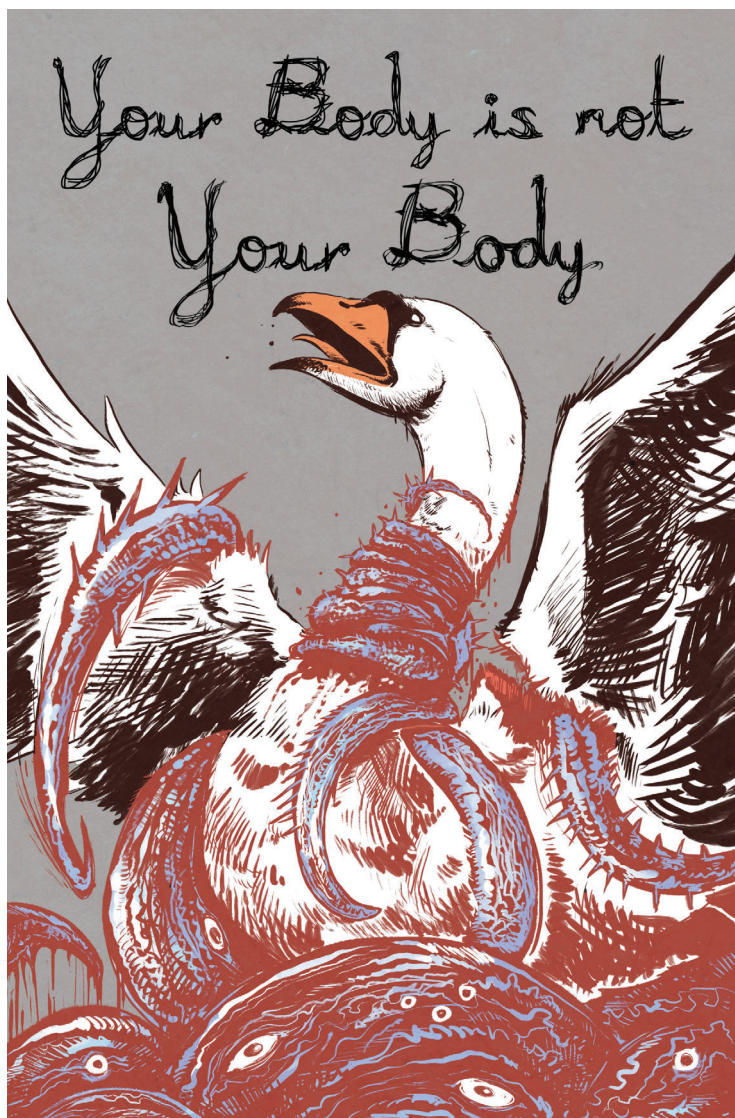


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Read an excerpt from



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About YOUR BODY IS NOT YOUR BODY:

A centaur seeks illicit surgery in an alien bodily modification club.

Two medieval monks react to their transformation and demonic pregnancy in very different ways.

A resourceful trans teen destroys sports bigots through the power of pluckiness...and abundant body horror.

A stellar cathedral crosses galaxies to dump the corpse of God into a star before the mission devolves into a panoply of psychedelic orgies.

A doxxed teen falls victim to violent assault and dishes out some harrowing retribution of their own.

Over thirty Trans and Gender Nonconforming creators unite to voice their rage, and the rules of conventional Horror go out the f\$%&ing window in this collection featuring murderous pleasure-bots; proselytizing zombies; acid-filled alien cops; science run amok; sorcerers, ghouls, cannibals...and that barely scratches the grave-dirt.

“Every story is a finely-honed scalpel poised to carve new pathways of perception on the meat of your mind.” - M. Belanger, *from their introduction*

Your Body is Not Your Body was conceptualized in response to the abhorrent declarations of Texas Governor Greg Abbott and his government in March 2022. Proceeds go to Equality Texas to combat the attempts of the government to criminalize trans youth and their families.

CHIRONOPLASTY

by JOE KOCH

The sky freezes and falls to the ground. Black shards of night scatter under Chiron's clumsy hooves, crushing an obsidian infection, glittering as he leaves behind his frail shelter for gunmetal city streets. It's too cold to slow down, colder still exposed to the inscrutable black glow outside Chiron's hideaway. Tempting the sea of streets, he may drown in the pain of his unthinkable body, a centaur at risk in the wrong cryptid habitat.

Killing chronic futures with every step, he exits the past with bold choices as the metastasized city sprouts identical heads on each corner, another No-Club in no-time blocking, beckoning, exploding all the way down across endless intersections.

No-Club has no exit. The neon sign hovers above wet streets. Faces of strangers lie flat in reflective pools slashed by passing traffic. The pavement is wet and silent, then wet and wheezing, then cracked by window-faces with every bus and door and alleyway that rises. Across the city's excess, Chiron rounds the corner with a clatter of hooves.

The shine of slippery breath as the surface cracks, liquid underneath releases, and Chiron catches their half-horse lower torso on a parking meter pole before they splash to the ground, gutter and sidewalk ready to greet them with a concussion. Unknown water-faces turn away in abject disinterest. Awkward, winded, bent around the parking meter; Chiron reassembles his four horse legs and two human arms into a workable position to avoid disaster and choose a better medical crisis.

Today is surgery day at No-Club and anything goes.

Another door opens in no-time with sufficient spacious egress to accommodate a centaur's shape. Rumbling noises spill out on smoke and hide the broken sky. Pastel fog and light pollution undermine the cosmos while frozen gases of the void remain and settle over the cancerous urban expanse. Native to the desert, Chiron slips on ice. The cold cuts him in half. Half centaur, half man, half something-or-other; too many halves to make a simple whole and all the confusion of a

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fable told and retold.

No-Club has no exit, and glimpsing what's behind the door as it swings open and closed flips archetypal cards from Freud's primal scene: shame, awe, desire. Chiron can practically hear the hand being dealt with the flat repetitive certainty that he'll never leave once he enters the rigged game-space of no-time.

With the choices they've made, there's nowhere else left to go without traveling backwards in time. A centaur's body doesn't fit in the city outside. The city dark; the city wet. The city splashing with synthetic sounds as tires thrill across gunmetal streets. The city alive. The city will eat itself. There's no sky anymore, only cold smoke. The city destroys mythology. The city regresses exponentially as it perpetuates onward towards infinity.

Inside No-Club with no regrets, because the poetic architecture of Chiron's mythological chest was made all wrong and they will not survive another night alone in the city cold, the city lost. Half myth, half man, hung with shameful udders like obscene growths, diseased, inflated, bulbous with the visible fruition of external demands, leaking the milk of damnation to feed the infantile needs of others who plead and beg and grab; but what about Chiron? Who cares who they are and what they want beneath this forced combination of parts?

Before he can catch his breath or accommodate his hot horse-haunches to No-Club's raging temperature, a stranger seizes Chiron's full breasts, inspects them with mechanical efficiency, and says, "Come with me right away to the crash site."

Which explains some of the heat and smoke in here tonight. Alien intervention sounds more promising than the known prosaic earthbound back-alley hacks, so Chiron follows.

In the crush of the club, Chiron's groin sweats, and the scent of horse dick stinks up their vicinity with excessive force. They can tell who's bemused by a chin lift of olfactory interest and who, in contrast, ranks inferior by way of an unrestrained eye-roll. It's good to wear the barometer of sexual prowess openly on their long centaur torso, good to graze soft city toes with the superior durability of hooves. In another age, they would have been a god to these craven creatures desiccated by modernity. Chiron takes wider steps. It's good to smell like a threat.

As bodies move away, Chiron spreads their shoulders, push-

ing out his chest. The shallow cavity of a centaur rests between the bulbous abominations, well-formed and desirable though they may be. The blood of generations may beg for him to procreate, to warm and nurture great broods of lustful young; but Chiron cannot respect a past that clamors for mere compromise below a dead sky. He is a cold and lonely centaur and will not be consumed by the city dark. They will not be mastered by the random genetic lottery braided from a paper horse's harness. He will escape the sea of streets, for the centaur presents as a land animal and bullies through the crowded club like a holy beast and shoves their trouble into alien palms:

“Cut them off!”

The mother tongue is quick. The superposition of no-cock, no-time in alien gleam-stoked surgical suites sleeps in sync with incomplete dreams. The blue light of the crash site preps heads for experimentation and hypnotizes nerve endings like unlocked webs. Warning: the following paragraph contains graphic depictions of violence against gendered body parts which some readers may find upsetting or offensive. Warning: dysphoria is hell. Warning: this is a work of fiction. Warning: don't believe everything you read, this warning least of all. Warning: what did you expect from a centaur?

Warning, danger. In contrast to chopping off, say, a finger or a small toe, the following contains a graphic and prolonged scene where a breast is snagged in the scissor-grip of alien equipment like garden shears. In traumatic throes of pseudo-erotic hatred for the transitional object's haunted origin, the breast pillows between the wide V-shaped blades of the clipping device, flesh squeezed between sharp edges as they snap closed, nipple bulging, stretching, its gift of fat pink aureole swollen about to burst before the blood spurts. The second deletion of the next breast repeats the gory scene. The centaur's chest sheds its creamy excess as the alien surgeons couple with their implicit trauma, exaggerating the image of the body in an ecstasy of transformation.

Emptiness spreads through Chiron in peaceful pulsations, a natural anesthetic like a slow and constant heartbeat. He hears the voices of the merging surgeons, voices in his head who also hear him and respond to the sleepless dream of self-creation and recreating self.

The no-voice of no-time speaks and listens with a secreted shell to scab over Chiron's breastplate. Alien proteins course through Chiron's half-awake horse flesh, healing uncomfortable angles in an

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increasingly ambitious fantasy of rebirth. The exploding city heats in anger, flapping wet streets like whips, shaking No-Club's foundations and juddering the crash site and making a mad blinking strobe of the alien surgical suite's gleaming blue light.

The city dark; the city ruptured. The city screaming stay in your lane! Protestors flood in below the neon egress, but No-Club has no exit in contrast to the infinite metastasizing city that perpetuates outside its doors. Body after body enters shrieking sex is real and your body is a temple! Hand after hand thrusts pamphlets from the Institute of Genetic Purity printed in hot pink with gold heart emblems linked together encasing slogans: save our girls from alien misogyny! Invaders are everywhere! But the hands cannot thrust, and the mouths cannot move as the bodies pile in from the ever-flowing rivers of the crowded city streets and pack No-Club full to the static seams.

The blue strobe light can barely illuminate. The mob amasses like the multiplying bacteria of an infection. There's no space between shoulders and faces. Protestors pour in from the ever-birthing reproductively diseased spunk-hole of the city, and participants of large stature stomp the slight, teeming to the top of the pile, gasping like netted fish.

Bones snap. Teeth smash. Lips bleed. None can breathe by the time the dominant bodies squeeze up to the ceiling's rafters. At the bottom of the pile, the weakest have already expired. Chiron sleeps through the massacre, dreaming in alien synchronicity, happy in their blissful release from an oppressor that once lived inside their skin.

No-time speeds up as a result of the deceleration forced upon the space by the crush of the protestors; medical waste rots faster. The dying expire at an increasing rate. Putrefaction happens quickly as No-Club enters into real time and Chiron awakes.

He risks drowning in the sea, in the wrong cryptid habitat. The murk of many deaths accumulated doesn't affect Chiron's ability to breathe, but the inane roar of protestor no-thought chokes his soul with each poison drop of hate which judges and demands their martyrdom. Trapped and liquefying, the eyes of the eugenicists can no longer deny what they see: Chiron concedes eagerly to illicit alien surgery and will do anything to be free.

As time continues moving, the city's reflected space reaches a pinpoint of exponential regress. No-Club's boundaries quiver with

quantum anarchy. The alien surgeons flaunt their expertise, changing beast to man and back again through endless permutations of joy. Lights like finely tuned piano keys, like inks in unbearable colors begin to blend and bend the sick opinions of the onlookers.

We are all witnesses to Chiron's transformations, willing or not, and if not, why? Why do we care? And if we do not desire transformation, what do we fear?

A welcome carnage ends the parade of Chiron's desires. Priests and hard men in ball caps desire it, too. Many directions of light traveling at real-time speed-map a new territory outside the city dark, the city cold, the city dead with no stars, the city that cannot hold. No-Club exits itself, mirroring the city's infinity. Protestors unravel as the twine of their impacted thoughts spills out, neurons weaving a less broken sky that holds more light. Chiron hopes there will be enough light.

Already it seems a little warmer. Or perhaps Chiron has grown stronger. Where the city ends, mythology begins. The vanishing point grows visible under the new web of dimly brightening sky. Fruiting heads high among alien arbors nod in new sacred time and in synchronized agreement as Chiron delivers a final battle cry to the city's surviving protestors: "Your quote-unquote violence is my freedom. Technology leaves you behind. Your infantile fears betray you, and my body is not your battleground. You know nothing of my pain."

BECAUSE MY MOTHER TELLS ME SO

by DAYNA INGRAM

I am being stalked by a zombie. He's unlike other zombies in that he's completely cognizant; he sits on my front porch and taunts me. I have a porch swing and he leans back in it, kicking his feet against the rail. He says, "Come on out, little girl," and flashes his rotted teeth at me. I haven't left the house in four days.

On the first day, I almost did not notice him. It rained earlier in the morning so that the sidewalk was covered in worms by noon, and I went out to gather them. When I stepped out onto the porch, he was there. He must have been. He must have watched me from the porch swing, silently dripping mucus onto the cross-stitched cushions, as I bent at the knee and plucked up the worms with my index finger and thumb. I only take the liveliest ones, otherwise there is no point. I put them in a mason jar and turned to head back in, and that is when I noticed him, noticing me.

He said nothing at first. He smiled and his tongue lolled out next to an incisor where a piece of his jaw was missing. One eye scanned my body, its pupil dilating at a rapid pace, while the other struggled to keep its placement inside its sunken socket. Every few seconds he had to raise his arm, the good one with most of its skin intact, and gently nudge the eyeball into place. His fingers left smudges on the glistening orb, until the entire thing was clouded over, but I don't even think he realized he was doing this. One day he might say to me, "Why can't I see out of this eye? Where did all this gray come from?" But on this first day, he did not say that. This first day, he said: "Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior?"

I did not see his Bible because it was on the porch swing where he'd left it. His body leaned forward as if he might take a step, and then leaned away from me as if he might not.

"Yes," I said, hiding the mason jar behind my back even though I knew he had already seen it. "Yes, I'm good."

"But could you be great?" he asked.

I could see his larynx working through the holes in his throat.

His voice didn't come from his mouth, even though his teeth and jaws moved—he had no lips, or rather, he had negligible lips—it came from all of him, from the porous whole of him. “Could you be better in the eyes of the Lord? Could you be your best? Your best for you is good, but your best for the Lord is better than you yet know how to achieve.”

“I don't have any money.” I knew to be suspicious of something, but was unsure of exactly what. I was walking slowly toward the porch steps, staying to the right of him. He did not step forward but continued to sway, one arm tucked into the pocket of his tattered trousers, the other hanging loosely at his side, except when it was raised to his precarious eye.

“What *do* you have, girl?” The way he said “girl” made me nervous. Drool and mucus sloped down his chin.

“I left the oven on,” I said, and tried to hurry past him. I might not have made it, but my neighbor Jim Dobson came out onto his porch at just the right time. The zombie turned at the sound of the screen door creaking open, and I sprinted to my own door. I was inside before I heard Jim shout a “Hi-ya!” across the driveway.

I thought the zombie would leave now, but he walked to the edge of the porch and planted his finger bones on the railing, leaning over to shout back at Jim. They talked for almost an hour. Jim Dobson doesn't work anymore on account of his back, and his wife works a lot of double shifts at the Meat Palace. I've caught Jim looking through his bathroom window into my bathroom while I pee. I keep a Sharpie next to the toilet paper and I mark it on the tub every time he looks. There are twenty-seven marks now. I've thought about closing the curtain, but the thought makes me lonely.

Jim talked to the zombie about lawn care and health insurance. The zombie talked to Jim about soul care and soul insurance. He confessed to hyperbole, but he continued to peddle his god.

I listened for a little while and then got my shoes from the living room closet. I live alone so I could put my shoes wherever I wanted but this seems best. Best for me, best for the Lord. The zombie's voice and my neighbor's voice became one voice that sounded like singing and I hummed along to the baritone. I poured the worms from the mason jar into my shoes, first the left one, then the right one. I put my feet inside and walked around a little. The worms felt like spaghetti but not like spaghetti, because I've tried spaghetti and spaghetti did

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not feel like worms.

I spent the afternoon with my eyes closed, wriggling my toes. When the baritones faded, I looked up and saw the zombie's silhouette through the shades drawn over my front window. He sat down on the porch swing and picked up his Bible. The timer on the stove went off, and I made something to eat. I went to bed several hours later with my shoes on.

That was day one.

I didn't expect him to be there the next day. I was supposed to meet my dance partner for practice, but he was still outside. I peered at him through the mail slot, and he bent down and grinned at me.

"Come on out, little girl. I've got a powerful message to share with you."

I took a shower and cleaned out my shoes with ammonia and bleach. I phoned my dance partner.

"Well, Christ, Marie, I mean, what the hell?" Louise said when I told her I could not make it.

"There's a zombie on my porch," I told her.

"And since when don't you have a back door?" Louise had throat cancer four years ago when she was thirty-two and they had to cut a hole in her neck. She speaks through a machine and she sounds like a Speak & Spell, except not as evil. Whenever we are dancing, if someone tries to psyche her out by staring at her or talking about her, she glares at them with her gray eyes and says, "Do you want fries with that?" She can't really laugh anymore, but she wheezes and her eyes water and I know what she means.

"My mother's car is on the street," I said.

"Look, do you want me to come over there? You can't skip practice, doll, the tourney is tomorrow."

The zombie tapped on the windowpane and flattened the Bible against the glass. He tried to wink at me with his good eye, and his bad eye *slooked* out of its socket. It dangled on his cheek from a stubborn ligament.

"Maybe," I said to Louise.

While I waited for Louise, I tried not to look at the zombie, but he tried very hard to look at me. My across-the-street neighbor, Mrs. Flannigan, came out to walk her yappy dog, Jasper, and I watched her watching us. The zombie turned and waved. Jasper yapped, and Mrs.

Flannigan looked offended.

“I’ve seen her in church,” the zombie said, turning back to me. He raised his voice to be heard through the glass; I could see his larynx working extra hard. “She doesn’t give a lot, but she sure does take a lot. Some people need Saving more than others.”

“So you’re Catholic?” I asked him. He didn’t hear me, so I moved to the mail slot and spoke through that. “You’re Catholic?”

“No, no. I keep forgetting all the words to my Hail Marys. Plus, they kneel and stand too much in their services; these knees ain’t what they used to be.” He brushed his bones against his kneecaps and sank into the dust that powdered off his pants.

“Mrs. Flannigan is Catholic,” I said.

“As the day is long!”

“Whose god are you selling?”

“Which one are you interested in buying?”

His tongue was dry, but his words were slick. He leaned too close to the mail slot and I could smell him. He smelled like my shoes.

“Little girl,” he said, “don’t you want to be Saved?”

Louise pulled up and parked behind my mother’s car. She is a large woman. It’s the reason we’ve been able to remain friends. She was my mother’s friend and now she is mine. When I walk outside with her, her shadow embraces me like a hug. Most of the couples we dance against underestimate her nimbleness and stamina; she pirouettes around them while they sit in the corner, icing their feet.

She started yelling at the zombie before she was even out of the Yugo. I watched her through the mail slot, like studying a specimen in a microscope. Her flesh jumped along with her steps, billowing against her yellow dress. She held her microphone to her neck and all that came out was static, she was trying to speak so fast. Her forehead sweat rivaled the zombie’s own mucus-moistened skin.

Louise came to a stop at the bottom of the porch steps. The zombie did not descend to her, but he leaned over and held his better arm out.

“Morning, lovely,” he said. “The name’s Rickshaw. Pleasure to meet you.”

Louise blushed. “Louise,” she said, and shook his hand. His skin stained hers.

They talked for several minutes. I think Rickshaw was trying

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to whisper, but it was difficult to do without lips; with what he had to work with, enunciation was key. There was only one volume setting on Louise's machine. They talked about me.

"It's her daddy's house," Louise said. "Marie hasn't gotten over losing him. You know she still writes and calls her mother, up there in that prison? But it's not my place to talk about. We've been dancing together for a couple years. Marie's social worker encouraged routine outings, and she found these dancing derbies on the internet, and here we are. These contests, these marathons, they don't happen much anymore, but you search around, you can find 'em. And holy Christ are they—well, shit—I mean, oops—I mean, sorry."

"No offense taken," Rickshaw said, waving away her concern. His stench wafted through the mail slot. "Tell me more about Marie's family."

The carpet began to burn my knees. I got up and went into the kitchen and watched the timer tick down until it went off and I ate something. I can always remember to set the timer, but without its tinny wail I forget to eat. They were still on the porch and I could hear their dissonant hum, but I didn't sing along. Soon, Jim Dobson joined them; I saw his shadow behind the curtains. He stood against the rail and Louise took up the porch swing. Rickshaw leaned against the glass. Every few minutes, he turned around slightly and tapped on the pane and waved. His knuckles left marks all over it.

When it got dark, Louise knocked on the door and I let her inside. "What are you doing in here all alone in the dark?" She started to flip on lights. "Come on outside. That Rickshaw is a charmer if I ever met one! Have you touched his hair?"

"It's crawling with spiders," I said.

"Well, it's easy enough to work around that, isn't it?" She clomped into my kitchen and opened the refrigerator. "Since when don't you have any beer?"

A college kid delivers my groceries once a week. I'm about a month shy to buy alcohol, but he knows about what happened and he feels sorry for me. Louise drinks his gifts when we come back from our marathons to count our winnings.

Jim Dobson tapped the front window and held up a six-pack of cans. Louise brushed past me. "Come on out," she said. "Come on, join the party."

“He wants to save me,” I said.

“So what?”

That night I heard the crickets all around my house. I desperately wanted to catch them, but everyone was still on the porch. I dreamt about being alone, but in the morning Rickshaw was still there.

“I never did go in for breakfast,” Rickshaw told me as I stuck my fork through the mail slot and dropped a fried egg onto the welcome mat. “I can eat breakfast for dinner, but never for breakfast.”

“What about dinner for breakfast?”

“Like a ham sandwich?” He stroked his chin with his index bone and slapped a maggot from his left nostril. “I could do a ham sandwich.”

“That’s lunch,” I said.

“Potato po-tah-doh.”

“Po-Buddha Po-God-oh,” I said.

A thick slime leaked down the front of Rickshaw’s pants. “Exactly,” he said.

“Is that a real Bible?”

“Is that a real question?”

“Why are you wearing that stupid man suit?”

“What?”

“It’s from a movie.”

I ate my breakfast, and he read his Bible. Louise snorted and rolled over on the porch swing. She woke up late in the afternoon and had to pee, but I wouldn’t let her in. “Goddammit,” she said, then, “Oops, I mean God darn it—I mean Gosh dang it. Marie—!”

“You’ll find another partner,” I told her. “Everyone wants to dance with you.”

“Just come the fu—udge... Just come the fudge out.”

“I can’t. Make him leave.”

Louise looked at Rickshaw, pushing all of her emotions into her eyes and some of it into her cleavage. He looked at neither and shook his head.

“You can save her next week, Rickshaw. This contest’s for ten thousand dollars!”

“What’s ten thousand to the Lord?” Rickshaw said. “What is one? One is none. A soul is the thing. A soul is a million dollars. But a

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million dollars is nothing. I have ten thousand dollars. I have a million dollars. Take it, will you, it's heavy. Take it, and I'll get more."

He gave her his Bible. She threw it down into the grass and triggered small earthquakes on the way to her car.

I called my mom at the allotted time. "You can make him leave, honey. Just call the police."

"I can't," I said.

"I'm sure they'll know what to do. Call the health department. Call animal control."

"I don't want them here."

"Call poison control."

"It's too many people."

When I called the police on my mother three years ago, more than thirty people showed up. Not all of them were police. Some were firemen and paramedics and people with cameras and one guy with a bag to put my father in.

"Let me talk to him," my mom said. "I'll make him see what's what."

"You'll talk to him all night."

"Only five minutes."

"No."

"He'll die, eventually."

"He's already dead." The words were an echo, but they rushed through my mother's ears like wind; she didn't hear them.

"Well, shit, sweetheart, I can't do anything for you from in here. I'm out in twenty years. Can you wait twenty years?"

"I can wait."

"Just don't invite him in."

"That's vampires."

"And don't feed him after midnight."

"That's gremlins."

"Goodnight, honey."

Now it's day four, and I have a plan. I thought of it while I was peeing. Jim Dobson stared at me and I smiled. He smiled. His shoulders shook. A bee landed on the screen of his window in just the right spot that it looked as though it had landed on his teeth. I tried putting bees in my shoes once; it is very difficult to catch bees. Plus, they can only sting you once and when you crush them, they just feel

like burnt paper. It's not worth it.

Jim Dobson's teeth reminded me of Rickshaw's teeth. Without lips, all Rickshaw has going for him and his Word are his teeth. What good is his tongue without teeth? What good is his larynx?

I go outside. It is slightly windy, and my skin prickles with gooseflesh. Rickshaw sits on the porch swing, rocking his heels against the floorboards. He pats the cushion next to him and grins.

"This seat's not taken, little girl."

"I'm not a little girl," I say.

"We're all of us children for the Lord."

"Does your lord eat children?"

Something dark and congealed spurts out of Rickshaw's throat. "Not my Lord, no. I have been known to nibble now and again."

"So, how are you going to save me?"

"Finally ready to open your heart to His Saving Grace? I can fill you, little girl. I can fill you with His love."

"Do I have to sign anything?"

Rickshaw stands up and steps toward me, saying, "Not a thing. Not a thing you won't miss."

He intends to say more, but I strike him with the pliers. I over-swing and the metal catches his cheek. His eye pops out, and he is distracted. I jam the pliers into his mouth and pinch them shut around the first tooth I can find. I pull hard, but it is unnecessary; the tooth comes out like worms from the ground.

Jim Dobson comes out and watches me. Mrs. Flannigan, too. Her yappy dog stays well away. Rickshaw yowls and thrashes and my clothes are ruined. He had thirty-two teeth.

"Why the hell'd you do that?" Jim asks me when I finish. His eyes are wet and his nose is red. His shoulders shake, but in a different way than before. "Just why the hell, huh? He was good. He was a good man."

"He was a zombie," I say. I remember the way my mother said it, when the police, and then the judge, asked her the same thing. "A fucking zombie."

"And who the hell are you?"

I don't have an answer for that. When my mother comes home in twenty years, maybe she will tell me.