"Quiet," McRory interrupted. "You are unclean."

"But--"

"No buts!"

He got in the car and grabbed a duffel bag on the floor of the passenger seat. It was heavy. Shauna walked around the car, looked in the passenger window.

"Father," she said, "there's something moving in your..."

She stopped when she saw what McRory pulled out of the duffel bag: a nickel-plated revolver. He pointed it at Shauna.

"Oh, shit," she said and backed away.

"I'm not to be trifled with," McRory said.

"Okay," Shauna said, continuing to back away, towards the gas pump stand.

"Your husband has caused me some trouble."

"Okay."

"I need to deal with it."

"Don't hurt him," Shauna said.

"You must not have been paying attention," McRory said. "I already have."

"What?"

"Get in!" a voice cried.

Shauna whirled around, saw the gas station attendant standing in the open door of the gas pump stand, beckoning her inside. She didn't think about it and ran towards him, bounding into the stand. McRory cocked the revolver but didn't fire. Nose Candy winked at him and the priest smiled.



Nose Candy closed the door, sealing the two of them inside. McRory laughed, got the car running.

"I think I'll run into your pathetic little truck," he said.

He put the car in gear and gunned it towards the diner. He heard a loud ripping sound behind him and looked into the rear view mirror.

The back seat had been pushed out, torn open. And something was crawling over the wreckage, out of the trunk towards him. It was Harriet, one of his victims. Her body was twisted, her face still covered in his encrusted semen from earlier in the day. She grinned hideously at him.

Behind her was Margaret, his other victim. She crawled towards him as well, clutching at Harriet like the whore she was.

McRory screamed in terror and whirled around, pointing the gun towards them. His foot was still on the gas but he had lost control of the car. It went screaming past Mark's truck and ran straight into the doors of the diner.

*11:27pm*

"What the fuck was that?" Long Liz said.

They were just behind the diner, near the dumpsters, when they heard McRory's car smash into the diner. Both of them froze.

"I'm outta here," Gus said.

"What about Duke?" Long Liz said.

"Fuck Duke."

He turned around and booked it back towards his truck. Long Liz watched him for a moment, then ran towards the diner. Almost immediately, she slipped in Roy's spreading pool of blood and went down, hard, hitting the back of her head on the pavement. She was knocked out, instantly, her cowboy hat falling off and twirling on the ground for a moment before coming to rest.

*11:27pm*

Inside the diner, Foreman reacted first. He was on his feet in an instant and watched the carnage unfold: the car had smashed into the diner but came to a stop almost instantly, hitting no one. McRory - his head bloody from the hit it had taken on the steering wheel - fired a revolver into the backseat of the car. Two other people were in the car, trying to get into the front seat. McRory hit them several times

but they kept coming.

Annette screamed at the top of her lungs. Lucy was stunned into silence. Freya and Angel hopped off their stools and got on top of the counter. Duke jumped up on a table and growled in fear. Trixie backed away, towards the bathrooms. Joe stormed through the kitchen door, butcher knife in hand.

Foreman was the first to make a move, as well. He ran towards the car. For a moment, Freya thought he was going to attack those inside but when he reached the car, he simply jumped up on top of the vehicle and ran over it, out of the diner to safety.

"Shit," Freya said.

She pulled her switchblade from her jacket, flicked it open. McRory - screaming all the while - came climbing out of his car through the shattered front windshield.

"That's him!" Angel yelled. "That's the guy!"

"Help me!" McRory screamed. "Please God, save me!"

"Everyone get back," a new voice said.

They all turned to look. Emerging from the bathrooms was a tall, sexy woman with short orange hair. They had seen her come in a few moments ago but she had seemed to ignore them at the time. Now she looked determined and strode towards the car.

McRory scrambled all the way out of the car and fell to the ground, revolver and duffel bag in hand. He crawled towards the others. Dee ignored him and continued walking towards the car. Harriet and Margaret climbed out of the wreckage and Dee immediately took Harriet by the head and bit her left cheek off.

Nearly everyone in the diner screamed in terror as Dee spit out the putrefied chunk of flesh and slammed Harriet's face into the hood of the car again and again until it was nothing but a mess of bloody pulp. Margaret stood still, watching.

Dee showed the second girl the destroyed face of the first. Margaret hissed.

"Tell your boss I'm ready for him," Dee said.

Margaret screamed a primal wail and jumped onto the top of the car. A moment later, she bounded out of the diner on all fours, running into the night.

"Who are you?" Lucy asked.

Dee tossed aside Harriet's lifeless body and turned slowly around to regard all of them.

"Right now," she said, "I'm your only chance of survival."

*11:29pm*

Foreman reached his truck, which was parked in front of the diner but farther out, not on the inside ring of parking spaces that surrounded it. He clambered inside and grabbed the M-16 immediately. He checked it, made sure everything was in the proper place, then took aim at the diner.

A woman came bounding out of the smashed diner doors on all fours, running off into the night. For a second, he tracked her, almost fired, but didn't. When he looked back at the diner, there they were.

The Viet Cong.

Their eyes shown bright in the night and that sickly, yellow light moved behind them. They stood in line inside the diner, arranged around the crashed car.

"No!" Foreman screamed. "I won't go back! You hear me?! I won't!"

He fired - full auto - into the diner, screaming at the top of his lungs as he did.

*11:29pm*

The 5.56mm machine gun rounds ripped into the diner. The first three shots took Dee in the back and she went down instantly. The next two shots went wild, hitting bottles behind the counter. The next two shots took Duke in the neck and head. The dog's face split apart, blowing his blood and brains across the table on which he stood. His body collapsed, his knees buckling.

The next three shots went wild again, hitting the ground around the counter. The next round took Joe in the right arm. He dropped the butcher knife and fell to the ground behind the counter.

"Move!" Dee shouted from the ground, her wounds already beginning to heal.

Everyone bolted, hiding behind the counter or bounding into the bathrooms. The next three shots took Annette in her spine and the back of her head as she was fleeing. Her skull split apart and she went down, brains and blood painting the counter, abstract-style.

The next two shots took McRory in the leg and ass. He screamed in pain and crawled as fast as he could towards the bathroom, still dragging his duffel bag with him.

The shots finally seemed to subside.

A fine layer of dust and debris floated through the air after the carnage. It was eerily quiet.

On the ground of the diner, Dee growled, rage building up inside her.

*11:30pm*

Gus's truck roared to life. He chuckled in pleasure: he half expected it to not work at all, the kind of night it was. The radio was suddenly on full blast, some eerie song jabbering on about Bela Lugosi. Gus frowned and turned it off. He gunned the truck around the diner, pulled around front of it. He saw Foreman's truck - which was in his way - and Foreman himself, holding a machine gun and firing into the diner.

Gus didn't think twice and slammed into the back of Foreman's truck. The vehicle spun around, hit Foreman, who went down instantly. The vehicle now out of his way, Gus laughed and headed for the exit of the Station.

Standing in his way was a man shuffling a deck of cards. He smiled up at Gus and didn't move. Gus honked his horn but it was no good.

"Okay, then, pal," Gus said and shook his head, preparing to hit the man.

There was a loud squeal behind him and Gus looked just in time to see one of the Pig Monstrosities leap onto him from the back of his cab. The creature started gnawing on Gus's face as the man screamed.

He lost control of the wheel and the truck went sideways, then tipped over, slamming into the ground. It came to rest just in front of the Card Shark, blocking the exit of the Station. There was no way anyone was getting out of here.

Not by car, at least.

*11:33pm*

"Quit moving so much!" Freya said.

"Ah, Jesus," Joe said.

Freya poured whiskey from a handy nearby broken bottle over his wounded arm and Joe yelped in pain. It looked bad: the bullet was lodged in the man's arm, possibly in the bone, Freya couldn't be sure but she knew it was in there somewhere; there was no exit hole, just an entrance. Joe grit his teeth as Freya wrapped a towel around the wound, tied it off tight. Freya, Joe and Lucy were all crouched down behind the counter, none of them daring to move beyond it yet.

"Sorry," Freya said. "I don't think we have the tools to get it out of there."

"You've done what you could," Joe said.

"Who do you think was shooting?" Lucy asked.

"Fuck if I know," Freya said. "I saw that...Valkyrie and the dog get it before I jumped behind the counter but nothing else. Did you see anything?"

"Annette didn't make it," Lucy said. "Other than her, I don't know. And that woman, the one who...attacked those dead girls, she didn't seem to be down for the count."

"What the Hell is going on here?" Freya said.

"She was an Arrowhead," Joe said.

"What?" Freya said.

"An Arrowhead. It's sort of a nickname, a legend my tribe has told for God knows how long. Like skinwalker, that's a nickname. I don't know what they were originally called. Arrowheads lived up in the mountains. They were women who were feral, wild, like animals. They preyed on people, ate the bones of men, you know?"

"Christ," Lucy said.

"Tell me about it," Joe said. "How'd you like to grow up with that particular bedtime story?"

"Arrowheads?" Freya said. "I don't get it."

"Well, it's a nickname, like I said. You see, they looked like women, always, but...they had...you know...between their legs."

"What?" Lucy said.

"They had dicks. Chicks with dicks."

"Far out," Freya said.

Joe nodded.

"If you're all done talking about me like I'm not here," Dee said.

They all looked up and saw her towering over them, looking over the counter. Lucy actually jumped.

"I think it's safe for us to get up," Dee said. "At least for the moment."

Cautiously, the three of them stood up. Dee smiled at them, her teeth bigger than they should have been. She paid particular attention to Freya.

"Am I dinner or dessert?" Freya said.

"Can't you be both?" Dee said.

"Treat me like a lady and we'll see."

"Oh, you're no lady."

"More of a lady than you," Freya said, "from what I hear."

"Good one," Dee said. "Your boyfriend seemed to like me just fine."

"My boyfriend?"

"Sexy guy, mohawk?"

"Roy?"

"If that was his name."

"Roy's not my boyfriend," Freya said. "Just a friend. We go to college together."

"Honey, you are missing out," Dee said.

"Nah, I don't think so. He's cute but he's not my type. Where the Hell is he, for that matter?"

"Is this really what we should be talking about right now?" Lucy asked.

"You're right," Dee said.

"Yeah, we should be talking about you," Freya said, indicating Dee.

"Me? I'm the least of worries right now."

"Oh yeah? You take a bite out of a fucking walking corpse, take some machine gun fire and look no worse for it and we're not supposed to be worried about you?"

"That's right."

"Well, silly paranoid me, I just thought--"

"I hate to interrupt," a voice said. It was broken up by static but they could still understand it just fine. "But you need to be speaking to *me* right now."

They all looked towards the source of the voice - the television mounted to the wall above them - and gaped in confusion. On the screen, the Card Shark looked down on them. He was framed in a medium shot, waist up. Behind him was a background of stars. He shuffled a deck of cards between his hands.

*11:31pm*

Father McRory willed himself through the women's bathroom door, shut it closed behind him and curled up into a ball in a corner. His duffel bag and revolver were beside him.

"Well, look who it is," Angel said.

McRory looked up and saw his angel and Trixie standing over him, the harsh ceiling light behind them. McRory immediately grabbed his revolver, pointed it at them and pulled the trigger. All he got was a click. The gun was empty.

"Shucks," he said.

Angel was on him in an instant, stepping on the bullet wound in his leg and grabbing the gun from him. McRory yelped but Angel silenced him by shoving the gun barrel down his throat.

"Shut up," Angel said. "Think you have power over me? Now? Huh? Do you?"

McRory only choked and gurgled. Trixie was at Angel's side now, rummaging through the man's duffel bag. She found a speed-loader for the revolver, handed it to Angel, who popped open the

cylinder and reloaded the gun.

"I'm in charge now, Father," Angel said. "Me. You understand?"

McRory nodded. Angel found herself nodding along with him.

"Good," she said. "Good little boys listen to their teachers. And I'm your teacher right now, Father. School's in session and class has begun. Pop quiz! What's 5'6", has blonde hair and isn't taking anymore shit? If you answered, 'You, mistress' then you're fucking right! Fucking-A right! What's on the syllabus today, you might ask? Well, children, today we're gonna learn about pain. How does that sound? Sound okay? Does that sound gee-golly, right-on?! I hope so!"

The sweat on McRory's brow looked like a waterfall. His eyes were bugged out of his sockets, terrified.

"Hey, look at this," Trixie said.

Slowly, she pulled something hideous from the duffel bag. It was a modified strap-on dildo: black leather straps, adjustable; a metal dildo, hollow, presumably so McRory could slip his own, real, penis into it while wearing the apparatus; razor sharp blades running along the shaft.

An object of sexual murder.

"What the fuck is this?" Angel said. "Was this what you were going to kill me with? You sick fuck. You diseased piece of rotten garbage."

With her free hand, she pushed a finger into the bullet wound in his leg while, at the same time, shoving the gun further down his throat. She spit in his face and finally pulled her finger out of him.

"Give me that," she said.

Trixie gladly handed the murder weapon over to her. Angel unbuttoned her fly.

"Keep this in his throat," she said.

Trixie took over holding the gun. Angel stood up, took off her pants, threw them aside and put on the strap-on harness. She stood over McRory, razored metal dick practically in his face.

"Now I'm gonna fuck you, Father," she said. "I'm gonna fuck you to death."

Trixie smiled as Angel crouched down and starting undoing the priest's fly. McRory's eyes were wide with terror. He shit himself just as Angel pulled his pants down. Angel laughed.

"Out before in," she said. "Courteous of you."

Now Trixie laughed. This was going to be hugely entertaining.

*11:34pm*

"Dee," the Card Shark said on the television, "it's been far too long."

Dee only sneered. Freya, Lucy and Joe looked at each other, no idea what was happening.

"But here we are now," the Card Shark said, "face to face. Well, face to TV screen, but it's the same thing, isn't it? Never mind. How are you?! You look well."

"I'm peachy," Dee said.

"Peachy. Good. You know why I'm here. It's time to collect. Past time to collect, actually. One hundred years. That was the deal. No more, no less. It has now been..." He looked at his wrist, though Freya didn't see any watch. "One hundred and three years and five days. You've managed to elude me for over three years. Impressive. Really. I'm not lying. No one has ever escaped my clutches for that long. But it's over, Dee. I'm coming in there and you're coming out with me."

"I don't see you coming in here," Dee said.

"Oh, you don't, do you?" the Card Shark said.

"No. All I see is some half-life Slabs that you've animated."

"I have more than just Slabs, my dear."

"Oh, yeah? What else do you have? Monstrosities, maybe?"

"You are an astute one, aren't you?"

"I do my best."

"Good. You're going to need it."

"You know what I think?" Dee asked.

"I'm all ears," the Card Shark said.

"I think you're afraid of me. That's why you won't come in yourself. Yeah. I think you're worried that I've found out something about you, something I can use against you, something to beat you. Well maybe I have."

"Uh, sir?" Lucy said, speaking to the television.

"Did one of your little ants just speak?" the Card Shark said. "Yes, that one there. Did it say something?"

"I believe she did," Dee said, not without a little contempt.

"I don't suppose we could..." Lucy said, "I don't know, give you this...woman here in exchange for our freedom?"

Freya and Joe looked at her like she was crazy. The Card Shark laughed.

"You speak of trade?" he said. "Why, my little creature, you have nothing to trade. You can't give me Dee. If you even so much as tried, she would rip your head off and use it as a ball to play catch with one of my Monstrosities if she had the chance. You have nothing, small thing."

"I'm walking out of here," Dee said. "There's nothing you can do to stop me."



"We shall see. How do they say it on the CB? Ah, yes. Over and out."

The television screen broke up into white noise and recombined into a normal show once again: *Gilligan's Island* was still on. A double episode, perhaps? Ginger and Mary Ann were standing very close to each other. If Freya didn't know any better, she would have thought they were about to kiss. Amazingly, a moment later they did. Freya certainly didn't remember this episode. But there were more pressing matters at hand.

"What was that all about?" Freya asked.

"Well," Dee said, "looks like Mary Ann and Ginger are about to get it on. 'Bout time, too, if you ask me. No one else on that God-forsaken uncharted island is even remotely fuckable."

Freya shook her head in frustration.

11:37pm

Mark stayed put during all the carnage, folded up into a fetal position under his truck. He was in so much pain. Not only did it feel like he had internal bleeding in his abdomen but his head was pounding worse than ever. He banged it against the pavement several times but it was no good.

Despite the brisk night air, he was sweating profusely. Heat surged through his body. It felt like he was going to explode at any moment. If only he could get a fix to relieve this pain.

"I can't help you," Mr. Wrench said.

He was under the truck with Mark, laying down next to him, head turned to regard him. His mandibles clicked together. They were wet and glistening in the moonlight.

"You monster," Mark said. "You're gonna leave me like this? Like this?!"

"You only have yourself to blame."

"The fuck I do. Everything I've done I've done for you. This was your plan."

"My plan? As I remember it, this was your plan. I clearly remember you discussing it with me. I told you it was a bad idea but you had to have your way."

"No," Mark insisted, holding both of his temples and shaking his head. "No, this was your idea. I remember... I don't... What? What's going on? Where's my wife? Where's Shauna?"

"Ah, Shauna," Mr. Wrench said. "That's who we should be talking about. If you take care of Shauna, I can provide you with what you need. I can help you. You know this to be true."

Mark shook his head in anguish, then banged it against the ground a few more times. Drool ran out of his mouth and snot poured from his nostrils.

"No," he said, "I won't do it. I won't. She's my wife!"

Mr. Wrench didn't answer and Mark saw now that he was gone, disappeared as he often did. Mark cried out in pain. He needed a fix, needed something. He looked up at the underside of the truck.

And there they were.

The eight packets of fluid. Mark had taken one out to show to Father earlier. Now, Mark found himself leaning up, tearing at the packets with his nails, gnawing at them with his teeth. Finally, he broke one open and drank deep of as much of the black, horrible fluid as he could catch in his mouth.

It wasn't as good as the uncut stuff but it would do in a pinch.

*11:40pm*

In his wrecked truck, Gus moaned in horrible pain. His body was twisted, a large gash in his upper right thigh, his face was partially eaten away and he lay in a large pool of his own blood. He didn't know where the creature that attacked him was anymore. It was all a blur after the crash.

"Help," he managed to say. "Someone help me."

He heard the sure steps of someone walking up to the overturned cab. "Oh, thank God. Help me, mister. I'm hurt real bad."

"Poor little creature," the man said. "Are you broken?"

"I need you to call an ambulance. And the police. I need help."

"You're too broken for help, I think. Perhaps you can still be of service, though."

He crouched down and looked into the cab. Gus recognized him as the man he was ready to run down with the truck. His smile was hideous.

"We heard something over the CB," Gus said. "Someone warning us..."

"Signals," the Card Shark said, shaking his head. "You can't trust them, especially on a night like this. Tell me, have you seen any lights in the sky tonight? Ones moving erratically, impossibly even? Doesn't matter. I know they're here. Those are visitors. Travelers, I call them. Whenever they're around for a long period of time, you can't trust any kind of signals you see or hear. It gets...all messed up. Wires get crossed. I don't have any better way to describe it to make your little brain understand, I'm afraid. Oh, there we are."

There was a rustling behind Gus and the trucker turned his head with much effort and saw the Pig Monstrosity crawling towards him through the wreckage. Frantically, he tried to crawl away but it was no good. His body was too far gone to move properly.

"Oh, Jesus," he said. "Help me, Jesus!"

The Pig Monstrosity reached him, crawled up his legs till it reached the large gash in his upper

right thigh. To Gus's horror, the creature pushed its fingers into his wound. He screamed as the monster opened his wound wider and then start to push its entire arm inside him.

"Yes," the Card Shark said, "you'll make an excellent puppet."

*11:43pm*

Long Liz sat up suddenly, her head screaming in pain. She clutched it with both hands, felt around back of it. Her hand came away bloody. There was definitely a major wound of some kind back there.

She tried to stand up, lost her balance and fell back down on her ass. Her equilibrium was off.

With some effort, she tried again. This time, she was more successful, only having to steady herself on one of the dumpsters for a moment before continuing on. She found Roy's body almost immediately. It was torn in two, his chest and lower jaw ripped away from the rest of his body.

Long Liz felt her dinner coming up, tried to stop it but failed. She leaned over and it all came up, pouring from her body onto the ground beside the corpse. It took more than a moment for her to find her feet again but she kept moving, heading around the diner towards the front.

*11:44pm*

"Hey, someone in there?" Freya said.

She knocked on the woman's bathroom door once again. This time, it was answered by Trixie, who unlocked the door and opened it.

"Just you?" Freya asked.

Trixie shook her head. She moved aside to reveal Angel, standing not far behind her. The girl was quite something to behold. She held the priest's nickel-plated revolver in one hand. She still wore the button-up white shirt she had been wearing all evening but her pants were gone and she wore a black leather panty harness which sported a metal, razored dildo. Her lovely legs were bare but she still wore her trainers. Almost her entire bottom half was covered in blood.

Freya practically ran to the girl.

"Shit," she said, "are you okay?"

"Yeah," Angel said. "It's not my blood."

"Did... Is that? Fuck."

Angel nodded. Behind her, in one of the stalls, Freya saw him. McRory's body was bent over

one of the toilet seats, his head in the bowl. His pants were around his ankles and his asshole had been destroyed, torn apart by the weapon between Angel's legs. There was blood and shit spattered across the walls of the stall. As Freya watched, a large bug crawled out of McRory's destroyed asshole. It looked like a cockroach but it was larger than any roach Freya had ever seen. The whole scene was something out of a nightmare. But Freya found herself nodding.

"I took care of him," Angel said.

"I can see that," Freya said. "You're sure you're okay?"

"Yes."

"You better come out here. Do you want to grab your pants?"

"No. This suits me better."

"Right."

She led the girl out of the bathroom. Lucy covered her mouth in shock when she saw Angel. Dee chuckled, pointed at the metal dick between Angel's legs.

"I see that we have something in common," she said.

"What?" Angel said.

"Nothing, sexy."

"Help," a voice said.

They all turned as Long Liz stumbled into the diner. She tried to make her way around the crashed car, failed and fell over. Lucy, Trixie and Joe ran to her aid and helped her up. She didn't look good. Her head was bleeding badly and she certainly wasn't sure on her feet.

Angel looked around, spotted the television and frowned.

"I don't remember that episode," she said.

Freya looked. On *Gilligan's Island*, Mary Ann and Ginger were furiously fucking on the beach, arms wrapped around each other. Mary Ann's hand was between Ginger's legs. She was practically growling into Ginger's face. The redhead's eyes were closed in ecstasy.

"Yeah," Freya said. "They must not show this one in reruns too often."

11:47pm

"Some husband," Nose Candy said.

"I'm sorry?" Shauna said.

The small space in which Nose Candy reigned supreme seemed even smaller than it must have been in reality to Shauna. The man's whole presence made her feel claustrophobic, like he was

constantly pressing up close to her, even if he wasn't.

"Your husband must not be much of a man," Nose Candy said.

"What are you talking about?" Shauna said.

"Leaving you out here by yourself with some stranger. Not very husbandly, if you ask me."

"I didn't ask you."

"Fair nuff. You don't need me telling you how to live. You obviously have it all figured out. So, tell me, Mrs. Perfect, how come you're stuck in here with me?"

"Circumstances, I suppose."

"Oh, you suppose, do you? Well, la-de-fucking-da."

He was unpleasant before but now he was actively repugnant: sweaty and smelly, sticky and itchy, always scratching himself. He simply oozed sleaze. There was a radio on somewhere in this small, encroaching place. AC/DC was on: "You Shook Me All Night Long."

"Look," Shauna said, "thanks for the rescue, really, but don't tell me about my marriage. You don't know me."

"I know you," Nose Candy said.

"You don't even know my name."

"You think that fucking matters? You're all the damn same. Every last one of you. Always leading a man on, never delivering. How do you think that affects me, as a man? Huh? Got an answer for that?"

He was practically in her face now, his own face beat red with passionate anger. Shauna backed into a corner of the little workspace, reached out behind looking for something to defend herself with, if it came to that. Nothing was presently forthcoming.

The phrase "out of the frying pan and into the fire" rolled around in her head.

*11:49pm*

Mark staggered around the diner towards the back. There was no way he was going inside. All those people in there were nuts. He just hoped Shauna was safe. He rounded the back of the diner and came upon Roy's body. Paying it no mind, he clambered up onto one of the dumpsters and swung a leg over the side, then the other, dropping inside the trash. At least one bottle broke when he landed but if it had indeed hurt him, he felt no pain.

In fact, it was rather comfortable in here. The smell was sweet and the trash bags and sticky surfaces felt heavenly. Mark took the time to grab some newspaper in the trash and wrap it around his

broken finger, tying it to the ring finger. It was painful but distant, the drug coursing through his veins. He felt his eyes begin to shut.

Some part of him - some deep, frantic part - cried out, told him to stay awake, to stay alert, that there was danger everywhere around him, but he paid it no mind. He was asleep within moments.

*11:51pm*

Foreman got up as quickly as he was able, considering the situation. His whole body ached. On the plus side, it didn't feel like any of his bones were broken. He looked around, found that his truck had been almost totally destroyed. The back end had been pulverized by that eighteen wheeler. He looked around, saw the vehicle in question overturned, crashed, and he smiled.

"Serves you right, you white trash bastard," he said.

With some effort, he managed to get the door to his truck open. He clambered inside, in incredible pain the whole time, and grabbed his pistol and hunting knife. He strapped the knife to his right leg and tucked the pistol into his pants at the small of his back. He rummaged under the driver's seat and found what he was looking for: the small packet of rolled cigarettes he had laced with angel dust when he made them.

He stuck one between his lips when he stepped out of the cab, set it alight with his Zippo, then went about recovering his rifle as he smoked. He found it on the ground a moment later.

"There's my beauty," he said.

Maybe it was his imagination, but it felt like the drug was already taking effect. He could barely feel his wounds and, in fact, felt like he was invincible. He surveyed the diner, didn't see the Cong but they were out there in the jungle all the same, he knew it.

Slowly, surely, he began to sweep the area, keeping an eye out for them the whole time. The only thing he feared at the moment was the sickly, moving, yellow light. But tonight, maybe - just maybe - he'd be able to put it out once and for all.

*11:54pm*

In the diner, the jukebox had moved on to Patti Smith - "Dancing Barefoot". The survivors had moved Annette's and Duke's bodies into the cold storage, to give them some kind of send-off, half-assed as it was.

Freya stood close to Dee and Angel: the former because, even though she didn't trust her, she

seemed to be the only one who might get them all out of this alive and the latter because...well, just because, she told herself. No particular reason. She looked at the young woman and felt a longing, shrugged it off.

"Well, princess," she said, "you took care of your little serial killer. That must have felt good."

Angel looked at her, defiantly, paused before replying:

"Yeah," she said. "It did."

"Well..." Freya started but trailed off when she realized that she didn't have a comeback.

Joe kept his gaze fixed on Dee, his free arm gently grasping his injured arm, as if reminding himself of the pain, keeping his mind focused. Lucy tended to Long Liz, checked the towel they had wrapped around the woman's head like a bandage. Trixie was in the kitchen, watching the rest of them through the window.

Dee - the woman herself - stared at the television. The episode of *Gilligan's Island* was coming to an end. Mary Ann and Ginger threw Molotov cocktails at what appeared to be an ancient reanimated mummy which was shambling towards them menacingly. It was hard to tell what was actually going on. Not only was the picture frequently broken up by static but whenever it was clear - crystal clear from time to time, in fact - the mummy was out-of-focus. Under the distortion, his face seemed much more articulate and animated than your average movie - or television, in this case - mummy but you couldn't see what he was trying to say to the stranded island girls.

"Far out," Dee said like a hippie.

"So you're a hundred years old?" Freya said.

"Hundred and twenty-six," Dee said, not looking at Freya.

"One twenty-six. So...how's that possible?"

"You think I have an answer for that?"

"Yeah, I would think so. You'd think it would come with the territory."

Dee sighed, finally turned to Freya.

"Sorry to disappoint," she said. "Don't really know how the magic works. I made a kind of deal, a long time ago. I was dying, my brother wanted to save me, he found the Card Shark...somewhere, I don't really remember. He gave his life and...at least one other part of himself to save me and I've been the new me ever since."

"Wait, so that's your brother's...?" Trixie said, trailed off.

Dee nodded with a smirk. "Must have got a few other things from him, too."

"Devil," Joe said.

Dee whirled around, stuck her face into Joe's, practically snarling at him.

"The fuck you know about it?" she said. "Huh? Your people talk about me? Maybe saw me back when I was a strange little thing? See me getting gang-raped by Regulators? Oh, I was popular with the perverted white men: little Irish gal with a big dick swinging between her legs. A freak! One they just had to get their grubby little hands all over. Yeah." She pushed Joe up against a wall of the diner. He gasped in pain. "But your people didn't do anything to stop it, did they? No, they didn't. I saw them watching from the bushes. They could have stopped it but they didn't lift a damn finger to help me. No. Because I was a devil! An Arrowhead! Your little name for us. But it's okay, I forgive you. I got bigger, stronger. Pretty soon, I could tear those white devils apart with my bare hands." She laughed, let go of Joe. He stumbled away from her, fear writ large on his face.

"I remember one time," Dee continued, chuckling to herself, "I met up with this bounty hunter. Armand Julius Hartley. Big motherfucker, must've been 6'5". He thought he had me cornered at a way station...not too far from here, actually - maybe a few miles east." She laughed again. "When they found him four days later, his pistol was shoved so far down his throat, they had to use a crowbar to get it out. I unloaded the gun into him. Made one Hell of a mess."

"What are you?" Lucy asked.

She was sitting on one of the stools, Long Liz on the stool next to her. Dee turned slowly to the woman.

"I'm a nightmare," she said. "Don't worry, though. You'll wake up soon enough and I'll be gone. And, pretty soon, you'll only remember me in the dead of night - that time when you wake up for no reason, around 3am. When you think something's in the room with you, something standing in the corner or maybe crawling across the floor towards you. And, yeah, maybe that'll be me. Maybe. You'll turn on a light and for a second - just for a second - you'll see me staring at you, my big teeth gleaming in the new light. But then I won't be there anymore. It's just your imagination."

"Stop it," Angel said.

Dee looked at the girl, turned her head to one side like a curious dog, sniffed the air. Freya found herself squaring up next to Angel, getting ready for whatever was to come.

"I'm getting hungry," Dee said. "Anyone want to volunteer? Joe?"

Suddenly, she was on Joe. Freya didn't even see her move. Lucy screamed and Joe yelled out in shock and surprise. Angel gasped and leveled her revolver at the pair. They moved around quite a bit and Angel had a hard time taking aim. She was afraid that she would hit Joe.

Dee took hold of Joe's injured arm and closed her lips around a large circle of skin. Joe screamed in pain.

It was over seconds later, as suddenly as it had begun. Dee drew away from Joe, who looked at



his arm in shock, then up at Dee, who smiled back at him. She opened her mouth. Trapped between her teeth was the bullet that had only moments ago been in Joe's arm. She winked at him and swallowed the bullet.

"Yummy," she said.

That was the moment that Gus - or, the horrible, mutilated puppet of Gus - made his presence known, dropping into sight upside down from the roof of the diner, poking his head inside the shattered glass of the front doors. He looked a little like a bloated worm. His skin and muscle were stretched to near breaking point, his arms useless skin flaps at his sides. Every bone in his body was broken and shifted underneath his skin like tectonic plates under the surface of the Earth. His whole mass was covered in some kind of slime which dripped down his body and splattered on the floor below. Cockroaches scurried along the sticky surface of his skin, getting caught in the slime and falling down with it.

Lucy saw him first, screamed and pointed. Everyone turned to look.

"Oh, what the Hell?" Angel said.

"That is...not right," Freya said.

"Jesus," Long Liz said. "Gus?"

"Yeah, Long Liz," the Gus Puppet said, "it's me. Your old friend, Gus."

His speech was punctuated by mad, pig-like squeals. He shook so hard at times that his teeth rattled.

"Gus," Long Liz said. "That ain't you."

"Course it is...Long Liz," the Gus Puppet said. "Bought ten miles back...underwear. Under. Under grate. Things. Night birds. Bloody Mary. Swill. Damn, is that Duke I smell? Man, has he gone all ripe."

The Gus Puppet licked his lips. A particularly large gunk of slime trailed down his neck and over his chin, filling his mouth. He swallowed it and almost immediately vomited it back up, along with a large amount of blood and some unidentified greenish blue liquid, onto the floor of the diner.

Long Liz screamed. She was the first one to move, getting up from her stool and running out of the dining room and into the back room, passing Trixie by. Freya could hear her beginning to open the back door.

"Let's go!" Trixie said.

Angel immediately followed Freya as Dee stood where she was, staring at the puppet. Joe was behind the girls shortly after. Lucy was frozen in place, only able to stand up off her stool: her feet were now welded to the floor

"Meat," the Gus Puppet said.

It jumped from its nesting place and into the diner, turning itself right side up as it came. The rest of its body was now visible and what it revealed was horrible: a Pig Monstrosity had pushed itself into Gus's body from between the man's legs, which now hung from the worm-like body, flailing about. The Monstrosity's legs stuck out of Gus's body and pinwheeled in place as it soared through the air.

Lucy screamed as the puppet knocked Dee aside and jumped on the waitress. It opened its mouth impossibly wide and took Lucy's right arm inside its throat, bit down, instantly severing it at the elbow.

Lucy fell backwards, blood erupting from her stump in a veritable fountain. She continued screaming as the puppet fell on her, taking a large bite out of her head, a whole quarter of it - the upper left side - now gone. Blood cascaded into the air and what remained of Lucy's brains oozed out of her skull: it appeared to have been broken apart by the slime like stomach acid. Her body twitched as she died.

Dee rolled over onto her hands and knees and grabbed the puppet by Gus's flapping, broken legs. She tore them apart like a wishbone and suddenly the Gus skin suit was ripped in two. Dee flung both parts away in disgust.

The Pig Monstrosity popped up and immediately attacked, no longer encumbered by the Gus Puppet. It stuck its spikey bone hands into Dee's chest, breaking the skin and drawing blood, lifting Dee off the ground. Dee felt the shock of intense pain and opened her mouth in a silent scream.

The Pig Monstrosity opened its own mouth, squealed in pleasure and prepared to take a bite out of Dee. Before it could, Dee bit down on its right arm, tearing a large chunk of flesh away. The creature let go, dropping Dee to the ground.

Dee wiped the putrid flesh away from her mouth. It was a bad move, costing her time: the creature struck out with a strong hand and hit her in the face. She went flying over the crashed car in the doorway, tumbling over the roof and into the parking lot beyond.

*October 15th, 1983, Midnight*

Long Liz, Trixie, Angel, Freya and Joe burst out of the back door of the diner. They ran from the building, Long Liz in the lead. Almost instantly, she slipped in Roy's blood and once again, went down. She landed on her back. It hurt but not as bad this time: at least she hadn't hit her head.

Joe stooped to help her up, aided by Angel. Freya stopped, saw whose blood Long Liz had slipped in and yelped.

"Fuck!" she said. "Roy! Holy shit! Oh, fuck fuck fuck."

Trixie put an arm around the girl and kept her moving. They didn't have time for any of this. The group was mobile again and another moment later they headed towards Long Liz's truck, parked out back of the diner.

They didn't see the three Pig Monstrosities watching them from the roof of the diner. The creatures pounced off the roof and followed after them, hidden in shadows.

*12:01am*

"You're gonna put out!" Nose Candy said.

His finger was in Shauna's face. Shauna was convinced that she could see steam wafting off the man's skin, his heat disrupting the cool air around him. Shauna was backed into a corner of the confined space, trying to make herself small and less of a target.

"Hear me?!" Nose Candy continued. "You're gonna take me to a happy little place where little Nose Candy can get all excited and erect, erupting inside you. You're gonna make me happy!"

"I...I..." was all Shauna could say.

"You you you. Everything's about you, isn't it? Well, you better change your little tune there. That priest, he said a lotta things that made sense. He told me that women needed to be taught how to act like proper ladies again, how they had to stop speaking and listen!"

He punched a fist into the wall just to the left of her head. Shauna was in sheer terror.

"My daddy knew how to do it," Nose Candy continued. "He taught my mommy good. There wasn't a day went by that he didn't hit her with a piece of firewood at the dinner table. And she shut up, believe you me. She shut the fuck up! And, you know, when she hung herself in the closet of my room when I was fourteen, I didn't give one Goddamn shit about it. It was her own damn fault, you hear me? Are you listening to me, mommy?! Huh?!"

Shauna reached out with her left hand and fumbled along the counter, her fingers grasping for something, anything, to defend herself. Finally, her fingertips came upon something - a sharp pencil - and she wrapped her small digits around it, brought it up.

Before she could even think about it, the pencil was embedded halfway into Nose Candy's face. She had stabbed it into the man's sinus behind his right nostril, breaking the skin immediately outside the nose.

Nose Candy screamed in agonizing pain and fell backwards, crashing his back into the cash register. Shauna moved instantly, unlocking and opening the door to the small space and running out

into the night.

*12:03am*

Above all the chaos, dark clouds gathered. The sky had been curiously quiet, almost dead, but now they erupted with thunder and lightning. The clouds opened up, letting rain down onto the little stage that had been prepared by a madman's hands. The rain was heavy, hard. It came down like bullets, crashing into everything and creating a cacophony of noise.

Mark was awakened from his brief slumber, his head pounding once again, his finger crying out in protest. He started to cry, actual tears mixing with the rain running down his face. He climbed halfway out of the trash, looked around.

Mr. Wrench was there, standing in the rain, although not an inch of him was wet. He stared at Mark.

"I need it!" Mark screamed at him. "Do you hear me? I need it!"

Mr. Wrench shook his head in disappointment. He turned away from Mark and walked into the darkness. Mark called after him but got no reply. The tears came harder now. He didn't want to do what he had to do.

What he must do.

*12:04am*

"Ah, what the Hell?!" Long Liz said.

She tried the ignition again, still got nothing. She sat in the driver's seat of her truck, Trixie next to her in the passenger seat, the rest of them standing just outside the cab, the rain drenching them. Freya was cold and she could tell that Joe was, too. Curiously, Angel seemed totally unaffected by the rain, despite not wearing any pants.

"What's the problem?!" Joe shouted over the rain.

"I got nothing!" Long Liz said. "It's like the battery's dead! But it couldn't be!"

Freya wandered a little way from the cab, farther down the trailer. There was a strange sound coming from behind the truck.

"Hey," she said to Angel, "come here."

"What is it?" Angel said.

"You hear that?"

"Hear what?"

"That sound."

"I can barely hear anything over the storm."

"Listen."

They stopped talking and listened. At the cab, Joe shook his head, rubbed his chin.

"I better take a look at it," he said.

Angel and Freya approached the back of the cab. Behind it, sitting on the asphalt, was a large object. It was humming, shaking. Steam rose off of it. It was metal.

"I'll open it up," Joe said.

Long Liz popped the hood from inside the cab. With his good hand, Joe reached out to open it.

"What is that?" Angel said.

"It's the truck's engine," Freya said.

"Oh, Christ." Angel turned to the others. "Don't open that hood!"

Joe looked at them curiously, his hand still in midair, about to open the hood. He frowned, couldn't see the object just past the girls. That was when the hood burst open of its own accord and two Pig Monstrosities popped up from the empty engine block. They grabbed onto Joe and squealed as they pulled him inside with them. The hood closed behind them with a metallic thud. The screams started shortly thereafter.

Blood sprayed from out of the hood and from under the cab. Trixie and Long Liz screamed at the top of their lungs. They exited the cab in a flash.

More squealing sounds echoed across the parking lot. Freya saw three more Monstrosities running towards them from the south. They must have been hiding somewhere near the diner.

"Come on!" Angel shouted.

The two girls were on the passenger side of the truck, so Trixie was with them right away. They started to run west, towards the mountains. Long Liz exited the cab on the opposite side and tried to head that way as well but was stopped. The two Pig Monstrosities inside the truck popped out of the hood again, now completely drenched in blood and flesh. Long Liz continued to scream and ran east, towards the gas pumps and the woods beyond.

They had been separated.

*12:07am*

Shauna managed not to vomit when she came upon Roy's body behind the diner. She choked

back a foul-smelling burp and stooped behind one of the trash canisters. Making herself small once again, she curled up in a ball and hid in the shadows.

She heard a strange sound, some kind of chittering noise. Looking around, she saw someone standing nearby, someone who wasn't there before. He was humanoid - wearing a nicely-tailored suit - but Shauna got the impression that there wasn't anything remotely human about him. He shook hideously. He was out-of-focus, somehow, as if she were watching a television broadcast that wouldn't quite tune in properly.

In a flash, he was gone, just disappearing from her sight.

Shauna shook, because of the cold, because of fear, because of some strange presence that had passed her by, intruding from some other, totally alien dimension. She shook her head now.

"This isn't happening," she said. "This isn't happening."

Over and over again.

12:08am

Dee stood up with some effort, shaking off the little bits of glass that covered the concrete where she had landed. She was in front of the crashed car halfway in/halfway out of the diner. She looked towards the diner, found it empty now, at least as far as she could tell.

"Good night for it," the Card Shark said.

Dee looked around, found the Card Shark standing a good distance away, between her and the wrecked truck blocking the entrance to the Station, and smiled. She raised her head to the sky, opened her mouth, let it fill with rain water, drank deep and looked at him again.

"It is," she said.

"You know," the Card Shark said, shuffling his deck of cards between his hands, "I'm almost glad that you eluded me for as long as you did. It's invigorating. The chase, as they say, is far more enjoyable than the catch. I don't know if that's strictly true but I've had quite the time these past few years. As did you. I saw one of your little films. *She-Men of the SS*, wasn't it? A classic. That scene where you have those prisoners-of-war lined up in the cell, chained against the wall, and you rape them, one by one, just going down the line? Unforgettable. Good production values, too. That prisoner-of-war camp was quite detailed for a grubby little porno movie. Where was it shot?"

"The *Hogan's Heroes* set," Dee said.

"I knew it looked familiar! How stupid of me. I can picture Sgt Schultz witnessing that little threeway between you and the sexy Jewish twins - the ones with the rather large breasts, you

remember, their faces always buried between each other's legs, eating carpet - and reporting to Col Klink, 'I know nothing!'" He laughed. Dee joined him.

"You know I'm going to kill you, right?" Dee said, suddenly not laughing anymore.

The Card Shark's laughter slowly died. He shook his head. "I suppose we should get down to brass tacks, as they say."

He flung the cards out in front of him and they soared through the air. Dee dodged the first few then took a chance and vaulted over the crashed car and back into the diner. Two cards hit her in the back mid-flight, embedding in her skin like throwing stars. She grunted in pain and rolled into the diner and ran towards the backroom.

"Hide all you like, Dee!" the Card Shark yelled. "I'll tear this whole place down! Piece by piece!"

*12:11am*

"It's no good!" Trixie said.

The three girls were trying desperately to run up the rapidly ascending face of sheer, craggy rock to the west past the slab of asphalt that was the Station. The weather was working against them, turning the already steep and sharp rock wet and slippery as well. Trixie and Freya had already fell twice, thankfully not hurting anything major in the process.

"Okay," Angel said. She had made it the farthest up the hill but was still only a few yards up. She surveyed the horizon. "I suppose we could head south, around the edge of this place and get onto the highway on foot. There's no way we would have been able to get a car through that crashed truck, anyway. Jesus, if we had known, Joe might still be alive right now."

"Do you see any of those things?" Freya said.

"No. They went after Long Liz." She shook her head.

"Long Liz isn't with us?!" Trixie said.

She looked around all of a sudden, desperate and concerned.

"What the fuck?" Freya said. "Where have you been, girl?"

"I don't know," Trixie said. "I never even looked back. I just assumed she was behind us."

"Well, she's not."

"Should we find her before we escape?" Trixie asked.

"No," Angel said.

"We aren't going to just leave her here," Freya said.

"We can't afford to stick around any longer than we have to. I say we get the Hell out of here, bring the police, the fucking military, the militia, and every gun-toting nut we can find out here. Get 'em back here and blow the living shit out of this place. Then we find Long Liz. It's better than us running around in the dark until we all die."

"Right," Freya said. "That makes sense."

"I guess," Trixie said.

"Okay, it's settled," Angel said. "Let's go."

She walked back down the rock face and joined the other two girls. They set off south a moment later, preparing to head around the diner, sticking to the shadows on the edge of the Station the whole time.

*12:14am*

Long Liz hid behind the gas pump stand, on the far east side, hidden in shadow. Those things were close. She could hear them, squealing in the dark. She kept looking behind her, towards the woods. She wanted to run through them, get to town, to get help, to get to safety, but...

But there was something about the woods. Something there. She kept thinking she saw something move between the trees. Maybe it was just her imagination, but she wasn't going that way unless it was absolutely necessary.

As she was looking towards the woods, she heard a hissing sound. Her chest seized up, fear replacing air in her lungs. The hissing wasn't coming from the woods.

It was coming from right beside her.

She slowly turned her head towards the sound. There, not more than five inches from her face, was Margaret, one of the reanimated corpses from McRory's trunk. She stood on all fours, head turned quizzically one way, then the other. She hissed.

Long Liz opened her mouth to scream, then covered it with a hand, afraid she'd attract the attention of the Pig Monstrosities. Margaret inched towards Long Liz. The rain danced on both of the women's skins, bouncing about madly, gleaming in the dim glow of the streetlights.

Gunfire rang out, a burst of machine-gun fire. Margaret's body was riddled with bullets. Five shots took her in the side, three in the side of her head. She opened her mouth to wail in pain and alarm and more gunfire came, every shot taking her in the neck and the head. Her jaw broke away, bounced against the wall and landed in Long Liz's hair. Her tongue was blown off and hit Long Liz across the eyes.



Long Liz was relieved that she still had her mouth covered at this point. Margaret's body fell against the wall, lifeless now once again. It fell together in a heap in front of Long Liz.

She looked towards the source of the gunfire - the woods - and gaped. Standing between two trees - framed between them like a portrait - was Foreman. He spit out what remained of his wet cigarette and walked towards Long Liz.

"Goddamn Charlie," he said. "There's more of 'em coming. Better be ready."

*12:16am*

Angel, Freya and Trixie stopped in the shadows just by the diner, watching. The Card Shark walked cautiously into the diner, heading around the crashed car, shuffling his deck between his hands. The girls looked at each other.

"Are we clear?" Freya said. "Can we go?"

Angel nodded.

"Yeah," she said. "Let's go."

They kept moving, faster now, around the edge of the Station. They reached the crashed truck, went around it, then over the four-foot-high concrete fence around the edge of the Station and onto the highway. There came a loud squealing sound and they whirled around, saw two Pig Monstrosities on the other side of the wreck - the Station side - and kept moving.

They ran onto the highway, looking both ways, hoping to flag someone down. But there was no one around, so they kept moving south, past the highway, towards town. They made great time, running and running, until they could see the first buildings of town just over a rise.

"Look!" Trixie said.

They all looked where she was pointing. Rushing towards them, about two feet off the ground, was a large ball of light. Yellow, sickly-looking light, pulsing and moving in place. It filled all three of them with intense fear.

They tried to outrun it but it was no good. It engulfed them a moment later.

*12:18am*

Shauna had a feeling. Something told her he was there before she had seen him. It was that sense that married couples sometimes had, a kind of telepathy. She knew - simply knew - that Mark was near.

She looked around and found him.

He was standing in the rain, between the diner and the gas pumps. Just standing in the rain looking at her.

"Baby," she said. "Hon?"

She stood up from her hiding place and ran towards him. She seemed to be moving in slow motion, her feet splashing in the puddles of water all over the asphalt, rain dancing on her shoulders.

Reaching him, she swept her arms around him. He stood still, hands behind his back. She hugged him long and hard, then looked up into his face. "Are you crying? Honey, it's okay. Whatever you've done. Let's just go. We can get out of here. It's okay."

"I know this to be true," he said.

"What?"

"Mr. Wrench. He says that I know it to be true."

"Know what to be true?"

Mark shook his head, his tears heavier than the rain. He burbled.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"Sorry for wh--" she began but stopped abruptly.

There was pressure in her stomach, just below her rib cage. Then the pain came. She looked down, between the two of them. Embedded in her stomach was a broken beer bottle. Its sharp end was driven deep inside her, its handle carefully cradled in her husband's clenched fist.

She looked up at him again. They were both crying now.

"Honey?" she said.

Mark said nothing, only pulling the bottle from her stomach and stabbing her again. And again. Shauna gasped in pain each time. Every bit of air in her lungs seemed to disappear all at once.

After Mark pulled the bottle from her stomach for the fifth time, she collapsed to the asphalt, on her back. The rain came down on her, filling her mouth with water. She tried to choke it out but didn't have the strength.

"I'm sorry," Mark said again.

He bent over her and stabbed her again and again. He figured she was dead after the twenty-seventh blow.

He stood up, covered in blood which the rain seemed incapable of washing away. He looked around, searching for Mr. Wrench.

But he was nowhere to be found.

Mark continued to cry and walked, defeated, towards the diner. He dropped the bottle on his

way there, where it shattered on the asphalt.

Rain danced around its shattered pieces. It was the only sound he could hear now. It rang through his ears like a piercing scream.

*12:20am*

The Card Shark stalked from the front area of the diner into the back area, the television just static above him. The place seemed completely deserted but he knew - could just feel - that Dee was in here somewhere. The large grill in the back was still on, so he thoughtfully turned it off.

"Where are you, Dee?" he said. "Hiding in some corner? Locked away somewhere? Where's the little Mary Deirdre McDonald that I met back in 1879? She's totally gone, isn't she? Blown away in the storm. So where's Dee? Where is this new self that you've come up with?"

He walked towards the cold storage, knowing that she must be holed up inside, foolishly thinking she was safe. He smiled. She hadn't even closed the door entirely. He could feel the cold air wafting out of the small crack.

A splash of white on the ground just in front of the cold storage caught his attention. He frowned as he examined it.

Salt.

It was a small pile of salt. He grinned. "Were you trying to make a circle of salt, Dee?" he said, laughing. "You know that would only work for a short time, don't you? That I can break right through them with a few deals of my cards? Of course you know that. That's probably why you stopped before you barely even started. But, then..." He trailed off. "Maybe you were trying to make a weapon."

He looked at the cold storage door, hanging partially open. Realization dawned on his face and he immediately started a shuffle in one hand. The cold storage door flew open, hitting him square in the forehead. He was dazed for a moment, the shuffle interrupted.

Dee came out of the cold storage like a Valkyrie but her weapon of choice was an odd one: a large bag of salt, open. She tossed a great mound of the stuff over the Card Shark's face, a good portion of it ending up in his mouth.

The Card Shark shrieked in pain, struck out with his deck blindly. Cards flew everywhere, cutting through the air, but Dee was ready.

Immediately dropping the now-half-empty bag of salt, she picked up Duke's dead body and tossed it into the air. The cards instantly collected Duke, making him one of the face cards: the dog's expression on the card was one of utter terror and pain.

But the cards kept coming, even as the Card Shark fell to the floor and began to flee through the back door of the diner. Dee grabbed Annette's body and thrust it out in front of her and the cards collected her, too: her face screaming a silent scream on her own little face card - the Queen of Diamonds.

The cards seemed satisfied and they flew from the cold storage and streamed out of the diner, following their dealer through the back door. Dee sighed, relieved. She could feel the cards in her back trying to dig their way through her flesh - whether in or out, she didn't know - so she picked up the bag of salt and poured a good bunch down her back. It was painful but the cards immediately wrenched themselves out of her body and joined their colleagues out the door.

Dee sat on the floor of the diner - just outside of the cold storage, its door still hanging open - trying to catch her breath. She was suddenly aware of a presence in the room with her and looked up. Standing in the entryway between the front and back area of the diner was Mark. He did not look well. The bags under his eyes looked like Samsonite and his skin was pale and sweaty.

Dee smiled and stood up. She approached Mark, put a hand on his shoulder.

"Just the man I wanted to see," she said.

"What?" Mark said.

"You want this night to be over?"

"Oh, God, yes."

"Okay. You can help me with that."

"All right. How?"

"It's a little complicated."

"Sure."

"And there's a catch: you're gonna have to die."

Mark finally looked her in the eye - he had been staring off into nothingness until now - and Dee thought that there was a spark in his gaze that hadn't been there before.

"Best news I've heard all night," he said.

*12:22am*

Foreman and Long Liz ran towards the diner. They had tried to escape through the forest but found that it seemed to be crawling with Pig Monstrosities. Also, the trees seemed to be working against them, crowding in on them, almost as if they could move on their own.

Now they ran, Foreman turning again and again and blasting away at the creatures chasing

them. He took down one, another, three now, but there were more coming, always more.

They reached the diner, saw someone covered in salt run from the building in pain, and stopped at the back door, Foreman holding Long Liz back for a moment, assessing the situation.

Another moment later, they stormed in the back door, Foreman's rifle at the ready. They found only Dee and Mark standing near the large grill. Dee looked around, saw them and smiled.

"And the other person I wanted to see," she said.

"You aren't Charlie," Foreman said.

"No, I am not," Dee said. "And I need your help in defeating the Cong."

She approached Foreman, put a hand on his shoulder. Foreman immediately batted it away in disgust.

"Okay," Dee said. "No touching. I get it."

"You're damn right," Foreman said.

"Actually, I need your help in defeating something worse than the Cong," Dee said.

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean. That horrid light."

"You know about that?"

"Of course I do. It's mostly just mischievous but it can be far worse. Look what it's done to you all these years."

"What do you know about what it's done to me?"

"I know enough."

"What are y'all talking about?" Long Liz said.

"Foreman here has been menaced by a terrible yellow light ever since he was in 'Nam," Dee explained.

"Okay," Long Liz said.

"What do you mean, 'since I was in 'Nam'?" Foreman said. "Lady, I still am in 'Nam."

"Of course," Dee said. "Stupid of me."

The jukebox, back in the front area of the diner, started playing "Ave Satani," from *The Omen*. Long Liz looked towards the front area, mouth agape.

"What's that doing on the jukebox?" she said. "Sure gives me the willies."

"The presence of inter-dimensional beings disrupts reality," Dee said. "But never mind that right now. We've got bigger fish to fry."

12:24am

Angel, Freya and Trixie found themselves back in the concrete slab of the Station, standing just west of the diner. Smoke idly drifted off their bodies. Freya shook her head, looked around. Angel did the same. Trixie only stared off into the nothingness, a strange look on her face.

"You know my daddy didn't like cornfields," she said.

"Oh, yeah?" Freya said.

"Not at all," Trixie elaborated. "Didn't like corn, full stop. Whenever we drove past a corn field, he'd tell us about the evil of cornfields and the things that lived there. 'Member," she said, hitting Angel in the arm, "that time he was telling us that we should never stop by a cornfield if we were driving past one? He said that you never knew what could wander out of a cornfield. He said he once saw something with really long, stick-like arms shamle out of a huge cornfield, tried to grab him." She went silent for a moment. "Then there was that time he drove straight into that cornfield when we were on that trip. He just drove into it and we were screaming at the top of our lungs. He didn't say anything. He just stopped the car in the middle of that field and got out, leaving us inside to scream our heads off. I don't remember what happened after that. Did we get separated, Heather? I think we got split up, didn't we? You got that nice family in Vegas and I got that shithole one here." She laughed - there wasn't any humor in it. "I know that I never saw Father after that. At least, not till tonight."

"Yeah..." Angel - or was it Heather? - said.

"Your father?" Freya said. "Who's your father?"

"It was that priest we killed," Trixie said. "Well, Heather here killed him. But I helped."

"Yeah," Angel/Heather said.

"He used to touch you," Trixie said. "I'm sorry I didn't do anything about it, Heather. I was too little."

"It's all right, Trixie," Heather said.

Freya looked at the two other girls, blinked in confusion. Then she shook her head.

"We don't have time for this," she said.

As if on cue, they heard a scream. It was a man's scream, angry, enraged. They looked for the source, saw the Card Shark standing on top of the wrecked truck by the entrance of the Station. He shook salt off his body, spit it out of his mouth, retched it up, then screamed some more.

"I don't think we have anywhere else to go but inside," Trixie said, pointing at the diner.

The three of them ran to the building.

"You see," Dee said as she looked around the floor of the back room, "I've been planning this night for a while. I can only beat the Card Shark under these special conditions."

Heather, Freya and Trixie ran into the diner from the front, headed towards the back when they saw the others through the little order window. Foreman raised his rifle when they came in but lowered it when he saw who they were. Dee looked up at them.

"Oh, good, you're here," she said. "I could use the help."

"We're okay, thanks for asking," Freya said. "Well, I'm okay. I don't know about these two."

"Long Liz!" Trixie said. "You're alive."

"I sure am," Long Liz said. "What happened to the three of you?"

"Well," Trixie explained, "we made it out of the Station but we were picked up by this strange yellow light."

"It got you, too, huh?" Foreman said. "Poor bastards."

"I don't really know what happened," Freya said. "We got picked up by this light, yeah, that's true, but we were dropped back off here. Doesn't make any sense."

"It's just playing with you," Dee said. "The Midnight Special is like that. Bit of an asshole, really. But I need it here."

"Why?" Freya said.

"I need the Special here because it weakens the Card Shark," Dee explained. "They're all part of the Consortium: the Card Shark, the Midnight Special, the Insect Gentleman. But they're meant to be kept apart. Three of them here all at once causes instability to reality, which is the only way I'm gonna kill the Card Shark."

"The Insect what?" Freya said.

"The Insect Gentleman," Dee said. "It's what's inside Mark's head, here. He knows it as Mr. Wrench. It wants to spread itself like a disease, an addiction, throughout humanity. But I can use it against the Card Shark."

"How do you know all this?" Long Liz said. "And what in blazes are you looking for on the floor there?"

"I know about all this because I'm mildly psychic," Dee said. "I've been planning this night for about twelve years now. I knew that I didn't want to become one of the Card Shark's face cards, no fuckin' way: I know how quickly he uses them up. I brought you all here, planting the idea in your head to come here. Well, most of you, a few of you are wild cards but you can still be of help...hopefully. And what I'm looking for is..."

She reached a corner of the building and suddenly tore the linoleum away from the floor. It was savage: she looked like an animal while doing it. What was revealed was a trap door set into the concrete floor of the building.

"Jesus Christ in a Cardigan sweater," Long Liz said.

Everyone crowded around Dee and the trap door. She looked up at the rest of them, a big, toothy smile on her face.

"Almost forgot where I put it," Dee said.

With some effort, she opened the trap door: it hadn't been opened in twelve years. There was a set of stairs under the trap door and Dee started down them. Foreman stopped her and handed her his pistol. Dee looked at it, confused.

"Gotta be some tunnel rats down there," he explained.

"Thanks," Dee said.

"You're welcome," Foreman said.

When he wasn't looking, Dee handed the pistol to Long Liz, who took it gratefully. Dee headed down into the hole, speaking as she rummaged around in the dark.

"I paid off the construction crew to put this here when they were building the place," she said. "Isolated way station, forest, mountains. Perfect place to set a trap. See, I knew the Card Shark would think it was his trap, but it would actually be mine."

She came back up the stairs carrying a sturdy wooden box. It was filled with what looked like rectangular objects made out of clay and wrapped in paper.

"What are those?" Trixie asked.

"C-4," Foreman said.

Dee nodded, still smiling.

"We're gonna raise some Hell," she said.

*12:30am*

"Bitch!" the Card Shark screamed.

He stood on top of Gus's wrecked truck, the last of the salt finally gone. It shouldn't have hurt as much as it did. Salt was heavy magic, of course. And it could hurt him, of course, but not like this. It was usually more of an annoyance, really. So what was going on?

"Lights in the sky," he said. "But not Travelers. You didn't. You couldn't have. No. No way."

He looked around. His beautiful Pig Monstrosities surrounded him. They came to him when he



was in pain and they were all here now. Only nine of them remained but that was more than enough.

"Kill," he ordered them in a soft voice, almost a whisper.

The Monstrosities squealed in delight and started to stalk towards the diner. The Card Shark smiled as he watched.

Nobody was coming out of that diner alive.

*12:32am*

"So what's the plan?" Heather said.

"You're gonna take half of these," Dee said, starting to hand bricks of C-4 to the girl, along with a detonator. "Put 'em on the gas pumps and the stand." She turned to Foreman. "The rest goes to you. Foreman, put these on the front of a good car, one that still runs."

"Mine'll still run," Mark said.

He handed Foreman the keys to his truck. Foreman nodded to him.

"Good," Dee said. "Put them on the front of the truck. Then comes the hard part. You gotta get the Midnight Special to materialize in front of the wrecked truck out there."

"How do I do that?" Foreman said. "There's VC running all over this place."

"It wants to taunt you," Dee said. "To torment you. So just focus your fear on that place. If it works, you drive the truck straight towards the Special at exactly 12:50am, bail at the last second, hit the detonator and blow the shit out of the Special and the truck."

"You mean I get to kill that fuckin' thing?"

"Oh, yeah. With the Card Shark and the Insect Gentleman here, it won't know what hit it. Plus, you'll destroy the semi, too. Freya, Heather, Trixie, you'll lure as many of those Monstrosities as you can towards the gas pumps, then hit your detonator, hopefully killing 'em all. After that, you pick up Foreman and Long Liz and high-tail it outta here."

"That's it?" Freya said.

"That's it," Dee said.

"What about Mark here?" Heather asked.

"He's gonna be in here with me. We're gonna kill the Card Shark."

"And then he's gonna leave with you?" Freya asked.

Dee shook her head. "He's not gonna make it."

"What?" Long Liz said.

"It's okay," Mark said. "I don't deserve to make it through the night. If it were up to me, I'd say

that I deserve to get hit by a truck and dragged for nine miles."

"What did you do?" Freya said.

Mark opened his mouth to reply but Dee interrupted him.

"Let's not go into that," she said. "We're pressed for time. Everybody but Mark out the back door. I think I hear them coming."

"All right," Freya said, shaking her head. "This isn't going to work. We're all gonna fuckin' die."

Heather put her arms around the woman, her razored, metal dick almost spearing the woman's upper thigh. Freya looked into the girl's face and made to spit in it again. This time, Heather opened her mouth and caught the spit, swallowed it.

"You disgusting bitch," Freya said.

Heather/Angel smiled. They kissed, long and hard. Foreman looked away in disgust. Long Liz watched in lust. Mark acted like he wasn't interested. Trixie smiled pleasantly. Dee looked a little annoyed. When it was over, Dee raised her hands.

"That's sweet and all," she said, "but didn't I say we were pressed for time? Get moving!"

They all did.

*12:35am*

The Pig Monstrosities crawled around the edges of the diner. When the survivors came running out of the back door, they were on them right away. Foreman, Long Liz and Heather fired their guns at them as they ran, the rest of them just running, trying not to look back.

It was all going down very fast.

*12:36am*

"So what do we do?" Mark asked.

Dee simply watched the television. For the whole time that they had been back in the diner, it had been simply static. But a second ago, the static had cleared, raising the curtains on a commercial. After that, a slim, pale, sexy woman with blonde hair and small, pointy tits writhed around on the top of a large, over-sized tombstone - a sepulchre, maybe? - wearing a revealing black dress. Very Gothic. She wore expressive makeup on her face.

"Welcome back to *Graveyard Habits*," she said, her writhing finally coming to an end. "I'm your host, Dementia. *Dark Night of the Scarecrow* is really getting going, don't you think? Sure is

scaring me. You know that feeling you get when you're just about to fall asleep and you jerk back awake suddenly, as if you just saved yourself from falling? Do you ever think that you're really on the Gallows and the executioner just tightened the noose around your neck and for a second - just for a split second - you saw the reality of what was really going on before dropping back into this little delusion of a world? Huh? Do you think that's what's really going on? Nah. Me, neither. Now let's get back to the movie."

The screen cut from the lovely Dementia to a movie, though it didn't look like *Dark Night of the Scarecrow*. A group of children - dead children - stood in a tight group in a darkened hallway. Their dead eyes stared out of the screen at Mark.

"Oh," Dee said, annoyed, "put Dementia back on." She turned to Mark. "She's sultry."

"What do we do?" Mark repeated.

Dee sighed, walked to one of the tables in the center of the diner - only a few feet in front of the crashed car - and slapped a hand down on it. She kept her eyes on Mark the whole time and now she smiled.

"Well," she said, "we fuck."

"Um," Mark said. "Okay. That's all?"

"For you? Yes. But you'll be dead by the time you come. It's a little more complicated for me."

"All right."

"So, first things first: take off your clothes."

Mark obeyed orders. Despite everything that was going on, despite the murder of his wife by his own hand, despite the insane night, despite the pain, despite himself, he was rather excited. First a good fuck then the exquisite release of Death. He threw his shirt aside: won't need that again; pushed down his jeans: over his shoes; stripped off his underwear: he was already hard.

He stood before Dee, naked except for his shoes, dick pointing straight at her. The woman had already removed her jacket and top, revealing her amazing breasts to him. No fake tits here: no siree. Nothing but grade-A, all natural tit meat, non-homogenized.

Dee kicked off her boots and peeled off her pants. Mark was now alarmed. Was that a cock? It was!

"What the fuck?" Mark said.

Dee was a perfect woman everywhere but between her legs, where a large, hard dick protruded from a small tuft of orange red pubic hair and a big set of balls hung below, tight against her body, ready to get busy.

"You..." Mark said. "You have a dick."

"Oh, get over it," Dee said, shaking her head in annoyance. "Now get on the table, on your back. I promise you: you're going to enjoy this."

Mark wasn't so sure about that but he did as he was told and sat on the table then leaned back. Dee climbed on top of him and kissed him. It was surprisingly sweet.

Then he winced as she started in on him.

*12:39am*

Heather/Angel fired at the Pig Monstrosities as they came. She, Trixie and Freya were near the gas pumps and Heather held off the creatures while the other two set the C-4 against gas pumps and the stand. The rain came down on them hard, seeming to come from every direction, bouncing off every object in the area and ricocheting all over the place.

"Hurry up," Heather said. "This won't work for long. I gotta be nearly out of ammo."

And yet, some distant part of her mind was telling her that she should have run out of ammo some time ago. Didn't this thing only have six shots? It didn't make any sense; was, in fact, like a movie where the hero never had to reload. She shook it off: it was a weird night.

"We're going as fast as we can!" Trixie yelled.

From the shadows of the little building, Nose Candy watched them, face covered in blood, and sharp, bloody pencil in hand. His gaze was fixed squarely on Trixie.

"Zebra," he said. "Little fucking zebra."

*12:40am*

Foreman fired his rifle at the three Monstrosities that were on their tail. He and Long Liz ran around the diner on the west side, heading around to the front. They reached Mark's truck, Long Liz in the lead. Immediately, she started placing C-4 on the front of the truck, every last brick that she carried. She set the radio triggers in place in each one as Foreman covered her.

She felt good; more alive than she had ever felt, in fact. She barely felt the pain in her head as she finished setting the charges.

"Ready!" she yelled.

"Okay, get in!" Foreman yelled.

He stopped firing long enough to grab Mark's keys from his pocket and throw them to her. She caught them deftly out of the air, opened the passenger door, got inside. She unlocked the driver's side

for him.

Foreman started to move around the front of the truck, opened the door and ducked his head to get into the cab. A Pig Monstrosity slammed into the driver's side door; Foreman used it like a shield. The creature shook its head in pain then Foreman slammed the door into it again. It fell to the ground, knocked out. Foreman laughed. Long Liz happened to look in front of her as he did. The truck was parked back to the diner, front to the entrance of the Station, where Gus's wrecked truck was. Standing on top of the wreck was the Card Shark. He was looking straight at them.

Long Liz frowned.

The Card Shark smiled. He dealt a hand from his deck and the cards came flying towards the truck. They were all headed straight towards Foreman.

"Get down!" Long Liz screamed.

She lunged across the cab as Foreman was halfway in/halfway out, his face turned in terror towards the entrance of the Station. The cards smashed through the front windshield.

Nearly all of them hit Long Liz.

It was like a hail of bullets, like 'Nam. Long Liz was riddled with cards, hitting her and digging into her flesh. She didn't scream, didn't seem capable of screaming at the moment.

Four cards hit Foreman: three in the upper right shoulder, causing pain but little damage. The fourth card scraped his head above his left eye, cutting a path in his scalp and hitting the seat behind him, driving itself inside like a missile.

Grunting in pain, he got inside the truck, pushing Long Liz to her side. He slammed the door closed with some effort; it was much harder than it should have been. He got the keys out of Long Liz's hand and started the vehicle up. It ran like a dream. Foreman got it moving, tore around the diner on the east side, planning to do a few loops around the back parking lot before heading straight towards the entrance of the Station again.

"Ah, Jesus," Long Liz said next to him.

He looked over at her. She was in bad shape. More than forty cards were embedded in her body. She was bleeding bad. It wouldn't be long now.

"It's okay," Foreman said. "You can cash out. It's all right. Died like a man."

"No," Long Liz said.

"It's all right. I seen bigger, stronger guys than you - brothers - seen 'em turn and run like little girls. It's a good death."

"No, I can't. I gotta...hold 'em."

For a moment, he didn't know what she was talking about, then he saw that the cards were

moving, trying to pull out of her. Long Liz was holding them with her arms, trying to stop them from returning to their dealer.

"If I can hold 'em," she said, "then he can't use 'em."

Foreman nodded. He looked down at the cards embedded in his shoulder. Wincing, he punched them, hard, driving them deeper into his body.

"Yeah," he said. "Fuck you."

"Right," Long Liz said.

She could barely speak now. Foreman watched as she turned over in her seat and pressed her body against the cushions. She screamed in agonizing pain as she drove the cards into herself.

"Hang on!" Foreman said. "Just a few minutes more!"

*12:43am*

"No," the Card Shark said. "No!"

His cards wouldn't return. He could feel them trying to escape, failing. This couldn't be happening. It was impossible. But here it was, like a cockroach that you thought you'd killed suddenly appearing in front of you on the rug, tickling your toes.

In a rage, the Card Shark hopped off the wreck and started walking towards the diner, his eyes fire, his hair actually smoking, the rain hissing and sizzling as it hit his head.

This was going to end now.

*12:45am*

Trixie set the last brick of C-4 in place and stood up, a smile on her face. She looked at the other two women.

"All set," she said.

"Okay," Heather said. "Let's go."

"We have to stay here long enough for those things to be here when this place explodes. Should we go through the forest?"

"I don't know," Heather said.

She took a shot at one of the creatures, sending it back a few yards in a panic. As the three of them looked at the creatures coming from the southwest, Nose Candy bounded from the shadows, pencil in hand.

"Bitch!" he said.

He was on Trixie instantly, stabbing her again and again, all over her back, driving the pencil in deep each time. Trixie went down. Nose Candy laughed and ran like the coward he was. He headed west, across the back parking lot. Heather shot at him several times but missed. Nose Candy disappeared around the other side of the diner.

"Cocksucker!" Heather said.

Freya cradled Trixie as she sank to the ground. She was losing a lot of blood.

"Carry her," Heather said.

Freya nodded and started to pick Trixie up. But the girl stopped her.

"No," she said. "Leave me here. Those things. They can smell my blood, I know it. They'll come for me and...you can get away."

Freya shook her head as Heather began to sob above the two of them. The Pig Monstrosities began to close in on them.

"Go!" Trixie screamed.

Freya got up as Heather crouched down. She took hold of her sister's hand and they shared a silent moment. Heather kissed Trixie's forehead. She got up and took hold of Freya's hand. The two of them ran, heading in the same direction that Nose Candy had fled. Trixie watched them go, sinking, sinking slowly to the ground in a pile of her own blood.

She was on her back now, the rain pelting down on her like sheets of rubber bullets. There was movement above her, on top of the gas pump stand.

It was a bird.

A large bird, one that looked like an owl. She had seen it earlier tonight. It felt so long ago now. She knew now what the bird was.

It was Death.

Come to collect. It had warned her earlier tonight, told her that it was coming, but Trixie didn't speak its language and didn't understand at the time. Now she did. She wept a little then grit her teeth for a moment, bit down on her tongue to get the rage going.

"Come and get me!" she managed to scream at the Pig Monstrosities before coughing violently, blood spattering her face.

They turned towards her - all of them, even the three that had been chasing Foreman and Long Liz a moment before - saw the blood, filled their nostrils with the sweet scent of it. Then, slowly, they started towards her. They had all the time in the world.

She was a wounded, caught animal.

12:47am

The Card Shark stood at the back of the crashed car in the diner entrance. He shook his head in disbelief. Dee was furiously fucking some guy on one of the diner tables, just railing him. The guy's face was curious: he grit his teeth, clearly in pain, but his eyes were bright and intense, clearly enjoying it.

"This is your plan?" the Card Shark asked as he sauntered into the diner. "This?"

Dee looked up at him, not missing a beat in the rhythm of her fucking. She smiled at him, her whole body covered in sweat.

"Drawing the energy out of him?" the Card Shark said. "So it gives you a little power? So what? He's just some regular Joe. Or John, maybe I should say." He chuckled at his own joke. "Okay, I'll bite. What do you hope to accomplish? Huh? Because I'm gonna rip your head off."

Dee still stared at him, still had that smug, self-satisfied look on her face. Then she winked.

"Hmm," Dementia said on the television, "strange things afoot in that small little town. Do you know, my little home in the cemetery was overrun with rats once? Oh yes. Rats. Horrid little things. You know what I did to get rid of them? Made friends with them. Oh yes. I set out food, sat on the ground when they were near, softly sang to them. Then, when they were finally comfortable with me and they were all gathered on the floor in front of me, hypnotized by my voice, I doused them with gasoline and set them on fire. Then I left my little home and let it burn. Because you can always find a new home."

She smiled wide. The Card Shark looked from the television to Dee and took a step back. Dee's sinister smile was the same as the woman on the television. In fact, for a moment, they seemed like the same woman: different hair but otherwise the same. It wasn't true, of course, but in that moment, it seemed like it was.

"What did you do?" he said.

"I beat you," Dee said and began to laugh.

Then her face filled with lust. She panted heavily.

"I'm almost there," she said. "What about you, Mark?"

"Yeah," Mark managed to say.

"What did you do?!" the Card Shark said.

"I invited a few of your friends here tonight. Hope that's okay. Hey, you got the time?"



*12:49am*

Freya and Heather watched - from a distance - in horror as the Pig Monstrosities went at Trixie. The girl screamed in agonizing pain as they torn her apart and started to eat her. Freya checked her watch. 12:49.

Jesus, when would it be 12:50?! Finally, she couldn't take it anymore and grabbed the detonator from Heather's hand, pulled the trigger.

Trixie's screams abruptly stopped as all the gas tanks around her, as well as Nose Candy's little domain, exploded in a massive ball of fire that reached high into the sky. All nine of the remaining Pig Monstrosities went up with it, their squeals of pain ringing like beautiful music in Freya's ears. The explosion set the forest to the east of the Station on fire, the tops of trees going up like candles and spreading, although not very far. The rain would take care of that soon enough.

Freya and Heather were crying as they watched the fire. Mark's truck drove past them and, for a brief moment, Foreman and Heather locked gazes.

In that moment, Heather knew that Foreman wasn't going to make it.

*12:49am*

Foreman rounded the diner one last time, focusing all his fear on the entrance of the Station. He thought of the VC, standing there in front of the wrecked truck, thought of that horrible, sickly yellow light moving back and forth, thought of all the friends he had lost in 'Nam.

And, yes, he now realized that he wasn't in some far away country fighting the war anymore. He was in the ol' US of A, in Arizona, fighting something far worse. Something scarier.

He used that fear, used it and pushed it out in front of him, projecting it onto the wrecked truck. He finished rounding the diner and saw it. It was hanging just over the wreck, buzzing like a million wasps.

He wiped blood out of his eyes: his scalp was bleeding like a stuck pig.

He got ready to jump, used a free hand to open the driver's side door. Or, he would have, if it wasn't stuck. Panicked, he tried it several more times but it wouldn't budge. That damn thing had busted the door when it had ran head-first into it. He shook his head. Okay, then, if that was how it was going to be, then that was how it was going to be.

He spared a glance at Long Liz, next to him. She was dead. The cards in her body finally began to worm their way out of her.

"Don't think you have enough time, boys," he said with a chuckle. "I know I don't."

He was going into that thing, whatever it was, and he wasn't coming out. He drove straight towards the light, which swiftly lowered itself to the ground to meet him.

"Fuck you!" Foreman screamed.

He started to laugh. It was suddenly the funniest thing that he had ever seen in his life. A giant yellow light? Why was that scary? He laughed loud and hard as he drove straight at it, grabbing the detonator off the seat beside him and pulling the trigger the moment the truck hit the light.

It was exactly

*12:50am*

The first explosion had rocked the Card Shark in place and he stumbled a bit but was fine. This second explosion, closer and behind him, knocked him to his knees. His head was suddenly in incredible pain.

"What..." he said, "what was that?"

"Oh, that?" Dee said, not looking at him anymore, just looking down at Mark as she fucked him. "That was the Midnight Special. Foreman just killed him. He's fucking gone."

"No," the Card Shark said. "No, I don't believe it."

"You ready, Mark?" Dee said.

"Yes," Mark said.

Dee opened her mouth wide and bit down on Mark's neck. Blood sprayed up into the air, covering Dee's skin. Mark screamed but he also came, his dick erupting all over his stomach. Dee let go of him, bit down again, this time on his lower jaw, which broke off under her immense strength. She crunched it between her big teeth. She bit down again, on his neck once more. There was a pop as his neck broke. Mark was already dead, his head now detached from his body. But his body was still moving, still pushing forward with every thrust of Dee's hips, like some kind of male praying mantis whose head had been bitten off by its mate.

Dee came inside the man, her whole body shaking with pleasure. Mark's body finally stopped moving. Dee held his detached head in her hands and pushed on the temples with both hands. With a sickening crunch, she crushed the skull, a horrible scream coming from within.

She dropped it to the table in a bloody mess. A large, cockroach like creature crawled from the mess of blood, hair, brains and skull. It tried to scuttle across the table but Dee caught it with one quick hand.

"No," she said, "you're not going anywhere, Mr. Wrench. Or do you prefer the Insect Gentleman?"

She laughed as the Card Shark stared in pain and horror. Dee looked straight at him as she crushed the bug in her hand. It screamed as it died.

"This isn't possible," the Card Shark said as another jolt of pain crashed through his head.

"Oh, but it is," Dee said.

She cast aside the remains of Mr. Wrench and pulled out of Mark, stood defiantly in front of the Card Shark, who slowly stood up despite the pain. He was shaking. The whole building was shaking. Dee only smiled.

"This can't be happening!" the Card Shark screamed.

Dee felt the power coursing through her: Mark, the Midnight Special, the Insect Gentleman. Their power was inside her. She slowly walked towards the Card Shark. Around her, the diner began to collapse. The television sparked, then exploded, sending glass in every direction. The tiles in the floor began to lift into the air, turning, then spinning around Dee.

In the back area of the diner, the grill exploded, throwing fire in every direction. Here in the front area, Mark's body and Lucy's body, both headless now, rose into the air as well, along with what was left of Gus's body, and began to spin in a wide circle around the ceiling. The tables imploded, crushing themselves into small balls of twisted metal and splintered wood.

Behind Dee, the bar ripped out of the ground and hit the ceiling, embedded itself there like a row of teeth. Every bottle of booze behind the bar shot through the air like a bullet, hitting the ground around the Card Shark.

"This is the apocalypse, little card boy!" Dee said. "Are you ready?!"

The jukebox was still working somehow, the record not skipping, not even a little bit. "Warlord" by Wrath belted through the diner. Dee loved this song.

The Card Shark began to scream. It was a loud, inhuman wailing, full of pain, despair and utter defeat. He pressed his hands into his temples, his mouth open wider than was humanly possible. His hat blew away, then his clothes were torn away, leaving him naked. He had no genitals; was simply bare like a Ken doll. His skin started to run, then solidified once again and began to flake off in small clumps, raising into the air around him, revealing his sickly muscle underneath.

Every bone in his body broke, one by one, starting with his toes. They snapped like little bits of celery, the kind you spread with peanut butter or cream cheese and bite down on hungrily. His legs popped, then his pelvis, then his ribs, ripping into his lungs like daggers. His arms cracked and dropped to his sides. His shoulders twisted apart.

His neck and head were stubborn. He shook, no longer screaming, his teeth grit together, his face beat red. His eyes exploded in his skull, gore streaming out of them along with some blackish, brownish bile. Dee laughed.

The Card Shark's teeth shattered and his jaw dropped open, screaming again. Then the sound was cut off as his vocal cords exploded and his tongue slithered out of his mouth like a snake. It dropped to the floor and writhed about.

The Card Shark floated into the air, his legs and body useless and dangling below his head. His mouth opened and closed silently, blood pouring out of it. Dee continued to laugh.

The Card Shark's neck broke, his head snapping to one side - the right - with a pop. His skull went a moment later, collapsing in on itself. His whole body followed suit, compressing into a ball of bone and flesh about three feet in diameter.

In the moment before the ball exploded, Dee saw something - a hole in reality. Through it, she saw the Card Shark's true form, but only for a moment: a small, diseased creature, bent over and singing some insane song, trying to please an idiot God who danced, brainless and dickless somewhere far away. It terrified Dee but it was gone a moment later.

The ball of flesh and bone exploded, pieces flying in all directions. Dee chuckled to herself, no longer a hardy laugh but a small, satisfied bark. On the jukebox, Wrath ended and The Avengers' cover of "Paint it Black" wailed.

Dee was a sight to behold: a naked woman with a hard penis, already wet but ready to go again, chaos swirling around her, getting faster and faster. There was a look of serene satisfaction on her face.

A second later the building collapsed on top of her.

*12:51am*

Heather and Freya watched as Mark's truck hit the large, creepy yellow light head on, the C-4 detonating the very instant it hit the light. The explosion was louder than anything either woman had ever heard, louder even than the explosion of the gas pumps just a moment ago. And that shouldn't have been: the gas pumps should have been louder; the same amount of C-4 had been spent but the gas pumps gave it the edge.

But it was true: this explosion was louder. Freya thought it must have been the light. What had Dee called it? The Midnight Special, that was it. The truck exploded, then the light, which blew up like a supernova, sending light in every direction.

Gus's wrecked truck went after that, blowing apart and clearing a path for them to escape. Freya

had her hands over her mouth.

"They never got out of there," she said through muffling fingers.

Heather shook her head.

"No," she said, "they didn't. They're both dead."

After this second explosion, color seemed to come back into the world all at once. Under the sound of the storm and the rain, Freya could hear the sound of coyotes howling somewhere, could hear the sound of birds escaping the storm to their nests, could hear cars passing somewhere out on the highway. They were all wonderful sounds and Freya found herself smiling, despite herself.

That was when the diner began to shake, as if gripped by an earthquake. The women looked at the building, then each other. They heard things smashing around inside the diner, things breaking. They heard the television explode. Freya was starting to think that whatever was happening was going to take the entirety of the Station with it, that it would just shatter the asphalt and pull everything down deep, to the very center of the earth.

The two of them started to run south, towards the front of the diner and Freya's car. But Freya broke off, headed around the back of the diner.

"What are you doing?!" Heather yelled after her.

"The keys!" Freya said. "Roy had the fucking keys! We'll need those!"

Heather huffed in annoyance but followed Freya. The two women rounded the building, their feet sticking to the asphalt slightly in the large congealed pool of Roy's blood.

Freya knelt down and fumbled in Roy's pockets. Disturbed bugs crawled out of the man's corpse and skittered around Freya's feet and knees. Inside the diner, the grill exploded and the back door swung open violently, threatening to tear off its hinges. Heather yelped, startled.

Freya finally wrapped her fingers around the keys and yanked them out of Roy's pocket, tearing the fabric in the process. She stood up, starting to run, Heather right behind her.

They rounded the building as bricks starting flying out of the edifice like bullets. One sailed right past Freya's head, missing her temple by less than an inch. She didn't stop, didn't slow down, kept running.

The diner shook, started to crumble in on itself. The roof was going to give out any moment. Would it take the whole Station with it? Freya didn't want to stick around and find out.

They got in the car, Freya driving, Heather in the passenger seat. She kept her eyes on the collapsing diner as Freya got the car going.

"Come on!" Heather said.

The car revved to life and Freya took off, reversing and spinning the wheel. She was now facing

the former wrecked truck, which was now the exit. She gunned it out of the Station.

Heather turned to watch the diner collapse. The crash caused a kind of shockwave and she saw the asphalt around the diner break apart and fly up in the air several feet before crashing back down. The shockwave actually caused the car to swerve a little but Freya was able to keep it under control.

And they were out. Gone. Off onto the highway, mercifully away from the Station. Heather found herself laughing in relief. Freya cautiously joined her, but soon their laughter turned to sobs, then stopped all together.

In their hurry to escape, neither of them questioned the fact that they hadn't needed the keys to get into the car at all.

The doors had been unlocked.

*No Time. No Place.*

Foreman opened his eyes.

An act which was, in itself, a surprise. Didn't he die just now? He thought that was what had happened but it seemed as if he was wrong. What could he see? Just stars, a wide, open sky. The stars were dazzling in their brightness.

He was lying on his back on cold, hard ground. He sat up. His head ached and there was sharp pain there, as well. In his shoulder, too, it seemed. With some effort, he stood up. His legs and back ached, as well.

He remembered the cards embedded in his shoulder and looked down. There they were, stuck into his flesh. He cautiously grabbed one. It wasn't moving. He pulled it out. It was covered in blood and was a bit crushed but it was just a normal card now. He dropped it on the ground and pulled out the other two, discarding them. He took out a handkerchief from his pocket and wrapped it around his bleeding scalp as he assessed his surroundings.

He was still in the Station, standing at the entrance by the highway. But there was something different about it now. There was no storm, and no cars in the parking lot. No light, either. The street lamps were dark, as was the diner itself. He took a few steps closer to the building and found that it was covered in moss and vines. They had rooted deep in the ground, breaking up the asphalt.

So he was somewhere that resembled his own world but wasn't his own world. Where the Hell was he?

He walked out onto the highway, which was also cracked and overgrown with moss and vines and plant life. He saw a few deer run past him up ahead.

Perhaps this was the place that the light - the Midnight Special - took things when it wanted to do so. Perhaps this was its world, its home. Foreman had no way of knowing. All he did know was that the Midnight Special was dead now - he had destroyed it - and that meant that he was stuck here. This was his world now, for better or worse.

He walked along the empty highway towards town. There, in the distance, he saw a few makeshift camps, fires burning in the cold dark. He no longer had his rifle, nor his pistol but - he checked his right leg - he still had his knife. He unsheathed it, got it ready for anything.

God knew what lurked in this uncharted shadow dimension.

His new home.

*1:11am*

The car drove into the night, heading south. Heather twisted the knob on the radio, didn't find anything strange, no weird signals from another planet, just creepy far-right-wing talk radio and music. She stopped on the music but didn't turn it up too loud.

"You think she made it out?" Freya said.

"I don't know," Heather said. "Probably not."

Freya nodded. Her gaze drifted out to the highway stretching ahead of them, then idly up to the rear view mirror. Her eyes widened in shock as she saw the Shape sit up in the backseat of the car, something raised in its hand like a weapon, going right for Heather.

"Watch out!" Freya screamed.

Heather immediately ducked. The sharp pencil hit the seat instead of her head.

"Fucking bitches!" Nose Candy said.

He pulled the pencil out of the seat, raised it again for another strike. Freya jostled the car, sending Nose Candy flying to one side, then the other.

"Stop it!" he yelled. "Goddamn women drivers! Why'd we even let you get behind the wheel in the first place?!"

Heather - or was it Angel? - grit her teeth and bounded over the seat and into the back. She led with her pistol and whipped it across Nose Candy's teeth. At least four of them shattered in his jaw and he yelped in pain and surprise.

"Fuck you!" Angel screamed. "You don't deserve to live, you waste of skin!"

"My fuckin' teeth!" Nose Candy said, almost incoherently through his shattered jaw.

Angel pistol whipped him again, this time landing the blow against his left cheek. She heard

something break and his cheek was now sunken, displaced.

Nose Candy tried to fight her off with the pencil, bringing it up into the air. As it was framed against the small back window, Angel raised her pistol and fired. The bullet took him straight in the hand. It blew apart, fingers bouncing about the cab, the bullet shattering the small window behind the hand.

Nose Candy screamed at the top of his lungs. Freya winced at his screams, turned the radio up. It was a Runaways song, some live track.

As Nose Candy cradled his wounded hand as it spouted blood, Heather grabbed his legs, spread them apart, torn off his pants. She led with her razored dick, making a new sex hole in him: between his balls and his asshole, right there in the taint. Then she fucked him.

Blood erupted into the air with each thrust. Nose Candy was in so much pain that he couldn't even scream. It simply wasn't possible.

Angel screamed for him.

"Fuck you!" she yelled. "Fuck you, dad! You can't do those things to me! You hear me?! Do you fucking understand?!"

After a few more thrusts, the metal dick actually broke off inside the man. Frustrated, Angel untangled herself from the leather harness and wrapped it around the man's neck.

She let his face turn blue - sitting on his arms, digging a knee into his destroyed hand - before giving him a moment of relief. She let the leather harness drop to the floor of the car, put the pistol down next to her and held her hand out over the seats to Freya.

"Give me your switchblade," she said.

Freya pulled the knife from her pants and slapped it into Angel's waiting, open palm. Angel cut off one of the man's balls, then the other. Then she took an agonizing few moments to carefully castrate Nose Candy, her face a rictus smile as she did it. When there was just a flap of skin holding the diseased member to the rest of the man's body, she pulled it off with a plop. Blood sprayed from his crotch, covering her.

Angel laughed, swung the severed dick back and forth. In a flash, her face was serious again: furious. She grabbed the severed balls off the seat and shoved them down the man's throat.

"Swallow!" she said. "Fucking swallow!"

Nose Candy's head lolled one way then the other but he managed to swallow. Angel shoved the dick down his throat.

"Eat!" she said. "Eat eat eat!"

Nose Candy bit down once, twice, then couldn't take any more. He shook his head. Angel shook



her own head along with his then slowly picked up the pistol and jammed it into his asshole and pulled the trigger.

There were five shots - muffled by Nose Candy's fleshy body - before the pistol clicked. Nose Candy shook violently, bile flowing out of his mouth. A moment later, he lay still, dead. Angel kept pulling the trigger: click, click, click.

Click.

Finally, she sat down in the back seat next to the man's dead body, leaving the pistol stuck halfway into his asshole. She simply stared out the front window into nothingness. In the front seat, Freya looked up into the rear view mirror, tears in her eyes.

They were tears of relief.

And, despite herself, tears of joy.

*1:46am*

The rain had finally stopped and so had all the fires. Police were now in full force at what remained of the Station. It was curious: based on all the carnage they found, they were surprised that there weren't any reports until just within the last hour. There were spent shells all over the place, crashed cars, an engine sitting outside an eighteen wheeler, a man torn in half out back of the diner. None of it added up.

The diner itself had completely collapsed. It was going to take hours to clear the rubble.

*2:17am*

Freya and Angel stopped in a ditch off the highway near a little town somewhere between Moonstone and Phoenix. Using a crowbar from the trunk, Angel destroyed Nose Candy's face, shattering his jaw, making him unidentifiable. Freya filled the car with gasoline from the extra can - also from the trunk - made sure she took the plates off it before setting the car alight with her Zippo.

The two of them watched it burn, Nose Candy still inside it. They were a sight to behold: both of them covered in blood, Angel naked from the waist down.

"Is your name really Heather?" Freya asked.

"I really don't know," Angel said.

"Was Trixie really your sister?"

"I don't know."

"And that man you killed, the priest, was he really your father?"

Angel shook her head. Her eyes filled with tears.

"I don't know," she repeated.

Freya put an arm around her. Slowly, they walked towards the little town.

*4:46am*

They continued driving, deep into the night. Phoenix came and went and they kept going south. In the little town near where they had torched the car, they found a house with a car in the driveway but no one home. They broke in, took a shower together, stole some clothes then stole the car after they found the keys and wiping the house of their prints. They switched plates so it would be harder to track.

Angel lay against Freya as she drove. She kissed her on the cheek.

"Tucson?" she suggested.

"Yeah," Freya agreed. "Tucson."

Why not? It was as good a place as any.

"A hotel," Angel said.

"Yes," Freya said.

"A bed."

"For sure."

"You. Me. Only a layer of sweat between us."

"Count me in."

On the radio - some AM station - David Bowie's "Lady Grinning Soul" echoed into the night. Angel closed her eyes and drifted to sleep lying against Freya.

Freya kept driving. Up ahead, a yellow, diamond-shaped sign informed her that the right lane was ending. She merged left, kept going.

Two souls approaching dawn.

*6:55am*

It was a big bright morning, the sun seeming to smile as it peeked out from behind the mountains. Birds chirped their own little symphonies, roosters crowed at the nearby farms, the early school bell at Moonstone University rang out loud and hopeful.

Things were not quite as sunny at the Station.

O'Bannion walked cautiously through the rubble, picking his way through the evidence. He was young for a detective - 30 - but he knew his job. There was more than one body here in what remained of the diner. There was a headless body of a man, another of a woman, a second man torn in half up the middle and a third man lying on the ground, crushed by the rubble. Or was this fourth body a man? It had a penis, yes, but it also had tits, tits which didn't look fake. And the face was beautiful, like a woman's.

He shook his head. It was a puzzler, all right.

He looked around. There were only a few police left on site, watching the perimeter, making sure no one tried to get in. He frowned.

Was that an impossibly large bird perched on one of the trees to the east? He squinted. Was it an owl? It couldn't be, could it? Another puzzle.

When he looked back down at the body of the man/woman, her eyes were open. She smiled up at him.

"What the-" was all he got out before Dee grabbed him and pulled him down to her.

She bit deep into his face, eating. She bit down again and again until he was more flesh than bone, like a crumpled, pink garbage bag fluttering in the wind.

*6:56am*

Dee felt her body regain its power, felt her wounds heal. Her dick was hard again, ready to fuck, ready for anything. It was like a curious case of morning wood. She finished with O'Bannion, tossed him aside, dead, and stood up.

The cops were on her in an instant, four of them. They crowded around her but didn't dare approach. They pointed their pistols at her.

"Don't move!" one of them screamed.

Dee smiled a sinister smile and raised her hands in the air. The smile turned into a sneer. She would play their game but only for a moment. After that, they wouldn't know what hit them.

It was going to be one Hell of a time.

**THE END**

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