

"I was expecting something black and crippling, and Mary delivered...again. Sometimes whimsical, sometimes pure evil, every story is a dark tumble into terror that hits quick and leaves you reeling...Her style is vibrantly vicious, and each story is equally unforgettable...With consistently believable characters and smart storylines, Mary will win your respect as a writer that knows how to wow without bowing to convention."

—**Jezy Wolfe**

"What elevates *Pearls and Prey* above so many of its horror-genre brethren is that Goff has so much more than horror on her mind. These stories and poems bleed more than blood—they bleed eroticism, rage, disillusionment. She is pearl-diving, and she isn't afraid to get herself—or you—dirty in the process. This is macabre writing sung A Capella—naked, raw, and transcendent of the genre in a way few new writers would think to try. Good, good show—with the promise of even better to come. Superb."

—**Wayne Spitzer**

"No longer should we only think of the classics when we think of horror. Very Lovecraftian in style, Goff is a name that deserves to haunt the minds of horror fans everywhere. Mary Goff has an uncanny ability to make her reader see images as if we were walking around inside her head while she dreams up (sometimes literally) these often disturbing stories. We feel the cold, smell the blood, and sense the fear along with her characters...She paints a very visual landscape that isn't always pretty. And that's a good thing."

—**Valarie Overstreet**

"...what makes the collection special is all in the way she writes – the way she draws you into her own nightmares...she wants you to literally get goosebumps and chatter your teeth...And fear is something she gives you and makes you keep with you while you carry on about your day, constantly checking behind your shoulder to make sure none of her tales have followed you home. Because they will..."

—**Jessica Wells**

"Not many people can have a story roll off their tongues and onto paper with the knack Mary Goff has and have it be something that stays in their head long after the reading is done."

—**The Angry Princess**

"Within *Pearls and Prey*, Mary Goff exquisitely evokes the psychodynamic teratosis and malevolent animus lurking unbound within the collective consciousness of humanity..."

—**Necromagickal, The Chainsaw Mafia**

**PEARLS
&
PREY**

A collection by Mary Goff

Pearls and Prey by Mary Goff ©2009

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Front cover illustration by Bryan Bloodsoaker © 2009

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Finally, to those fair-weather friends and the people who love(d) to kick me when I'm down: Fuck you. Thanks for the fuel and the fodder.

Wear a smile!

A word from the author:

To explain myself, I believe that nightmares are some of the worst kinds of horror because they expose your darkest fears and they reveal things about yourself that you don't like—they also aide comprehension of someone else's deeds, as well as your own. Sometimes these things can be exorcised, sometimes they dissipate into the morning with each waking blink, never to surface again but still, these worries and fears linger deep within you.

Am I stating that because a person has a nightmare that they kill their father with their bare hands, they are capable of doing such a thing? Am I stating that because you have a nightmare about whatever your darkest most horrible deed could be—that you have a strong desire to make this a reality? No. Far from it. I am suggesting that nightmares are truly one of the most personal of horrors and I decided to write out one of my own nightmares.

You can either enjoy the particular story i.e. "Cry Wolf", in the sense and spirit that it was written—the sharing of nightmares, with the knowledge that this will horrify you...or you can strongly hate me for what you have read, believing me capable of such horror. Either way, I hope that you walk away with a sense of ill. I love horror that doesn't have a happy ending or doesn't feel good...most people do not. I hope that "*Cry, Wolf*" doesn't feel good at all.

I would also like to plant the seed of suggestion that a lot of times, I like to explore ancient deities, demons, myths, and stories in modern settings. One more thing, we are little more than sheep without an opinion of our own, so some of my stories are statements on what I think and feel about today's world and its state of being. Will I hit you over the head with it? Probably not. If you happen to see a hint of mythology, etc. in my stories, cool. If not, cool. I hope that you see a hint of entertainment at least. Thank you for reading.

Mother of Wisdom

I am the grain of sand
that forces the oyster

to make a pearl.
So take me

upon your tongue,
give me a swirl;

Then, open your mouth
and deliver me.

Kitty

Melanie came home, stripped her uniform off and showered. Managing a restaurant had definitely been taking its toll on her mind, not to mention her soul. But it paid the bills and at least she was no longer just a waitress trying to make ends meet.

After eating another “TV special” and the late night line up faded into paid commercials, she smoked a cigarette on her front porch; the only habit she couldn’t completely break.

She had won the battle to stop chewing her nails (she learned to like the taste of Tabasco, thanks to Mom) and stopped tapping her teeth, but this nasty little nervous habit had a way of sneaking back into her daily routine now and again.

Especially after a day when shipment arrived for the wrong store, and her store was low on everything and short on help.

Melanie sighed and took a drag from her cigarette—coffin nail, cancer-stick; her mother’s voice screamed from the back of her mind, “No man likes a girl who smokes!”

Melanie vocalized inside her own head, conversing to the voice of her mother. Even in her thoughts, Melanie argued with her.

“Mr. Right-Now doesn’t care about yellow teeth, Mother.”

She started to go over inventory and schedules mentally when she heard the soft lilt of a child’s voice.

“Kitty...kitty...”

Melanie rubbed the bridge of her nose and glanced at her watch.

"Midnight-thirty." she mumbled, slightly fazed, and then added a bit too loudly, "Hello?"

She felt a bit silly when no reply came, but no porch lights turned on and no one shouted out their windows for her to shut up.

The lilt came again. She didn't want to tempt a sleep-disturbed wrath so she didn't holler. She didn't see a tom-cat but she did approximate where the voice had come from and moved toward it, albeit cautiously.

She walked, slightly hunched over, and every time she stepped down on the balls of her feet she couldn't help thinking about Indian trackers in spaghetti westerns.

Her blonde braid fell across her shoulder and swung back and forth next to her ear. She spoke into the dark and tried to communicate to the disembodied voice.

"Does your mommy or daddy know you are out this late?"

She came to a stop in front of a house that sat about a block and a half from her own. She hunched over a bit deeper, almost squatting as she moved, worried about being found in pajamas in someone's front lawn talking to a child that possibly could have been her lack of sleep and stress induced hallucination. She whispered even lower this time.

"Hello?"

The porch light blasted to life and Melanie back peddled to the sidewalk. She felt sick to her stomach and looked down the street at her house. An old woman dressed in a blue flower print robe came to the screen door and opened it.

"Hello, ma'am?"

Melanie swallowed again and approached the woman who looked at her with wide cataract eyes and thin drawn lips.

"You better not be getting in my flowerbeds!"

She had a light southern drawl to her voice so it all came out, "Yah bettah not be gettin' in mah flayer beds!"

The woman backed away from the screen and half of her faded into the darkness of the house behind her. Melanie stopped and held out her hands.

"I don't mean to bother you! It's just..." She swallowed as her thoughts rough-housed.

'There's a voice calling out and I think I am crazy!' Melanie struggled for words. The woman stared.

"I thought I heard something and thought I would check and make sure everything was okay." Melanie's body suddenly drained of strength and for some odd reason, she felt like yawning.

'My God, I must be overworked! I am standing here in some old lady's front lawn in the middle of night in my pajamas.' She rued mentally. Melanie waved and started walking back to her house.

"My sincerest apologies ma'am! I won't bother you anymore. I'm truly sorry."

She thrust her hands into her pajama pockets and forced herself to look at her feet. She imagined the woman thinking, "What in the hell is wrong with you?" Melanie hoped like mad that the woman wouldn't call the cops on her.

She braved a glance back over her shoulder but the woman was already gone back inside, door firmly shut. After about a minute, the light extinguished. Melanie felt her cheeks burn hot as she raced up the steps to her house.

"You need some serious rest Mel."

She shook her head and went inside, eager to crawl into bed.

∞

Sometime in the grey hours before full dawn Melanie woke up, unable to go back to sleep. She tried masturbating—sometimes getting off relaxed her just enough to get back to sleep.

However, her movements were predictable, she couldn't think of anything good to get off about (not even that hot new hire at the store), and she lost interest in herself.

"Well, fuck." She muttered. She stared at her ceiling and blinked before looking at her clock.

"Four o'clock?" She sighed, got out of bed, grabbed her furry pink robe and went into her front room. Coffee wouldn't brew itself for another half hour and it didn't sound as good as a cigarette. Melanie grabbed her pack of smokes and shuffled outside.

The breaking-surf sound of rushing cars filled the distance and everything had a dewy layer of moisture on it. She noticed cat paw prints on her windshield. She thought of that tom-cat and looked back to that house where the old woman lived.

"Am I going crazy?" She chattered, trying to smoke and whisper to herself at the same time. She shook her head and snubbed out her cigarette. She stared for a time at the woman's house.

Maybe it was her subconscious trying to tell her that if she doesn't get going on building a social life she will be the old lady with cats. She completed her thoughts aloud.

"But a child's voice? Well, old women think of their cats as children, right?"

Then a soft whimper came. Nearly imperceptible and unnoticed by all those who were still in their houses at this hour, but Melanie wasn't inside her house.

It sounded like a child whining.

"Fuck it I'm NOT going back over there." After the words came out, she sighed.

Melanie went inside, slipped on a pair of house shoes and before she could stop herself, made her way back to the old woman's house.

As soon as she felt the crush of grass beneath her house shoes the child's voice sang out, but very hushed, "Kitty...kitty..."

Melanie listened and followed this strange voice until she reached a small rectangular basement window that was open to just a slit. She crouched down, careful to not press down stalks of marigolds, daffodils and pansies, and squinted against the darkness.

She couldn't see anything except for a bit of moving shadow and she scooted a bit closer. In doing so, she pressed her hand on something jagged and cried out.

"Shit!" It wasn't loud enough to echo, but it was loud enough to call a pair of child-like eyes to the window. Melanie gasped and fell back.

"Oh my God." She clapped a hand over her mouth.

"Kitty...kitty..."

The voice was unmistakable.

'This was the voice she had been hearing!' Her thoughts were like frightened rabbits scrambling.

"Are you okay?" she managed. The eyes, which had been staring distant, locked on to her and steadied.

"Kitty-kitty." It was syrupy and sad all at once. Melanie clutched her chest and leaned closer.

"Do you need help little...uh...girl?"

The eyes blinked. Melanie glanced behind her, watching for any signs of the old woman. She looked back to the eyes.

"I'm going to get the police. You hear me?" She was just above a whisper, her teeth chattered. The eyes blinked.

"No." The child's voice said. Melanie froze halfway to a stand.

"No? Why not? Are you okay? Is this your... do you..." She couldn't find the words but the voice started anyway.

"Can you help me?"

Melanie lost her breath a moment and crawled toward the window.

"How old are you honey?" She felt a pang of fear for this child. Her heart hammered in her chest so that every movement seemed to vibrate her entire body. The rushing sound of blood in her ears threatened to drown out everything around her.

When Melanie neared the window the child's eyes moved away and blended into the darkness; Melanie leaned in to whisper between the glass and the ground.

"I'm going to go call the police. If you need help, they'll--"

"Kitty...kitty..."

The child's words cut her off before she could finish. Melanie strained to see inside the basement window but could see nothing but dark stains against an even darker background. Something moved inside, the sound of it reminded Melanie of air escaping.

Then a smell, a truck stop bathroom smell complete with vomit, assaulted her nose. She gagged a bit and rocked back onto her haunches.

She fought the bile that rose in her throat.

"You poor thing." She stood and a dark flimsy-appearing tendril snapped out like a frog's tongue then coiled itself around her arm. It burned her skin and she felt some of her flesh give way beneath its course-sticky grasp.

"Oh fuck! Oh fuck!" was all Melanie could manage to yell out. She tried to grab the sinister vine and remove it from her arm but recoiled.

It felt like she was grabbing sandpaper—hot, moist, slightly sticky sandpaper. She stared at it, blinking back tears of pain. Everything around her became blurry.

"Kitty...kitty...kitty." The child's voice had a warble in it, as if it was happy but it began to deepen and warp with baritone.

"Kitty..."

Melanie yelled out as her flesh pulled away and slipped down her arm like a loose piece of clothing. She screamed louder when she saw her own sinew and bones.

She tried madly to pull away as the tendril pulled her closer to the window, and her arm felt as if it were slipping free from its socket. She looked up and saw the eyes again.

The bluest eyes she had ever seen. They were sparkling and laughing.

Melanie yelped and struggled. More greased tendrils whipped out and found a place upon her body. They tightened like slipknots and yanked her forward. She hit the walls around the window so hard that she almost lost consciousness.

Her nose popped out of place and blood gushed, her lips swelled up and she nearly bit her tongue off.

It sounded distant, the old woman's voice, and Melanie tried to look over at the door.

She only managed to catch a glimpse of turning sky. The stars were already gone,

replaced by citrine stained clouds...
bruised and bleeding clouds. Porch lights
flicked on, up and down the street.

Melanie reached for the sky and inhaled to
scream, but the tendrils tightened their grip
around her throat. They snapped her in half
as they pulled her through the window.
Blood and viscera sprayed the grass,
glistening across the trimmed green blades,
and oozed from the glass and wood-frame of
the window.

Satisfied crunching noises rumbled from it,
then a short stumpy olive-colored appendage
slid out and moved across the circumference
of it; it cleaned up the blood and gristle neat
as a whistle, careful to not disturb the flowers
that surrounded the window there.

The commotion aroused people enough that,
wrapped in house-coats and armed with
various morning implements —some dangled
toothbrushes from their lips, they ventured to
the edge of their porches. A braver few
ventured to the edges of their lawns, bodies
bent with anxious curiosity.

But upon seeing nothing of concern they
returned to their routines, a bit grumpy at the
disturbance.

No one noticed that Melanie's front door was
slightly ajar, or the child's voice that sang out,
low and cheerful in the expanding morning
light.

Death...in its arms

Babylon spoke
deep within.
Sinners everywhere;

sloppy heart,
sluggish lungs,
wobbly stomach,
rotten mind,

and worse,
lack of spine.

Be still
fragile fly

shivering with the knowledge;
only the bravest of air
will filter
the quiet—

—ashes to ashes.

Cry, wolf

Mara kissed her children on their foreheads, and took a hearty swig of tea from her water-bottle. Shaylee, the youngest at age two, giggled and popped a thumb into her mouth.

Mara's son, Sammy, scowled a bit and rubbed his palm across the place where she kissed him. He often wiped kisses off.

"What's wrong, sweetie?"

Sammy shrugged and wrapped his arms around Shaylee, whose voice sounded distant as she repeated, "Peek-a-boo!" over and over, giggling with each turn. Mara bit the inside of her lip and took a couple of deep breaths.

"As soon as I close the door, I'm going to start counting. When I am done counting, I'll come looking for you."
Sammy snorted.

"You already know where we are." It was strange hearing matter-of-factness from a child's lips but Sammy is five and suspicious of everything, as five year olds are; suspicious of Santa Claus and his existence, he asks about death, and pretends to be a zombie.

He asserts his place on the food-chain by destroying imaginary aliens and squashing bugs that cross his path. He is a growing boy, for sure. Mara swallowed hard again.

Shaylee's brown eyes were at their widest, her thumb still cocked and at the ready but no longer in her mouth. She eyed Mara's tea-filled water bottle with greed.

"Drink!" she commanded as she reached for it.

Mara raked her tongue across her teeth as she knelt down and examined her son's small round face. It seemed to glow against the white of the abandoned chest-freezer. She handed Shaylee the water bottle and she chugged dramatically.

"Daddy doesn't know where you are hiding and I'm old, I'll forget! He'll come and find you! I promise I won't tell him."

She crossed her heart dramatically with her right hand. They both giggled, but Sammy's smile was one that she had seen many a time when he got something that he didn't particularly care for as a gift.

Shaylee made happy noises deep in her throat. She set the bottle down between her chubby legs and clapped her little hands together. "Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!"

She looked around as if he were going to magically appear right then and there, upon speaking his name.

"You mean he's not sick anymore?" Sammy inquired, innocently, a tag of hope attached to his query. Mara nodded.

"Yep. He's all better now. And he's ready to play with you guys." This relaxed Sammy to a degree and his smile became genuine. Mara gazed with loving regard at her beautiful moon-faced children, and then kissed them both again. She started to close the door. Shaylee, sensing something final, began to cry.

"Go home! Go see Daddy!" She pointed, shoved her thumb into her mouth and began a rigorous sucking rhythm. Sammy nodded.

"Me too. I want to go home, Mommy. When's Daddy coming?" Mara steeled her nerves and held the door open wide with one arm. Her shadow fell across the children like a negative lightning bolt.

They were both tense, wound tight enough to pop out of the chest-freezer the way rubber snakes do.

"Soon. He'll come looking as soon as I close the door. Let's finish the game and then—"

She struggled with the words. Her heart started to trip-hammer in her chest. Cheerily she added, "Then we can all go home for some ice-cream. Okay?" The kids shifted, relaxing their springs.

She held her gaze steady with Sammy's, admiring the darkness of his brown eyes. How his lashes curled upward like his father's, and those lips...definitely a perfect copy of her own. Mara glanced at her daughter and tousled her hair. Shaylee grinned around her thumb. She had her father's smile.

Mara's thoughts possessed her as they cycled through the good times, before her world became a cliché of crazy; before her husband accused her of being an alien life form and viciously attacked her.

She had bludgeoned him in defense and then dragged his unconscious body to their bed. For a couple of days she held him captive, all the while convincing the children that he was just really, really sick.

The children were naturally concerned, wanting to see their Daddy, but she didn't allow them into the room. She kept him drunk on ether, thanks to his profession.

His stinging hateful speech during a momentary bout of lucidity rang clearly through her head:

"You bitch! How dare you fuckin' fool me. You fooled me and now you are spreading your alien disease in the world through me...through us! Our children!

The world will not accept this. It will not accept you and it will damn our children. They are as good as dead! You should be dead too.

I'll kill you when I get out of this, you monster! How could you do this, you fuckin' alien freak! You bitch, you awful, awful bitch! To think that I loved you..."

She nearly suffocated him with the pillow right then and there, but the ether turned his

viscerating words into drowsy silence just in time. She struggled with the idea of monster, not able to make any real sense out of it, but decided that she was one.

Maybe they all were monsters trying to pass as human.

Shaylee spoke and this brought Mara back to reality. She blinked as she looked down at her daughter.

"I love you Shay-Shay..." She cooed, the way she used to when she held her children as infants. She whispered her words as she tickled Shaylee's chin lightly. This action in turn made Shaylee whisper.

"Tun-derrrr." She wriggled her little fingers. Sammy shook his head. Mara pressed a finger to her lips and sang low.

"Rock a bye ba-by in the tree top, when the wind blows, the cradle will rock..." Shaylee, excited by the song, swayed side to side. Sammy pushed against her and groaned.

"Stop pushing, Shay!" They began to bump against each other and squabble. Sammy growled. Mara flattened a palm on Sammy's chest and he sighed, but instantly stilled.

"Now-now, you are brother and sister. You need to get along. Do you hear me? You must love each other."

Sammy scowled at this. Mara felt movement deep within her belly as the fetus inside rolled over in its sleep.

"Fine." Sammy conceded, and crossed his arms.

"I'm getting bored Mom."

Shaylee echoed his boredom with, "Me too!"

Mara smiled her most convincing smile, even though her mind had already wandered to the trunk of the family car and to the awful truth wrapped in bailing twine.

"I'm going to close the door and then I'll count to one-hundred. Daddy and I will come looking for you when I reach one-hundred. sound good?" Sweat began to streak down her temples and neck.

Sammy nodded, his desire for ice-cream expressed in an interest of playing hide-and-seek. Shaylee stared at her brother and followed suit. She added a happy clap and then returned to sucking her thumb.

"I love you..." She whispered as she closed the door to the freezer, and then locked it. Tears crowded in Mara's eyes as the baby inside kicked several times in succession. She counted loudly as she walked away.

"One...two...three..." She half-heartedly jogged to the trunk of the car, ignoring the growing stitch in her side, and popped it open. She met with her husband's wild accusing eyes.

"I loved you..." She lamented. He struggled, mumbling and shrieking beneath his sock-gag, and strained against the bailing twine that bound his hands and feet. Mara dragged him from the trunk.

His body hit the ground and he made a pained sound. Tears streaked his face. She retrieved a large kitchen knife from inside the cab of the car and upon returning, straddled his wriggling body.

His eyes stared with grief into hers as he gave her a pleading expression. He made pleading sounds and high pitched squeals.

Mara heaved, and shook as she plunged the knife into his abdomen. His screams were mute and ineffective, and he was still too weak from the mild sedative to fight, but he kicked up his knees anyway.

Mara rocked to one side, undeterred, and she pried the skin apart. Her muscles ached and her mind started to become fuzzier by the second.

She squinted into the mess of squirming guts and looked inside, she pushed her hands into the cavity and felt around; his body hosted nothing but human organs.

He bled profusely—the red-blood of an oxygen breather, a human, an earthling...the man that she loved more than life. He convulsed and fell still. Mara gripped her stomach and bent over, sobbing in to his deaf ear.

"Fuck you! I loved you! I loved all of you!"

A cramp forced Mara to drop the knife and she fell to the side, curling and uncurling in agony on the ground as the poison from the sweetened tea reached its destination.

Inside the old chest freezer, Shaylee started to cry and Sammy called out for his Mom but they were too quiet for anyone to hear; especially in the hills in the middle of nowhere surrounded by miles of countryside.

Eat crow

He was crucified
for the sins of the crows;
trapped among the rows of corn—
it's not that he can't scream,
or wave his arms in protest
it's just that he finds birds
grotesque.

He hangs, a rag-doll
black-balled by the world,
and defeated by
the sheer weight of bird-shit.
His disillusionment grows by the day,
an unbearable thrum of,
"If I could eat you, I would.
If I could eat you, I would.
IF I COULD EAT YOU I WOULD!"

Instead he dangles on dry wood;
a doll defeated in purpose and further,
no-good.
But the anger instills, and the agony grows,
and should the day come
that he can move his dumb limbs...
who knows what scarecrows would do with
their freedom,

other than eat 'um.

Inmate No. 762030

"Hello." I said, as I walked toward the table and reached out my hand. I quickly remembered myself, and with a burst of mental self-admonitions I withdrew my hand, reflexively wiping my palm upon my slacks and gave a smile.

"You must be Miss Tucker."

"If I wasn't—then you, Ms. Reader, wouldn't be here." Alice Tucker didn't miss a beat.

Her voice had a southern laxity, mixed with an east coast accent and this made her sound damn near foreign. I nodded as I sat down.

"This is very true, Miss Tucker." I scratched the palm of my hand and cleared my throat. She leaned slightly to one side; her expressionless face pale in the fluorescent lights.

I had expected the face. It had been splashed on magazines and television screens across the globe and the expression was unchanged.

It couldn't change.

For Alice, it hadn't changed since the day that she fell from the roof of her house at the age of fourteen; no smiles, no grimaces. She had been fortunate enough to be left with the use of her eyes, lips and mouth, along with the normal functions of the rest of her body.

I set about arranging my things: notebook to the left, pen to the left of that, recorder to the center, Alice's file to the right. I then laced my hands together and pressed them against the cool table top.

Alice was not anyone I would have suspected of being capable of doing anything more than possibly mug someone; if you could imagine someone being mugged by a seventh grader.

She was all of five feet, topped with long dark-brown hair and a pair of high cheekbones that shelved green-gray eyes.

Except for the outfit, which were plain grey scrubs with the number: 762030 spray-painted in black on the front, she looked like a doll.

Though her appearance gave off a submissive vibe, it was her eyes that contradicted the mousy exterior. They glistened with intelligence—sizing me up. To add to the discomfort, Alice held a steady gaze.

The facility and the television company had everything set up so all I had to do was sit and ask questions. They allowed Miss Alice Tucker and I to sit in the same room together, but under the strict stipulation that Miss Tucker be restrained at all times.

To see her sitting in a stripped-down steel chair and chained to a steel table, which were both bolt-welded into the floor, titillated me to some degree. Her petite size made the already elephantine chains seem ridiculously over-sized.

“So I guess the obvious question is, what was your last meal?” I smiled a bit, in spite of myself, hoping to break the ice. Alice blinked, a sparkle moved within in her eyes, as if her thoughts materialized into static-sparks as they passed.

“I suppose you would like to hear that I had steak, or something, extra rare with a side of kidney beans.” She cocked her head to one side, almost puppy-like but totally devoid of sweetness. Then she leaned forward and I almost jumped away.

I cleared my throat again. She returned to her disinterested posture and clasped her hands in her lap. She drew her bottom lip inward and tucked it neatly behind her front teeth.

“In case you are wondering, no, I don’t regret killing and eating all those men. And yes, I’m ready to go.”

She had said the word regret with a bit of distasteful inflection and when she had completed her sentence, she sighed.

“Could I get a cigarette?” It was almost as if she were pleading. I shrugged, ever slightly and glanced at the wall-sized mirror. I studied our reflections as I spoke; I cursed myself for not getting a haircut before coming here and fought the urge to preen. I knew that I would be on film.

Alice looked even smaller in her reflection and though the mirror eased the weight of her stare, it did nothing to take away from its intensity.

“I could probably use a cigarette too.” I surmised out-loud, “But these days, no one likes that sort of thing. Those things kill you, you know.”

Alice laughed, and unexpectedly I found myself chuckling as well, chorusing just under her belly-deep laughter. She stopped and locked those scrutinizing eyes on me again and I swore that if she were able to smile, she would have had one on her little heart-shaped doll-face right then.

“So I’ve gone the way of the cigarette...” Just as she shook her head, the door to the interview room opened; actually, it was an interrogation room but I was not there seeking a confession, I was there to get answers for the public and for the movie folks dying to have her story. If I played my cards right, this could set me up for life.

The guard who entered the room was a large man, bigger than me at 5’8” 172 pounds. He walked past the diminutive Alice without as much as a glance downward. He held out a package of cigarettes and a lighter. I nodded and took them from his enormous square hands.

“Thank you.”

The guard tipped his head, as if grabbing the brim of a hat, and exited the room. Alice’s eyes glittered with movement.

“Could I interest you in a cigarette?” I said, feeling a bit corny in offering a smoke to her. But it is a peculiarity I welcomed. A cigarette, not a bad price to pay for her story. She was indeed, one of the sickest.

I lit the cigarette and held it, cherry end away. She leaned forward with an alarming abruptness and I flinched. She stared at me as she took the cigarette out of my hand with her teeth. I imagined hyper pit bulls tugging against thin leashes.

After she retrieved the fuming stick she inhaled deeply and closed her eyes. She reached up and took the cigarette from her lips while exhaling, and locked onto my gaze again. I regained my distance, a bit shameful at my grateful thoughts for the heavy chains.

“I never was a heavy smoker, but a cigarette now and again sure was nice.” Her voice was reflective, almost sad. My thoughts spilled out of my mouth.

“Well, you know why I am here. You obviously know why you are here. So let’s not beat around the bush. I have seen the death certificates of your mother and of your grandparents. It states that all three had bite marks but all three deaths were a gunshot wound to the head.”

Alice brought her hand up and pinched her earlobe momentarily.

I waited for details but she just smoked the cigarette and stared at me. I cleared my throat.

She blinked, her eyes a cold spark.

“Is mental illness prevalent in your family?” I finally managed.

She licked her lips and I automatically did the same. She gave me a sidelong stare, looking at me through curls of smoke rolling over her petite shoulder. I couldn’t help but smile as my thoughts raced ahead.

“You know, they are going to make a movie out of your story.”

This broke her stare-lock with me and she seemed to be glaring at the ceiling. She slouched in her seat and groaned.

“A fucking horror movie, no doubt.”

“You don’t sound happy about it.” Unhappy was not the right word, irritated is more like it, I thought. She sucked in her un-trembling pink lip and held it behind her top teeth.

“I hate horror movies. They’re all crap.” I laughed. I didn’t expect to laugh but I did. I regained my composure as she hammered me again with that intense stare.

“I’m sorry, but you don’t like horror movies? You, who effectively murdered and cannibalized thirty-one men, that we know of?”

Again, with that quickness only Alice could deliver, she quipped, “A girl’s gotta eat.”

I dropped my smile but I am sure that I did not lose my fascinated expression. She changed the subject, with a cool resolve,

“Besides, true horror cannot be captured on film.” Alice appeared bemused at her own thoughts, twisting the cigarette in small circles between her fingers.

I cleared my throat, undeterred.
“So why only men. Why not women?”

She shrugged.

“I’m not bisexual.” The word bi-cannibal flashed in my brain and I shook my head to

clear it away as if it were an etch-a-sketch portrait gone awry.

Alice gave me a disturbing knowing-gaze and I almost felt as if my thoughts were somehow exposed to her. Maybe she thought bi-cannibal too. Maybe I was just being silly.

I took a drag from my cigarette and laced my fingers together, mashing the smoke-stack between my ring and middle fingers.

"I want to know everything I can about you Alice. And I think it would be in your favor to get your story out now, on the eve of your execution."

She snorted and crossed her arms.

"For whose benefit? The gasping hungry public...you?" It was her turn to shake her head.

"No, I will tell you what I want, and you will take what I give you. The rest is mine to take with me."

I didn't know how to take this answer, so I just nodded and shifted in my seat. She appeared distant as she stared over my shoulder, and I almost turned to see what had captured her attention, when she spoke.

"We're no better, you know."

I nodded, not quite sure of what she meant.
"Better than what?"

She shook her head.

"You know...we're no better than animals. We abuse and we kill. We neglect and we lie. We're no better. In fact, we're worse."

I forced the smirk that was forming on my face into a flat smile. "You mean you are no better, Alice. I haven't killed anyone."

She slammed her fist on the table which sent me bolt upright.

"You've never swatted a fly? Squashed a spider? Hit a rabbit with your car and thought, oh well...there's too many fuckin' rabbits anyway...?"

I swallowed, my expression now serious. Alice continued.

"We choose where we want to fit in, Ms. Reader. You choose it, I choose it. My death will make no difference."

I must have looked puzzled to her because she leaned closer, and spoke slower, as if I was a child.

"Do you think those people are the meek?"

She opened her hands and pointed to the mirror-covered wall. I followed her finger with my eyes to it and I stared at it.

I knew the camera was right there on the other side, probably being supervised by a camera-person that would rather be doing anything other than be here but, happy at the large meal ticket handed them for filming this event.

I wanted to be here. I wanted to understand. In order to eradicate something, we have to understand it, even minimally. Alice had turned the world upside down with murder and literal mayhem; a global pandemic with no hope for cure.

Not even her very own noxious blood could solve the puzzle of the disease that gripped the world in its skeletal death-grip. One bite from Alice, and it spread like an unchecked wild-fire.

I could only assume that eating those men prevented them from rising back from the dead, but why didn't she eat the women too? I had my morbid suspicions, I had my feminist suspicions...but I knew one truth: I did not want to be infected and I did not want to live like that.

Alice found her way into my thoughts again and knocked me from them with her seemingly telepathic words.

"I can't tell you anything that will help you to sleep at night. I cannot help you make sense of it. Personally, nothing makes sense. Not this place, not this life, not my actions. Nothing. If you want to make sense of it all, then go ask them."

Again, she points to the wall and to the large mirror. I released a sigh, letting my exasperation be known. Alice swung back into her chair; the sound of writhing chains followed her down.

I glanced at my list of questions and smacked my lips at the doodles on the edge. How professional, Ms. Mary Reader. How professional indeed.

"Well Alice, please tell me about your past. Did your mother have this disease...?" I had a difficult time forming the words. I felt like I a five-year-old trying to say the word enemy and it just comes out 'en-mee".

I wanted to be cautious in my choice of wording. Alice's attentions focused into the distance. I could tell that she wasn't really looking at me anymore, or even seeing me anymore.

She spoke in softer tones.

"My mother died during childbirth. At least, this is what I was told by my Granny and Papa, who passed away from circumstances beyond my control when I was thirteen years old. It is quite possible, but it was never really... addressed."

She stared vacantly at the table top. I imagined an expression upon her face; one of sorrow and pity, as if she were viewing the dead bodies of her grandparents as they laid before her in shapely coffins dressed in their Sunday best. I decided to venture deeper.

"And what of your father?"

She lingered on this a moment before answering.

"I never knew my father." I imagined that maybe she still wondered who he was after all this time. I wondered if he was the originator. Maybe she wondered that too... She snapped me out of my own thoughts by speaking again.

"I have read the papers and the *studies*, however. Of course they allow me to see these things in hopes of showing me what greater-good could come of my involvement..."

Alice took on a cynical tone, almost mocking.

"They call it Fatal Insomnia. Which is silly because I sleep just fine...Strange name though, isn't it?"

It was difficult to hide my surprise at Alice's answer.

"True, many who have succumbed to your bites do so in a matter of a few short months. More still, in a matter of weeks, depending upon their propensity for the reproduction of the prions in their brains..."

Alice tilted into her folded arm, a disturbing wash of pride evident in her eyes. She nodded.

"Yes...prions..."

Although I sensed a deeper intelligence in this woman, I could tell that she knew no more than what I could dredge up from a medical file so I turned my attentions back to her family tree.

"After your grandparents were laid to rest, you went to live with your uncle Curtis. He is the catalyst for your rampage—"

Alice cut my words short.

"After my grandparents passed away, I was left with Curtis, my mother's brother. He hated me from the get-go."

Alice motioned to the pack of cigarettes and I obliged her by lighting one. I looked up and she stunned me with that gray-green stare.

Alice nursed the cigarette as if it were her last one. Maybe it was. She bit into her lip again. Not a nervous habit, for she seemed to not have any outside of smoking, but it was as if she were biting back something that she didn't want to say. She crossed her arms.

"I was maybe eighty pounds when Curtis died. The man kept me in a cage from the moment he 'inherited me' until the time I broke free one-year-later.

I spent my time on all fours and unable to move. I could barely lie down. He poked at me through the bars, he put cigarettes out on me. He would spit on me and tell me I need a bath.

Many, many times, I went without eating anything except for the occasional bug that happened to skitter through my cage...he got what he deserved." Alice stopped and took a breath. I prodded, gently.

"He never tried anything sexual with you?"

Alice's voice was soaked in disgust.

"Curtis wasn't like that. He hated me because he blamed me for Mom's death. And he blamed me for Granny and Papa's deaths. He didn't want to catch death from me, in any form, even if he were like that."

She chewed on her thoughts a moment, I could see her eyes moving back and forth, buried deep with that mask of a face. I focused on my own hands in an attempt to disguise my mental obliteration, my hesitation... my fear. I knew that I touched a nerve; I wanted it to keep thrumming.

Luckily, Alice continued without question.

"Many would like to speculate that it was the abuse that made me this way, but it wasn't the abuse." Alice shifted in her seat and brought her elbows to rest upon the table. The cigarette slowly turned itself into a column of ash between her knuckles.

"But wouldn't you say, Alice, that if you didn't suffer through what you had suffered through that maybe you could have used your...uh...abilities, for something good instead?"

Alice blinked and zeroed in on me with those tarnished green eyes.

"Well aren't you quite the philanthropist? Should we speculate *what-would-have-been* had Curtis been nicer, since my grandparents were, for all intents and purposes, quite loving and normal?" She gesticulated in large circles above her head as she spoke.

"Do you mean to tell me, that what you are saying is that I should have surrendered myself to science and allowed them to manipulate this genetic disease that I possess, into a cure for something like cancer?"

Alice stopped moving her arms and cocked her head to one side again. She flicked her tongue across her bottom lip.

"Or perhaps a cure for mortality?" She followed this with a shake of her head. I opened my mouth, but nothing came out. Alice filled the void.

"Maybe it could have been used to procure a safe and eternal paradise for those who fit the criteria? Or warp it even further—and use it to destroy each other in war? Sounds like fuckin' paradise to me, doesn't it you?" Her rising voice reverberated all over the room; it seemed to come from everywhere and it took awhile to settle into stillness.

After an uncomfortably long tacit stare in my direction, Alice sat back in her seat. I shifted in my seat, unable to focus any longer.

My sides cried out in spasm, a signal that I had been sitting too tensely for the duration of this conversation-slash-interview thus far.

My discomfort brought attention to the lull. I looked at Alice. She nodded, silent; sated.

“So explain to me again, how did you get out of the cage?” She blinked and leaned to one side, her posture one of disinterest.

“Curtis had it in his head one day that it was time to finish me off I guess. So he came to me, opened the cage and pointed a gun at my forehead.”

Alice shook her head slowly, appearing overwhelmed, vulnerable...but I knew better. I found myself mentally painting expressions upon that dull affect. Anything to fill in the gaps, although one could not say that Alice was inanimate.

I imagined that if she had known her father, like I knew mine, she would have heard things like, “I bet if your hands were tied behind your back, you wouldn’t be able to talk...”

Alice continued, disturbing my strange reverie.

“I fell onto his feet and I bit him on the shin.” She chuckled, a maddened giggle of a woman reliving a nightmare. She took another drag from her cigarette, exhaled... I raised my brows.

“I bit him and he kicked me. It was then I escaped. He had dropped the gun, after firing it once, and ran after me. I was weak from being in such a starved and emaciated state. My limbs no longer used to an upright posture. But I forced myself to use whatever reserves I had and I climbed into the attic. From there, I climbed out the window. Curtis

followed. The rest, well... is history.”

“Okay, but then why eat him?”

At this question, Alice crossed her arms. The heavy chains scraped against the tile floor, hollow and metallic; it emphasized the lack of furniture... the lack of life in the room.

Alice tilted her chin down and regarded me with two fixed and dark-green ovals.

“What dictates a person’s behavior, Ms. Reader? We have yet to determine whether it is nature versus nurture or a combination thereof.

The world just can’t figure out exactly what breeds ‘the good people’ and what breeds ‘the bad seed’.”

Alice leaned close to the table and it took everything in my will-power to not jerk away. Show no fear and the dog will not bite, isn’t that how it goes? Alice’s cheeks seemed to twitch and my rational mind knew that this was not possible, but it was almost as if she was trying her damndest to grin.

She pressed her chest against the table and said, “I had no choice. I AM the bad seed.”

I coughed into my fist and snubbed out my cigarette. I wanted something horrific. I wanted the world to see all of Alice. She was a victim. She was a saint...she was a monster.

I bit the inside of my cheek. I flipped a page in my notebook, scribbled down the words, “The Revenant Madonna” in all caps. It would make a great title. I covered it with my interlaced hands.

“What did you do then, barbeque him?” I said it before I could stop myself. Alice nodded, approving and amused.

“I did, actually.” She held her little pink tongue between her teeth and kept a steady gaze upon me. I wrung my hands into fists.

"I see. Well I can certainly understand the duress you were under and I can understand your actions given the circumstances, but to kill and cannibalize men again and again Alice?"

Alice wiped at her nose with her knuckles. "I had not eaten in so long that the taste was phenomenal. I loved it, Ms. Reader. Loved it. Guilty as charged...I LOVE human meat."

She nodded toward the mirror and to me and finished her cigarette. The room began to stink and I barely noticed that the room grew less clinical, and cool. I pressed my palms together and rested my chin on my thumbs. I stared at her over my fingers.

"So how many men were there, honestly."

Alice scanned the entirety of the room then refocused her gaze on me. She tilted her head slightly and those little champagne sparkles came again. They glittered like a heavy glaze upon her gray-green eyes.

She leaned toward me and I am surprised that I did not shift backwards this time.

"More than thirty-one, that you know of, to be sure." She winked. No, it was more like those sit-up sleepy dolls that I had when I was a young girl; sometimes one eye would stay shut when you sat her up and after a little bit, it would finally succumb to whatever mechanism swung them open, and it would bounce as it flew open. My skin crawled.

I couldn't help but stare at her teeth, like little rows of tiny breath-mints lined up in hot-pink gum. I tried to imagine her slicing up a man's leg into a macaroni casserole, or a torso served up like turkey dinner.

Needless to say, my imagination ran amuck.

"You openly admit, then, that you have killed an innumerable amount of people...regardless of gender, and you don't regret any of their deaths?"

You are comfortable in the fact that you are the reason that so many are dead now? That so many hordes of quote: 'zombies', have over-run the planet?"

She looked away, nodding mindlessly, and she parted her lips.

"I admit that I would rather be eating you, right now, than talking to you. I admit that."

Shocked, I widened my eyes. She laughed. I did not.

"You have been caught, Alice. You will be executed. You are not above it all."

This only made Alice's eyes widen and she sucked in her bottom lip again. I felt cold in my chest because I realized that this was her way of smiling.

"I am above it all. Your interview, Ms. Reader, will continue on, telling everyone of my story. My based-on-true-events movie will fade into memory. It may get re-made, re-hashed...re-told. I may become an urban legend....I may get fans. You may not live long enough to see all that."

"Oh?"

She nodded.

"Yeah."

I slouched in my chair. Alice snorted and I suddenly felt a bit out of control. I didn't know what to say, what to ask. I knew that I had to get more than what I have out of her but my time was running short.

"When you die, will you turn into a zombie?"

Alice pressed her lips together and stared. She stared so hard I think my skin literally wanted to peel off of me in order to get away.

"I am the spring from which all have sprung."

I cupped my chin and took a breath to speak, but several guards poured in and one stated, "Time's up."

What a way to end a career, I rued. But at least I interviewed the most infamous female killer of all time. At least I have that. I resolved to bury the embarrassment of my ineptitude in a hot-bubble bath and a bar of chocolate when I got home.

I made plans to write her tale when I could process all the information from my time with her. I knew I had to make it my best; Alice would soon be gone forever. There would not be another chance. I dumbly thanked Alice for her time and packed up my briefcase.

I walked right past her, very close. Alice flicked at something in the air. It was enough to stop me and she seized me by the forearm. I cried out despite myself and a flurry of guards spilled across the room.

She spoke in a low voice that barely broke the chaos that rapidly replaced the stillness.

"You've read my extensive medical record, no doubt. You know that I was simply born this way: forever a carrier, never infected. Like something that could be spread by procreation as well as things like biting, and spitting, and the exchange of bodily fluids. Like fuckin' AIDS, or rabies...right?"

Then she bit me.

My hand blanched in her grasp as I wrenched myself free. In shock I backhanded her and back-pedaled until I hit the wall.

"*What the hell?*" I said, more than once, unable to control the pitch of my voice. The guards surrounded me. There was a lot of commotion behind them; Alice was being removed from the room, gawking and cackling.

She shouted above the din, "Bon Appetite, Ms. Reader!" I tore my attention away from her writhing and screaming antics, to my arm.

The bite marks were clear, even through the fast swelling and the blood. A doctor came, at least I thought it was a doctor. He grabbed my forearm and shook his head.

"I'm sorry Ms. Reader...you are infected." I looked at the group of guards, the doctor, and everyone's face warped. I felt a disturbing pulse deep within me, it spread like tentacles unfurling...it raced up my arm and speared my brain. My personal bubble burst inside.

"Infected?" My throat snapped shut. The guards grabbed me and I strangely did not feel like fighting their brutal ushering, at first. They led me to the door where they stopped and chained my arms.

Fearful of their grip, of the chains...of this disease which I was certain by now was punching holes in my brain. I screamed.

"What are you doing? What's going on?" I knew deep down what had happened. I knew it.

I also knew that I was going to become like them: those zombies. Those fucking zombies who do nothing more than drool and scream for human flesh, for brains.

Pretty boxes carrying deadly viruses that wanted nothing more than to procreate. I broke out in a sweat and my insides roiled.

I fought the guards, but it seemed a feeble battle on my part compared to their expert handling. I wept as they dragged me on my big toes down several well-lit corridors and past several stations that looked like nurses' stations, but were actually guard posts.

I was led to a door with numbers blasted across it in heavy black text. They were the same numbers as the ones emblazoned upon Alice's plain gray smock.

They opened the door to reveal a make-shift padded room, rusted with obvious use and

wash-downs. It had one window with no glass and no bars.

They shoved me in and closed the door. I immediately rammed myself against the door, panicking about everything, uncertain of my exact fate. I ran to the window. Since it was open, maybe I could climb out of it and—

I looked down, and there, clawing, jumping and groaning like a sea of rats rushing the bricks; *'them'*. I get dizzy with it. They aren't going to kill me. They are going to make me kill myself! It is all because of Alice. I heard keys jangling and I raced to the door.

"Please, you must be mistaken! Please!" I slapped at the door and only the chains around my wrists raking against the metal of the door gave me reply.

"Dear God help me..." I whined as I slid to the floor.

The light passed into darkness and I could hear their voices outside. They cry out. Incessant. Angry. Sad. The choir of the damned moaning out of key. Then I heard it: a gun shot.

I ran to the window and caught sight of a body being thrown over wall of the facility...Oh who was I kidding anyway? The building was nothing more than a fortified sporting goods store.

The body of Alice bounced once on the side then cart-wheeled six stories into the swarming mass of zombies below. It made little disruption to the disorganized yet rhythmic tossing of the crowd.

My heart hammered in my chest. My head ached. My muscles ached. I tightened my grip on the window sill, felt the crush of glass in the palms of my hands. I vomited and it seemed to take an eternity to land.

Other than the initial body-jerk of surprise, the zombies are unmoved by it: the army of

undead women.

I think about my conversation with Alice. Will I be remembered as the one who interviewed her? The answer came with the panic that rose in my chest like heartburn as I backed away from the window.

I saw a pale flickering from one of the corners and I realized it was a recording device. I stood and stared at it. I stared at it and pled, silent, with my eyes. But no one came.

I felt the sickness swell in my chest and my heart galloped deep within me. A death throe. I saw ghosts. I felt whispers. I heard mom sing out, "Hush little baby, don't say a word..."

It reverberated in my brain like a penny in a tin can.

I traced drunken circles around the room while tugging at my hair, clawing at my skin, crying at the wound in my wrist.

Alice was right; I am going to be nothing more than a poorly rendered character in a horror film.

I stared hard at the window, I saw my mother perched there, and she was asking me if I wanted to go to bed. I told her that I'm afraid of the dark. She cooed in reply, "Don't be afraid..." and held her arms out to me.

Each step felt as if I teetered on a balance-beam. More moans echoed up from the outside and dissipated, taking Mom with them.

"Don't leave me here, Mom! I'm afraid!" I charged the window, and after a slow tipping, an eternity of sky, I toppled out.

As I fell, the oddest thought occurred to me:

"I hope I don't land in my own puke..."

I suppose I won't care.

Violets are blue

We fill our nights with TV shows,
passing the remote control,

and the buck.

"Were you watching this?"
"Nah.", a shrug.

It should be a shrug of laughter
with your hand upon my breast;

resting spoons on a Queen.

Instead,
TV Dad says, "Good night, honey."
and TV Mom smiles.
"Good night dear."

And they
laugh
as love dies
in a lucent blue
ether-world.

When Hell freezes over

"It's a blistering cold winter night in Wyoming tonight. A severe snowstorm appears to be on the move and will soon settle in this region.

Advisory is that everyone stay in their homes, do no unnecessary traveling and make sure you have what you need to stay warm. All stores are on mandatory shut down. Emergency assistance will still function as best it can to serve the town—"

"But don't count on it, right?" Linda muttered as she turned her cracker-box size television off. She glanced over her shoulder at the blanket that she hung to block the room in; an

attempt to keep the temperature as warm as possible.

Linda could see, in her mind's eye, the dimly lit hallway leading to her living room, and beyond to the bathroom and the new rows of windows lining the walls in foggy plastic wrap.

The trailer-home rattled beneath the furious shrieks of wind. Snow slapped hard against the windows and Linda clapped her hands across her shoulders with a shudder.

"Wonder if those windows will hold." She wrinkled her forehead and shrugged. "Well, they best hold. I paid good money for them."

She shuffled to her favorite chair and settled into it. The wind continued its assault on the outside of the trailer. Linda eyed her bed and momentarily wondered if she should go to sleep. A strange pounding noise came from the direction of her bathroom decided for her.

"Now what in blue blazes?" Linda pushed the footrest of her lazy chair down and moved toward the dividing blanket. The pounding came again and Linda felt a cold streak of coward race down her backside.

'What if someone were trying to break in?' Her mind flooded with images of men dressed in dark clothes wielding guns and knives and other weaponry.

She pushed back the blanket just slightly, and caught a glimpse of the dark, empty house. Her own breathing caught in her ears.

"I swear, Linda Garrison, if you make a fool of yourself!"

She clenched her teeth together and before moving on, grabbed a broom just to be safer-than-sorry.

She inched past the hanging blanket and suddenly felt exposed against all the uncovered windows. Her mind told her that

the plastic skewed any real view but she knew her outline was still seeable. She swallowed and picked up her pace.

The pounding came again and she realized that it was coming from the door next to her bathroom that led to the outside. She shuddered as she thought about who, or what, could be knocking at her door...at this hour...in a blizzard.

She came to a stop in front of the door and shook as she curled her hand around the icy brass doorknob.

"Hello? Who's there?"

The sound of her own voice brought her back from near panic but it did nothing to settle her stomach as she waited for a reply. A single "Thump!" came so hard against the door that Linda almost fell backward.

A weakened voice moaned from the other side, followed by a rapid scraping sound. Linda squeezed her eyes shut, swallowed, then opened them as she cracked her door open wide enough to peer outside.

"Please! It's fr-eezing... My car..." A very tall man, clothed head to toe in black, leaned forward and chattered. His eyebrows and eyelashes were encrusted in frost, his skin was an ashen shade of white and he ticked with the force of his shivering.

Linda eyed him, carefully noting any strange bulges on his sides or malicious gesturing.

"Ma'am. Please. It's— so c-c-cold." He stepped forward and reached out one hand. Linda instinctively stepped back and screwed her face up.

"Why are you here? What do you want?" Linda tightened her grip on the broom handle. She knew how to handle a man. Her late husband Heath had seen to it that she knew how to defend herself.

"A warm place — a warm place to sleep... please."

Linda could see the man's eyes dart past her and size up the refuge that was her trailer.

The chill began to get to her and before she could say anything, a strange feeling balled up in her stomach. Linda swallowed and glared at the man.

"You should have been listening to the news, young man." She forced herself to sound certain, strong. Unafraid.

"If you would have listened, you would have known not to travel! I have no room for you here." Linda slammed her door closed just as the man lunged toward her. She recoiled as the door began to violently rattle on its hinges.

"Damn fool." She double-checked her locks and backed away from the doors, eyeing each one in turn.

"He's a damn fool!" Her heart flip-flopped in her chest as she passed each window.

Linda jumped back screaming as the man slammed himself against one of the windows.

"PLEASE!" It was shrill and almost pained sounding.

"Go away! Get in your car and wait for help! Leave me be!" She pushed herself into the makeshift sanctuary of her warm bedroom. A few thumps and cracks were issued against the windows around her here, but after a few short minutes they stopped.

Linda shifted her eyes side to side for several minutes before finally relaxing and climbing into bed.

Some hours later, a loud knock came from the direction of her bathroom again.

Linda wiped her eyes and blinked. 'Now what could that be?' she climbed out of bed and pushed her feet into her slippers.

Three more loud thumps sent her heart jolting to marathon speed. She stopped and widened her eyes as the image of a man dressed in black came back like a frightening memory. Linda stared at her floor a moment and realized it was still dark outside.

“Thump! Thump!”

She flinched at each report and once again, shuffled for the safety of her broom. She wrapped herself in her bed-robe and pushed aside the blanket just enough to peek beyond.

The plastic on the windows seemed to be breathing as they moved in toward the windows then moved away again. Linda curled her hand tighter around the broom handle.

The thumping sounds continued to echo throughout her trailer home.

She jumped at each sound and as fast as her aged legs could carry her she ran down the hallway toward the door. She leaned close to it, holding the broom high.

“Go away! I told you there is no room for you here! I ain’t afraid of you! I’m armed!” Linda waited for a sound. There was nothing but the sound of the wind wailing outside. Linda looked down at her feet.

Something hard and definitely determined rammed into the other side of the door. She jumped and screamed.

“Alright! You asked for it!”

She squeezed her eyes shut, swung open her door, and thrust her broom outwards toward what she thought was the man. She swung the broom end side to side and made a big circle so that he couldn’t pass.

A swift breeze swooped against her legs and Linda opened her eyes, horrified. Nothing but swirls of blinding snow illuminated the pitch

night. She whirled around and faced her bedroom.

A few clunks and bangs told her that something did indeed slip past her and was now in her bedroom. Linda sucked in a stuttered breath and closed the door behind her. She thought about locking it but thought better of it.

‘If I hafta get away quick, I don’t want to mess around with the lock. You’re a smart girl, Lin. A smart, smart girl.’

She made her way down the hall and paused a few feet away from the blanket. A low, raspy grunt sent her hair on end.

“I told you I didn’t have any room!”

Linda whipped back the blanket and charged in swinging. A chip of wood broke free from the end of the broom handle. She toppled her tiny television set and caught her last swing on the back of her blue chair. She stopped and took a breath. No one was in there with her.

“Oh, what a mess you’ve made. Look. Just look at it.”

Linda berated herself a moment, almost in tears, and bent over to pick up the television set. A quick brush came against the back of her legs, sending her into another swinging spree. In stark realization, Linda stared at her bed. ‘He’s hiding under there. Oh my God. He’s under my bed!’

She inched forward, stopping to observe the light rustles against the bedspread that hung over the edge, obscuring her view of the underside. She steadied her broom.

The bedspread jumped to life with a high pitched shriek. Linda thrust the jagged broom handle beneath the bed repeatedly.

“Why— do you— gotta— scare— an— old woman for? Why?”

Her voice cracked as she screamed. Her screams were almost overpowered by the screams coming from under her bed. Linda leapt onto her bed and gripped her broom by the straw, like she was going to churn butter. She thrust it under the bed-skirt repeatedly.

"Get out! Get out! Get out!" She could hardly stand the screaming and shrieking. It reminded her of a small child screaming in pain.

Linda kept thrusting when her broom caught on something and she could no longer move nor control it. It ripped out of her hands and Linda watched as the handle slid and banged against the walls, back and forth. It spun in small circles and rattled violently. She tried to gain control of the broom and failed.

Beneath the sound of the broom scraping against the floor as it moved about, the screams were starting to quiet down. As quickly as it came to life, the broom stopped and hit the floor with a clap.

Scared into hyperventilation, Linda leaned forward, her lips numb and twitching, and stared at the motionless broom-bristles. She followed its length to the edge of the bed and swallowed.

"You still under there?" Her words sounded stupid and helpless but she had to say something or pass out. She could feel her blood racing through her body.

She leaned over the edge of the bed, lifted the bedspread then began to laugh.

And laugh.

And laugh.

"I can't believe you Linda! I just can't believe you!" Tears welled up in her eyes and she blinked, squeezing them out and down her cheeks. She held onto her sides and fell back onto her rear trying to take in a full breath.

It was her neighbor's pet pig. "Prize winnin' pig." They told her. So she best not be kicking this pig like she did their beloved Doobie— (*rest in Hell, Doobie!*). She continued to laugh.

Somehow, the broomstick handle caught the pig just right: up the ass.

She couldn't help but ache all over from laughter, but from coming off of being scared damn-near-to-death she would gladly have this ache.

As she calmed down and wiped tears from her eyes, the thumping and knocking sounds came again.

"I am never going to get any sleep, dammit!" She grabbed the broom but she quickly remembered the pig and swirled around in her room, more gracefully than you could imagine for a woman pushing seventy-two, as she looked for something else to arm herself with.

Another singular "THUMP!" sent her fist up into the air. She swung it in a mad circle.

"I swear! I'll...I'll call the cops if you don't leave me alone!" After the words came out of her mouth, her tongue went very dry.

"What if the cops aren't able to come in time...in time? In time for what?" She thought. She shivered as she grabbed an umbrella, thought better of it, then a heavy hand-carved wooden eagle head. It had "Heath Garrison, 1928-1998" engraved upon the brass plaque tacked to a square wooden base.

This retirement gift had been a bad omen— her husband died the following year. Well, it was a bad omen for him, at any rate. Linda wished that he would have gone much, much sooner. Lucky for her, out in the middle of nowhere no one really misses a retired senior with no kids...

A momentary flash of memory came to her; the last words that she ever said to him

before he died.

“See you in Hell, honey.”

She clutched it tightly as she walked.

She swallowed and her throat felt like two stones rubbing together as she neared the door. Her heart hammered in her chest.

If that man was out there, she was definitely going to be concerned for her safety. More thumps came, followed by a sound like leaves being raked. Her trailer creaked.

“Co-o-ld.” It was as if the wind whispered it. Linda stopped and felt her insides clutch.

“Cold...” It was a man’s voice. Her blood ran cold and her face suddenly felt as if it were carved out of ice. She couldn’t move.

“Cooold...”

She reached for the door knob. “I can take him. He’s frozen half-to-death.” She pepped herself as she opened the door.

As she did, she swung the eagle head and didn’t connect. She fell forward and landed in the packed snow. More snow whirled and tore at her hair, her face, and her clothes. She tried to stand but felt as if someone were punching her around.

“COOOOLD!” it was a man’s voice, followed by a woman’s voice. It was quickly chorused by a child’s voice. Linda looked up and watched several figures walk past her—some familiar, some not—and they shuffled hunched over, toward her house.

“No...no room!” She said as the wind piled more snow into her mouth and eyes. She blinked and found the strength to stand. As she did, she saw the full horror of what was to come.

Blue faces with ultraviolet lips chattered as the people shuffled toward her. They noticed

her standing there and opened their mouths.

“Cooold!” they said, their voices chorusing the wind like wailing banshees, and they reached their iced arms out to her. Linda backed away.

“Stay back! STAY BACK!” She turned and saw her trailer being crowded with all the frozen bodies. They turned and opened their mouths at her. They all moaned, “Cooold”.

Linda swallowed that stony way once again and turned around. She saw the others still coming. She turned again. The others were coming from inside the house too. She heard a scuffling noise.

She looked down and saw the prize pig, broom stuck-in-ass and all. She screamed as several pairs of frosty hands grabbed her and pulled her in different directions.

Then she saw him: her husband. His body was in an obvious state of decay but the square-shaped wound to his head was still visible. He shuffled toward her and twitched, creaking like old wood, as he pointed at her.

“Hell...o, dearest. What’s for supper?” A sinister smile twisted the flesh around his exposed teeth. His eyes were pale and cloudy but they were definitely zeroed in on Linda.

Linda squalled as she felt her limbs go numb and her body twisted in agony; she felt as if it were being shredded to ribbons.

She broke free from the grip of the pawing, frozen crowd then fell to her hands and knees. She crawled as fast as her aged body could move, back to her house.

A clicking-noise grabbed her attention and she looked up at the stairs leading into the house.

The pig-sicle stared down at her; it snorted coolly. Something colder than this terrible winter-storm, colder-than-death, touched the back of her legs.

Linda shivered so hard that she was sure that she broke bones. Her tears froze instantly to her cheeks.

She closed her eyes to try and will it away, but the winter remained. And all she could think about was getting warm again.

Nice, and warm.

Springtime beyond Pluto

"So you mean to tell me that rock is dead?" Mark pulls on a cigarette with his teeth, and lights it. Louis nods, his bloodshot-brown eyes sparkle as a natural semi-smile curls his lips.

"Yup. Dead. All we have now are whiners and wanna-be's."

Mark, obviously several years Louis' senior, smiles around the cigarette. His wrinkles stay when he stops smiling. He snorts.

"Whatever Louis."

He leans back on the floral-patterned couch and peers out at the small grove of trees in the distance. He surveys the open hills and valleys for a moment, musing. He looks over at his young lover and shakes his head.

The dark toned Louis curls with laughter and kicks a few of the empty beer bottles through the pallor of ashes on the ground in front of the sway-back couch. He rakes a hand through his hair and flicks his tongue over his back molars.

"Aww, you like pop music. I forget." he snickers, taking a healthy swig from his beer. Mark punches Louis in the crook of his arm and growls. Louis returns Mark's playful punch with a dive into his lap. He drags Mark to the ground.

Dust fills the air around them as they roll over the top of each other several times. They grapple for a bit, biting each other's lips and restraining each other.

"If I weren't so tired I'd kick your ass. You know that right?" Mark says between inhaleds. Louis giggles as he holds Mark's hands down.

"You mean if you weren't so damn OLD!"

They exchange glances and laugh. Louis drops his gaze and sighs. Mark cups Louis' chin and gives him a light kiss on the mouth.

"You are so asking for it."

"Whatever, man. Got any smoke?" Louis shrugs, his eyes still half-closed. Mark bucks lightly and rolls Louis to the side. He stands, to the reluctance of Louis. A slight smirk curls his lips.

"I have just enough for me...man." He gibes. The emphasis on the word 'man' comes out sounding like 'may-ann'. Louis stares, slack-jawed.

"Are you serious?"

Mark walks toward the trees some distance away and calls over his shoulder, "Mooch!"

His laughter echoes through the trees, stirring up a few stray birds as he walks up a hill and disappears over the crest. Louis sighs and shakes his head.

"I keep forgetting you're ornery."

Louis turns his attention to a short metal smoking-pipe and thrusts his hands down into the front of his pants to retrieve a baggy with a small, tight green bud inside.

He smiles down at it with adoration. He looks around for something flat to break it up on and spies a rock roughly the size of a TV dinner tray a few feet from the couch.

On his way back to the couch, he hears a rustling in the trees. Louis pauses, and shrugs it off with a barely audible 'just the wind' and returns to his sitting position.

He hums a metal tune as he breaks up the bud and sprinkles the shake into the bowl of his pipe. He pushes the stone to the seat next to him.

"What's taking you so long Mark?" He hollers as he lights the contents of his pipe and takes his first deep inhale. The embers glow red-golden and they highlight Louis' fuzzy chin.

He holds his breath in, quietly keeping an eye upon the hill where Mark went, and releases it. He takes another draw in then shouts as loud as he can.

"YO! MARK-O!" He laughs at his own voice, losing the fragrant smoke on each caw of laughter.

Something rustles the leaves and bushes. Louis' hair stands on end and he swivels his head to look behind him, even though he didn't particularly want to see whatever it could be. There is nothing. Relieved, he coughs and takes another draw.

Something moves along the crest of the hill, it is little more than a dark gray silhouette in the approaching evening. Louis grins and releases a thick cloud of scented smoke. He sings out.

"Markus...There's only a couple more hits on this and I'm getting lonely..."

Louis stands up and his words fade into anxious quiet. He moves his mouth but no sound comes. He drops his pipe and loses all tension in his jaw. The silhouette coming down the hill explodes into a wriggling multitude of tentacle-esque strings; a million hairs waver in the light breeze. It moves like an octopus along the ground and kicks up dust in its wake.

Louis freezes in fearful curiosity. He is stoned and all he can think to do is run but his legs refuse to move. The thing charges toward him, cruising along on the tips of its many finger-like stumps.

"What the FUCK!" his voice cleaves with the words. They shatter his frightened trance and he runs, almost comically zig-zagging like a frightened rabbit through the trees. A thin creek gurgles just ahead and Louis pumps his

legs for all that he is worth toward the wet cleft.

A tentacle snakes around his ankle and snags him. Louis falls, face first to the ground. He paws at the loose rock-laden dirt, ignoring the stabbing pains of losing a fingernail or two, and his blood chills as the creature makes a rasping staccato sound. It is unlike anything that he had ever heard before.

"NO!" is all Louis can manage. His thoughts blast through him, making no sense. Everything in his short life comes as one big jumble. Tears explode onto his cheeks as he sobs Mark's name.

Something presses against his ear, like a tongue, and he instantly feels as heavy as cemetery stone. A moist appendage wraps around his throat giving the jellyfish-thing leverage to turn him over. It squats above his face and its writhing bell-shaped mass blocks out the sky completely. A clapping mouth, flesh-like and velvety, protrudes and spits black fluid all over Louis' shocked face.

He screams.

He drowns.

He is gone.

Overhearing Louis' piercing screams, Mark zips his jeans and says while turning, "Louis?"

He is greeted by a bulbous wrinkled mass with flossy limbs that defy the weight of the world with their smooth vacillating movements. It appears like an enormous brain set atop jellyfish tendrils. They stand close, face-to-face would it have had one.

A ripe smell hits him and it nearly gags him. It reminds him of dead rotting fish two days out in the sun, and diesel fuel. Neither of them moves beyond the strange wavering of the floss and Mark wonders, in this odd still moment, how the hell it stays upright. A few

longer and heftier appendages part the dangling tendrils and reach for him.

He shrieks as the creature coils a tentacle around his throat and shoves a thick, phallic appendage into his open mouth. It thrusts past Mark's teeth; despite his fierce grasp upon its slimy flesh, he cannot stop its choking penetration. Unable to land a solid blow, Mark begins to claw, punch, and kick furiously.

"Louis!" He wails in his mind and his thoughts rip through his entire body; the flowers, the candle, and the ring that he had hidden behind this tree. The question he had practiced over and over in his mind, "Will you be the light in my darkness?" All of it echoes into melancholy. Tears squeeze from his eyes.

His expression is one of defeat as the thing penetrates his ears and his nostrils with translucent fleshy-strings. It coils snugly around his torso and shoves more tendrils down his pants: they slip into every orifice, writhing as they go.

Mark is unable to fight back and darkness seeps in from the corners of his eyes. Pressure builds in his temples. Deep within the wrinkles of the creature, something sparks like electricity.

The shine comes to Mark like diamonds beneath clear water. Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star lulls through his thoughts as the bones of his skull issue a sound like an egg breaking. A multitude of tentacles push their way into jagged folds of flesh and bone, to spear and puree Mark's brain.

His eyes roll over to white and he no longer fights the creature. Instead, he helplessly twitches in its tightly coiled appendages. Its proboscis, now buried deep within the goo of his brain, unceremoniously absorbs the liquefied remains.

The surrogacy fails, and Mark's seizing-kicks come to a stop. The creature releases its grasp upon him. Mark's body drops to the

ground like an old sack of laundry. The creature moves away from his corpse leaving a trail resembling that of a snail's silvery mucus as it goes.

∞

The two creatures meet up on the crest of the hill closest to Louis' resting, and pregnant body. They linger, then intertwine their tentacles and pull each other close; they connect like fleshy puzzle pieces and appear to have no clear beginning or end to their penetrations.

Their tendrils clinch and further penetrate in varying locations, followed by low chirrups and cooing noises that vibrate their bodies as they pulse within each other's embrace.

After a moment, they move away from the site, their tentacles and appendages braided together like fingers, and together they rise like a balloon into the atmosphere and beyond... Their combined form sparkles like a moist gem in the blood-tones of sunset.

Something strains against the skin of Louis' swollen skull, a dull shape slightly resembling bloated blood-veins. A thin, gray, and string-like thing worms its way out from Louis' left nostril and it wriggles, almost as if it is waving goodbye.

Or maybe it's hello.

Cradlesong

I am unadorned before you,
arms outstretched
with breasts a-sway,
atomic eyes set deep
within boyish cheeks.

My hair falls freely, as does my love.

"Touch me."

The shape of your body in the pillow next to
me...

"Yes."

...Is a cup full of shadow,

"Explosion!"

Memory,

"Explosion."

Misery.

Explode...

...The shape of your body in the pillow next to
me...

I am bare bones;
bare bones with no eyes to judge.

Suck the marrow from my bones
and for a small fee,
I'll let you drink from my skull...

taste the dreams that once were there.

Let's walk in the garden,
bare feet upon warm grass,
moist with dew.

Take me in your arms.

Dance with me.

Suck my bones!

A kiss. *"Intoxicating!"*

A touch. *"Inferno!"*

Hum a cradlesong, "Lay back, flossy girl.
Lie down."

Caress the scar upon earth's flesh
with petals and plastic—

—and watch me sleep.

Give the stone a kiss, but,
shed no tears for the words
engraved there.

It did not hurt, when the stone-smith cut it.

Then,

I will dream of living,
and my hollow chest

will thrum

a cradlesong for you,

will hum a cradlesong for you.

Fuck Love

The shapely brunette beneath him stretches her arms out, drapes them over his shoulders and allows her wrists to rest at a comfortable bend.

"I love you Dwayne."

His eyes are closed as he holds her legs over his shoulders. Street-lights kick on, one by one, and drown out the moonlight. He rushes his hips front to back, sweat turns his hair into moist waves, and he is licking his lips.

"Yeah. Shannon..."

He stutters as he quickens his pace. "...I'm gonna come...!" Before she can respond, he arches his back and groans.

Shannon purrs, "Oh." But disappointment is obvious upon her face.

It seems to take a moment for Dwayne to come-to and he lowers his face to meet hers in a kiss. His eyes are still closed. He lets go of her legs and they slip down to rest in curvy angles by his sides. Shannon hugs him, deepening the kiss. He is salty to the taste.

Her mouth fills with blood. She stares up and gurgles frothy red bubbles as Dwayne is flung into the air, spraying a Pollock of blood and spittle across the sky.

Shannon tries to take a breath but gags on the blood and rolls over. She falls onto the ground, heaving and sobbing. Spittle dribbles brown and red, across her chin and chest as she moves.

Dwayne's screams are shrill and brief, silenced in the sound of flesh being pummeled by something heavy. Shannon regains her breath and coughs. The muddy ground slips beneath her trembling limbs as she crawls into a run.

Something tangles into her hair and yanks her backward. She flips over and spikes of light

blind her, bleeding into blurry contrasts against the stars of the sky. She kicks, rabbit like and grabs handfuls of moist earth in an attempt to move away from her attacker.

Shannon catches a glimpse of Dwayne—that is left of him. It momentarily paralyzes her. Darkness wobbles and moves in front of her, strikes her across the face and knocks her to the ground.

Its inky hands slip higher and higher on her legs, forcing her toward it. Shannon's eyes widen and everything sharpens to crystal clarity. She whines, a loose pronunciation of a name.

"Donna? Oh god, Donna..."

The woman's face may as well have been made out of granite, but the cool spark of dissociation and detest gleams in her yellow-green eyes. Shannon struggles for words as she stands, and tries to free herself from the woman's intense glare by leaning in for a kiss.

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. It was just sex, I swear. My love. Please, he meant nothing to me. Please...I love you..." Her lips tremble as she whispers the words, and they brush lightly on Donna's lips. She tries to slip her tongue into her mouth.

Donna, swathed in black, bares her teeth through the blood on her face and grabs Shannon by the throat, sure to dig her fingers in deep.

She raises a small hatchet, a large mat of hair and flesh slips down the bloody blade. Shannon watches as the clump falls unheard to the ground, then inhales to scream.

The moon moves across the sky, following its ancient pathway until its weight pulls the sun back over the horizon. The morning rays illuminate the park and as patrons make their way to enjoy a leisurely day, a child screams in horror.

His mother runs up behind him then she, too, screams as she tries to shield her child from the mess of human remains and sparkling entrails with a palm over his eyes.

Soon, the police, citizens and press, all come to gawk and speculate at the horror of a Janus-like sculpture consisting of two human hearts, four arms, four legs and exposed internal organs arranged and bound together to spell the words "Fuck Love" atop a picnic table.

BRAINSICK:

Mary Goff lives in the basement of an abandoned hospital somewhere in Wisconsin. She loves to spend time with her lovely (*and so very life-like*) family, seeking out fresh burials, creating funerary music, writing anonymous confession letters to local law enforcement, and simply enjoying the benefits of general reclusiveness.

To learn more about Mary Goff and the cover artist, Bryan Bloodsoaker, visit the following sites on the web:

www.koff-inn.com (The official web presence of Mary Goff)

www.bloodsoaker.com (The official web presence of Bryan Bloodsoaker)

www.pretty-scary.net

Mary Goff would also like to invite you to visit these kick ass websites as well. Because she loves them and you should too:

www.axwoundzine.com/

www.eveblaackpub.com/

www.myspace.com/cinegorepictures

www.horrorsociety.com

www.gonzoriffic.com/

www.thechainsawmafia.com/

www.hsus.org/

www.guitarsforvets.org