

The Various Adventures of Monkey Boy

Part 8 “The Littlest Death”

By Anders Fischer

There is a hatred, a hatred born by inches throughout lives roiling with regret. It is a loathing so deep that it drowns all those who feel it, all those who come to hate the hatred itself. And it drives one who sits unnoticed in the heart of a city that burns like a secret, slowly roasting every living thing therein so that one day soon dragons may feed.



It had been something of an eventful night. The interview with Celia proved draining, dispiriting and yet tragically unenlightening. For all this talk of teeth as swords and omnipotent but nonexistent Dragons, Alice hardly felt like she understood what was happening any better than she did that first night in the alley behind the taco stand.

It wasn't too long ago she actually dared to dream that bringing in Celia meant the end to all of this. The mad doctor had after all engineered the arrival of all of her predecessors; she positioned herself behind everything. She governed and controlled *everything*. And yet nothing had changed. Whatever Celia may have figured out about her chimerical Dragon, she still didn't appear to know anything about Monkey Boy or his role in events. And when the interview was done and the veritable army of uniformed officers escorted this demigod back to a cell that should never have held her, she went along: head slumped and defeat sagging in her eyes. She walked not as a queen awaiting the fruition of her intricate schemes, but as a pawn that came to know the pointlessness of its own existence.

And if that wasn't enough, as soon as Alice left the precinct, a giant elephant guy came flying out of the air and smashed into a squad car. Even after *that* it still took six cops with tasers to bring him down. They locked him up and put yet another ivory sword into the evidence hold. Whatever was happening, Celia clearly wasn't as central to it as Alice had once hoped. Now, apparently, her goal was to pin down an amorphous mythical creature with no fixed form, purpose or definition. It was moments like this that made her miss Bangaroo; it was just so much simpler back then.

But Alice decided that for a time at least, she needed to put all this out of her mind. No more weirdness. No more freaks or monsters or existential crises. The night was overstuffed as it was and thankfully nearly at an end. So she took a deep breath and opened her apartment door to find a great big void of pitch-blackness, pierced only slightly by a minor glow that crept from under the bathroom door.

She drew her gun and snuck quietly inside. It wasn't like Monkey Boy to use the lights and nobody else had a key. So she inched carefully through the gloom, moving like a cat hunts a mouse or a pickpocket hunts a purse or a paparazzo hunts a quick bikini clip. The bathroom door was only open a crack, not enough to see inside, even as she sidled along the wall next to it. So she decided the direct approach was best. She slammed open the door and leapt in with the gun in front.

But what she discovered there was not what she expected. Standing alone in the bathroom and investigating himself in the mirror was a young boy with dark hair and no

clothes. Alice lowered her gun and – she thought – her jaw. The boy just looked back to her in a glance of familiarity and said:

“Hi.”

And – not knowing what else to do – she answered back:

“Hi?”



“We’re back with the top story of the hour: Monkey Boy unmasked. Earlier tonight in a spectacular battle at the Wet Season Wharves and Eateries with the latest in our recent rash of superpowered fiends, the man in question – who called himself Deo Genis – revealed to the world that Monkey Boy is in fact human, a young boy actually named Zachary Zane. Attempts so far to learn more of this boy’s life and history have been met with difficulty. But even though the facts aren’t all in yet, I think we can safely call this a bit of a shock, yes?”

“I’ll say. I mean, here we thought he was some grandiose super-human symbol that existed to lead us to the light and the peace and the Christ. But now we find out he’s just some kid in need of a shave. It’s disillusioning, spirit-crushing, like the exposure of a false messiah.”

“And did you notice how he never wears clothes? I mean it was one thing when we thought he was an animal of some kind. God knows we can’t teach dignity to a dog. But now that he’s human – and moreover a child – this cannot be allowed to stand. It’s just depraved is what it is.”

“But, my dear, you miss the most crucial element: Monkey Boy isn’t human, not completely. He may have been once, but not now. No, now he blurs the line between man and animal and once that line is obscured, how are we to keep from crossing it? For the moment, it’s just monkey law enforcement, but what’s next? Babysitting zebras? Dogs that walk men? Or maybe the next such merging will be with the common cow, the common and delicious cow. And if cows were to be part human, who’s to say at exactly what percentage our steaks will be whole Grade-A American meat and what percentage will be beef? And, more frightening, who’s to say what will taste better?”

“So what you all seem to be saying is that this latest revelation about Monkey Boy calls everything we thought we knew about him into question?”

“Exactly. Is he really the role model we thought he was?”

“Is he really hungry?”

“And is he really the hero we all wanted him to be?”



The morning sun groaned and squinted and lumbered listlessly over the horizon, creeping silently through windows and slapping awake those who would rather remain immersed in fanciful dreams that reveled in hidden desires which the waking world could never be permitted to know. It traveled solemnly over the beglittered mansions of Emergent Heights, across the Wet Season Wharves and through the maze of highways and off-ramps referred to colloquially as the Web. The orange rays brightened the homes of River Street and graced the shops of Vine and passed unnoticed over the ashen remnants of Den Street. And then it reached the small gated community of Clearing Way,

passed through each of the houses and arrived at the glittering steeple that sat at the heart of the neighborhood: The Blessed Church of the Holy Pine Cone.

It was something of an off-shoot religion admittedly, a reaction against what its adherents called “the spiritual negligence of the traditional faiths that permitted and encouraged obsolete naturalism.” The basic philosophy was that mankind had surpassed the need for elements of the natural order and so should “embrace a sinless modernity.”

“Consider, my brothers, the noble Tree,” proclaimed Pastor Shaun as his congregation listened intently in their pews. “Is it truly not the grandest of God’s creations? Simple, yet elegant and pure. It reaches out and is one with its brothers, for the Tree has branches. It gives of itself to feed the animals for the Tree has fruits. It shades the forest from heat and light for the Tree has leaves. And yet the Tree shall never know taint, it shall never know sickness or sores or sins. Why? Because for all these things the Tree has, there is one thing it does not have and that thing is...”

At that instant, all those assembled in the pews shouted in cheerful unison:

“SEX.”

“Precisely,” the pastor continued. “Modern society tells us that sex is natural, that it’s emotional and pure. But we know better, don’t we brothers?”

“YES.”

“We know that sex is just the great modern opiate, the leash around our necks that will drag us sticky and naked into Hell. We know this because we see what others see, but with clearer eyes: we see the Tree. The Tree does not reproduce sexually; it does not engage in acts of embarrassing and squishy intimacy. And yet we are not in a shortage of trees. What is the answer, my brothers?”

“PINE CONES!”

“That’s right. That is right. The Tree uses intermediaries. One Tree deposits its essence into the holy vessel, the great and divine Pine Cone, and from that vessel many more trees are born. There is no contact, no perversity; just simple, mechanical, saintly replication.”

“Hallelujah.”

“The other faiths, they understand that sex is a dirty thing, a vile thing that nobody really knows how to do well, no matter what your ex-wife might say. But they still accept the current fallacy that sex – at least between married couples – must be permitted to prolong society.”

“Boo! It’s a lie! It’s a lie!”

“Now, now, there was a time when this *was* true. Even God can make mistakes. But it is the duty of Man to correct those mistakes, and so we have. For technology has brought us our Pine Cone. We now have in vitro fertilization, my brothers, the solution to the age-old problem of how to propagate the species without the hated sex act. But now, NOW, husbands and wives can have children – as many as they like – without having to touch each other. NOW when your time comes, you will all have children of your own but not with one another. NOW, at long last, humanity can live as straight, rigid and unmoving as the Trees.”

The applause that followed, it had been said, was so loud, so raucous and yet so piercing that on the distant side of the world, an East German farmer was just lying down from a long day’s work in the fields only to be startled awake by the inexplicable sound of clapping. He would spend all night searching for its source, demanding of the shadows

that they cease their hideous mockeries and let him rest. And while the applause lasted only a few short minutes, it was said to haunt him to his final days, days spent in the lowest reaches of the dingiest asylum trying to out-clap eternity.

For those gathered at the Church of the Holy Pine Cone however, the applause simply gave way to a period of refreshments. The meals on supply were strategically chosen so as not to arouse anything other than hunger – and even *that* was debatable – and the flock clustered around the selection of crackers and unimaginably stinky cheeses and plain lukewarm water to discuss everyday things and their triumphs over their passions. Men boasted with each other over how long it had been since they last slept in the same room as their wives; women compared styles and congratulated one another on their homeliness.

But there were some for whom the old passions died very hard and poor Arthur clomped his pudgy self over to the lovely Daisy and in one sweaty and awkward gulp, yelped:

“Hi... Daisy.”

Daisy never once took her eyes off her empty plate and even though she was facing away from him, it should have been obvious to Arthur that she winced and sighed at his approach. She said nothing to him, but he didn't allow that to deter him.

“So, uh... Daisy... I was thinking, I have these tickets for *Filly: The Loveable Tadpole the Movie* and I was wondering if you wanted to go see it with me.”

“Why would I want to see that?” she asked brusquely and deeply – like Lucifer responding to a victim demanding the return of his soul – again without turning around.

“Well, because it's the only movie out right now without a sex scene in it. And golly I just know it would be lots of fun. Won't you please come with me?”

And at this, Daisy did turn around. She took one long look up and down Arthur's nearly amorphous frame and answered:

“No.”

“Ah, please.”

“No.”

“But...”

Arthur's entreaties fell silent as a loud collective gasp emerged from nearly everyone in the room. For something had just happened, something unusual and scandalous. In that room, that most holy temple, and right in front of everyone, Mr. Sanderson – a respected and favored mechanic and fisherman, who entertained children for decades with his curmudgeonly tales of the good ol' days – took hold of his wife of sixty-two years and did something unspeakable: he kissed her right on the lips.

And Mrs. Sanderson... well, she kissed him right back.

And that would have been torrid enough to fuel neighborhood gossip for years to come, but it didn't stop there. *They* didn't stop there. They clawed at each other's clothes like baby foxes caught in plastic bags. They tossed garments and undergarments and apparel that no one under seventy knew the names for anymore into a pile and commenced with acts that no one in this kind of organization *ever* learned how to describe.

This would have disgusted all those in attendance; it would have sent them into scornful tizzies and forced them to storm from the room and stomp on home, vowing to move as soon as the housing market cleared up. But no one there had time to be appalled

anymore, no one uttered a single word in disagreement because everyone there – from the couples, to the single patrons to the pastor himself – had joined in.

Two elderly ladies had taken Pastor Shaun and pinned him to a pew and the three began such a series of gropings that none of them would ever forget. Husbands and wives having spent years in separate beds clung to each other greedily. Some even traded with one another, confessing to long-buried admirations. Clothes were thrown about with utter abandon and soon the whole of the church became a moaning, groaning tangle of pulsating flesh that would at times yell and squeal in moments of joy so loud that they too could be heard across the world. This time in France, where all the citizens heard, listened and gathered together in confusion, confirming with one another that it wasn't Tuesday yet, was it?

And Arthur looked to Daisy with a grin so wide it made the stinky cheese look appealing.

“Well, what do you say?” he asked

And she answered: “No.”

She then tore off her own dress and jumped into the pile. While poor Arthur sat there by himself, watching and yearning and sinning in a way that was entirely his own.

And as the mass continued with their swayings and their thumpings and bumpings, as stains were laid into the walls that would never again come clean, as secret desires pushed themselves into the waking world, no one gathered there noticed the quivering shadow on the ceiling, the shadow that hovered by the rafters and watched and smiled.



Alice stayed up all night watching the news and watching the kid. She managed to find clothes for him buried in her closet, left over from the last time her brother and his husband brought their son over. Fortunately they fit – so that was one small nuisance out of the way – but after he was dressed the kid was reluctant to answer any of her questions. He just yawned, laid down on her couch and went straight to sleep.

He did seem exhausted, so she let him rest, but she kept panicking all the same. Who was he? How did he get in there? Was anybody looking for him? She turned on the TV to calm herself down and found all the breaking coverage about the elephant guy and the fight at the Wharves and the things that were revealed there. And suddenly, everything clicked into place. It all made sense and everything was fine, if different. But she still couldn't bring herself to sleep, couldn't bring herself to get up off that chair and do anything other than wait for the kid to wake up and confirm the things that had to be true.

It wasn't until around ten or so that he finally started stirring and yawning and rubbing his eyes. He looked up and found her sitting there and said:

“Good morning. What's for breakfast? I'm starving.”

“Who are you?” Alice demanded with quiet severity.

“I'm hungry!” he whined.

“What is your name?” she insisted.

He smiled mischievously. “I'm Zack. What's your name?”

“I'm Alice. What's your last name, Zack?”

“Can we have pancakes for breakfast?”

Alice almost smiled herself. Whatever had happened, she was dealing with a normal little boy here; and she wasn't entirely out her element in that department.

“Tell you what, you give me your last name and we can have all the pancakes you can eat.”

He jumped at this. “With syrup on them?”

“Of course with syrup on them.”

“And whipped cream?”

“You bet.”

“And sprinkles.”

“Yes, of course, sprinkles.”

“Goody!”

“Okay, so what's your last name?”

“What's *your* last name?”

“Malarkey.”

“That's a funny last name.”

“It is a little, isn't it? What's yours?”

“Zane.”

Alice nearly fell out her chair in surprise. She didn't know why this shocked her so much, she had figured it out hours ago, but hearing it confirmed was... unbelievable.

“Monkey Boy?” she gasped.

“That's my nickname,” he laughed, as he got up, stretched and flipped through the channels until he found cartoons.

“Can we have pancakes now?”

“But how did this happen? Yesterday, you could hardly say anything but...”

“Shhh, TV.”

“But when? How?”

“Wait 'til the commercials.”

All further attempts at conversation were met with harsh hisses and impatient sighs. So Alice threw up her arms and headed to the kitchen; pancakes actually *did* sound good right then. She fired up the griddle, mixed up the batter and got them cooking, always shooting a sideways glance toward the TV, eventually and finally seeing it shift to a commercial break. She didn't even have time to think up a question before Zack looked to her and said:

“I changed.”

“Changed?”

“Yeah, I do that a lot. You've seen me.”

“So this is what, human form?”

“I don't know.”

“Can you change back?”

“I think so. I haven't tried. Do you want me to change back? I thought I was supposed to be this way.”

“No, that's not it at all. And you are. It's just... awkward timing. See, we just found out that there's this big Dragon or something that's clamping down into our world with all those white swords, which are apparently its teeth and...”

“Gross.”

“Yeah, a bit. How about those guys with the swords, do you know anything about them?”

“They smell bad.”

“That it?”

“Yep.”

“Okay, how about you, how did you go all Monkey Boy in the first place?”

“There was this monkey at school one day and it kicked me really hard in the leg.”

“What?”

“It hurt a lot. Like a million times worse than getting a shot. Like a million!”

Alice rubbed her poor, wearied, overworked and emotionally fragile eyes and plucked the finished pancakes onto a couple plates.

“What about before then?” she continued. “Where did you live? What were your friends’ names? Or your parents? Do you remember their names? They must be worried sick about you.”

Zack just stared blankly for a few minutes, he looked all around the room for anyway to duck the question, something which Alice had some difficulty in comprehending. She didn’t think it was that much of a stumper.

“Zack?”

“I... uh... oh, show’s back on.”

He turned excitedly to the TV screen and said not another word. Alice considered pressing the issue, but let it drop. She would dig up what she could when she got to work; she had his name at least, that was a start. She walked over and handed him his plate and he wrenched his gaze away from the screen to stare at it dejectedly for a few minutes and then look mournfully back to her.

“Oh, my bad,” she smacked her forehead and then ran to the kitchen for some sprinkles.

Zack practically jumped out of his chair with excitement as the colored bits were applied and he gobbled down the meal so fast Alice questioned whether it had really existed at all. The boy just grinned a syrupy grin and returned his attention to the TV, but only to find dread and despair.

The bright yellow bunnies and singing armadillos that once graced the screen were gone, swept away and replaced with a grizzled husk of a human face that stared the thousand-yard stare of gloom personified. It open its wizened maw and whispered in a hiss that would worry a snake:

“Late breaking action, gut-punch news.”

“Boring,” Zack said as he got up and ran to the bathroom.

“A recent disturbance has shocked the Blessed Church of the Holy Pine Cone this morning,” the report continued “Patrons of the church have described themselves as confused, bewitched and violated. Here are some comments:”

“Well, I tell you, I was shocked at first, but then a little curious and then sort of sweaty and then really, really relaxed. But it was wrong, yes, very, very, oh, so very wrong.”

“Do you mind if I smoke? Well, sir, let me tell you, I been in this church some time now and I have never felt so flustered, so exasperated, so exhausted, and a little sore

in places. Do they know what caused this yet? ‘Cause I’ll tell you what I think it was: Liberals: hippie, gay, metro, commie Liberals. With hypnosis or something.”

“I am a God-fearing woman and I haven’t involved myself in such despicable carnal depravities with so many people around since college. And I won’t lie to you, there were parts of me that missed it, but those aren’t the parts I talk about in front of strangers (anymore); and this, this, whatever this was was a massive invasion of privacy.”

“Invasion of privacy is right,” the ghoulish anchor continued. “Security cameras inside the church managed to catch the whole illicit scene. Let’s take a look.”

The shot then changed to grainy black-and-white security videos of a large group of men and women mostly in their fifties or sixties, which wouldn’t by itself have been so bad. But they were all naked and all thrusting and bumping and humping and grinding in all manner of contortions, combinations and positions. There were missionaries of course, and cowgirls and cowboys, and shockers and pistons and everyone on top. Five-at-a-Time and sixty-nine and ménage a trois. Upside-down, inside-out and shaking all about. Hokey-Pokeys, Pokey-Hokeys, Sixteen-Men-on-a-Ropey.

There was doggy style, pony style, starfish style, roiling octopus style and the fabled Portuguese Man-of-War style said to claim the lives of the unworthy. There was the Venus Man Trap, the lock jaw, the over-under, the seventh posture, the eight posture and the forbidden eleventh posture, the old in-and-out-and-in-again, the purple nurple (as performed on a man). There were things all manner of rusty: trombones and bike pumps and torque wrenches too. Needles were threaded, Ts were squared, congresses suspended, hedges trimmed, spoons sporked, piles driven, moons successfully shot to – all in one scarcely distinguishable mass of heaving and throbbing bodies.

And as Alice watched, she sat transfixed, hardly even noticing as the fork moved closer and closer to her eyes. And even when she did see it, it still took her a few seconds to stop it. By that time, the shot had changed again. It was still on the church, but not on the crowd, rather on something far more sinister and sadly less clear. There was a shadow, she noticed, a hazy black shadow in the upper rafters. And as the the shot zoomed in and refocused, Alice could swear that it looked humanoid, though clearly not human. It seemed to be covered head-to-toe in dark fur, save for a small unintelligible red splotch around its chest. But as she squinted and glared at it, she was horribly certain that it was some kind of ape man.

“And who does this look like to you, dear viewers?” the news gremlin casually scoffed.

Alice turned off the TV and rushed to the door.

“Zack!” she yelled, and the boy reappeared from the bathroom. “I need to go out for a bit. Are you going to be okay on your own?”

“Where you going?”

“Nowhere specific, just some work stuff.”

“Can I come? I wanna hear the sirens.”

“No, you just stay here and watch more cartoons; they should be back on in a few minutes.”

“But this is one of those smelly sword guys right? It’s always one of them. So I should come.”

“No.”

“But I wanna!” he stamped his feet and crossed his arms over his chest.

“I said no. Now, go into the living room or you’re... uh... I guess... grounded.”
“It’s not fair,” he huffed, “Why can’t I come?”
“Because,” Alice sighed, “this is serious business and you’re just a kid.”

Four minutes after twelve exactly. The sun was blaring down like it just got a migraine and wanted to take it out on the world. Eggs fried on sidewalks smeared with dog crap and graffiti, people slogged by sweating and heaving and hating each other. The air was so dense with heat that the clouds caught fire and all air conditions across the land just gave up and moved to Alaska. And it was four minutes after twelve exactly.

Four minutes ago it was twelve o’clock and that was the last time he checked. Dan slumped against a wall and scanned the room again, seeing nothing of further import and figuring the only mystery here was how so many people could stand to make with the bumpities in this heat. The uniforms were interviewing the patrons, the forensics guys were sifting through the various stains and Dan just bit into another piece of gum.

His fourth today he realized.

Things were coming together like some satanic jigsaw puzzle of puppies or something biting the heads off bunny rabbits. Another dumb mug in fur pajamas was running around with his demon sword: gruesome toothfairies the lot of them, circling around waiting to collect their tax on the noble and the natural. Everything was going to crap, had been for a long time, probably had been since the beginning of time. But now things seemed out of control, reality and physics were bending like a bull in the hands of a hungry giant.

This wasn’t new for Dan of course, he had seen this coming for years, ever since that one night when the futility of being was made plain to him. But everybody else seemed genuinely surprised that this was happening, that the barriers were falling down and chaos has come like the party guest that doesn’t know when to leave or how to use a coaster.

12:08. It was too damn hot.

The kid sidled in around then, red hair all a frazzle, eyes darting in all directions surveying everything but seeing only secrets and dreads that she would refuse to share.

“So what do we got?”

Dan remembered when they first met. She was a young rookie then, all neat and by the book. Sharp as a porcupine’s ass though and she made her mark quick. She was a rising star and all that.

“Forensics found some hairs in the rafters, sending them back for DNA tests. Beyond that just a bunch of very relaxed people pretending to be antsy.”

But now even she was wearing down. Her hair was ragged and untended, her clothes looked like she’d forgotten how to use an iron and her eyes always sagged with great gray wrinkles that held miseries no one could lift.

“You know who this looks like, right?”

“It wasn’t him.”

But somehow she still had it. They all had lost it, all the old guards, the vets and the muckity-mucks. Dan saw it shot and dragged away into the abyss, but the kid, somehow she still clung to it: that feeble and childish illusion, that bittersweet paradox that keeps life going only because it is never truly realized.

“It couldn’t have been him. I know that for a fact.”

“If you say so, kid, but then you know what did do this.”

“Yeah. Looks like nabbing Celia didn’t really solve anything, did it?”

“It never does. Life is just a Sisyphean game of Whack-a-mole, kid, you knock one creep down, another pops up. Then two pop up, then three, then a dozen of the little bastards until you’ve given up and started bashing the machine with the damn flimsy foam mallet, your eyes blood red with rage, your veins pulsing...”

“DAN!”

“Yeah?”

“You were losing it there a minute. You need to calm down. We’ll sort this guy out like all the rest.”

She still had hope. She still honestly believed the fight had a point, that there was a victory to find in all of this. But she was just a kid. What did she know?

“Eh, sorry, kid, it’s too damn hot.”

“It’s forty out.”

“Oh.”

Dan knew better though. Every other cop in the world knew better. Because for all her smarmy smug self-satisfaction, for all her grinning like a thanksgiving turkey on Easter, the limey dame did have one thing right, one single truth that infested all public servants eventually. Evil is everything. And if that is true, then what is there really to fight for?

He sank into one of the pews and wiped his forehead on his coat.

“Maybe you should take the day off,” the kid suggested as she sat down with him and raised a soothing hand to his head. “You really look like crap.”

“You ain’t no blue ribbon special yourself there, kid.”

“Thanks. But I’m serious. Go home. Get a good four hours of sleep and come back refreshed.”

“What did you just say?”

“Get some sleep?”

“No, you said *four* hours of sleep.”

“Did I? Okay.”

Dan sprang up and dumped another piece of gum in his mouth. He trekked slowly to the door as though his feet were encased in mashed potatoes. He didn’t look back once, but he did stop briefly at the double doors that led to the foyer and the blistering outside. He stopped and he said to the kid:

“There’s eight of them already. Eight. How many more do you think it’s going to take, how many teeth have to clench into our cosmic guts before they’re torn out?”

“I don’t know,” she stammered.

“Well, you think about it. And hope that when the time comes that little Monkey Brat of yours is up to the challenge. Otherwise we’re all screwed.”



Everything looked strangely familiar now. The massive structures of stone and glass that he once thought to be bizarre and magical trees were really just buildings. The loud, noxious mechanical beasts that patrolled the forest floor were simple cars. And the forest was a city, a city with no boundaries, no ends and no limitations.

He knew all the words for things now, even resuming his base form with his white fur, long and happy tail and glowing golden sword, Monkey Boy still remembered the things he knew as Zachary Zane. The memories and sensations, the knowledge and facts, all of it registered with him not as new information, but as data once lost amidst a clutter of other ideas that he had scrounged up again at last.

And yet even knowing all this, nothing changed. The buildings still acted like trees, he could still swing through them like trees. The cars were still beasts to be mounted or avoided. The predators and crooks and thieves and monsters still stank and still drew him. The city was still a forest, a forest he alone could properly explore. And he had to explore it. Even though Alice had told him to stay, he couldn't resist. The smell of the newest Stinky Thing called to him and he at least had to investigate.

It wasn't hard to resume his Monkey Boy form, it was like a reflex, as basic and intuitive as telling your brain to move your arm. Easy and painless and liberating. His human state was fine and all; it brought with it wisdom and words, words that his current form's brain could now understand even though its mouth couldn't shape the sounds correctly. But this form made up for it with agility and strength and a tail. He was able to leap effortlessly from Alice's kitchen window to the roof of a neighboring building.

Jumping rooftop to rooftop he followed the smell with the wind rushing against him and the ground taunting him below. And he realized one thing while he flew through the skies as no boy ever could, he felt something that the purely instinctual mind of his monkey forms could never understand on their own, he knew now what these powers, these abilities and these gifts really, truly, actually were:

They were loads of fun.

He saw the world differently now. Tonight, he truly felt the exhilaration from leaping out a high a window and plummeting unobstructed to the hard ground below, catching himself halfway by wrapping his tail around a random flagpole and hurtling himself into infinity. He relished the cold wind whipping across his face, the hormones and chemicals thrusting through his veins empowering him, pushing him further, faster and faster. Every time he caught himself and threw himself he gained speed until he was flying ahead with such velocity that the world below seemed to stop altogether. Used to be this was just a way of getting around, of no greater consideration to him than a walk to the grocery store. Now, he appreciated it more; it made his life like a roller coaster, one without any lines.

But he saw other things differently too, he smelled them differently. Or rather he now understood what it was he smelled. The swordsmen, the Stinky Things, they still stank and it used to be that he knew what they smelled like, he got the scents in a purely objective way with no emotion, no connection, no reason to care other than that the smell was itself unpleasant. It was much in the way sulfur conjures an idea of rotten eggs, but doesn't arouse lost memories of old eggs left to spoil on childhood summer days; it doesn't make one miss lost opportunities or forgotten breakfasts, it just tells one to cover one's nose.

But now, they evoked memories. The smells were familiar smells, scents that brought with them recollections, but of times and lives that were not his own, memories of people still living worlds away whose feelings and sensations coursed through him like rivers under a mountain. He remembered hearing once that when you smell something you're actually inhaling small fragments of it. And so it seemed to be here, but Monkey

Boy smelled more than just a man and his musk and his cologne and his BO, he smelled his soul. He smelled his experiences, his thoughts and his regrets and they too entered him and stuck inside him and did what so many awful smells did. They made him sick, physically, violently ill.

And now the once indomitable Monkey Boy sat perched on the roof across from the church and puked out pancakes and milk and syrup. He trembled and shook as he rubbed his paw against his mouth. He once stood up against tigers and lions and leopards and bats and beasts of all kinds. And now he shuddered in the astral wake of an enemy he didn't even know yet.



It was at a party. That's when the thing happened, that's when he realized the great and unbearable truth. It was at a party. It was a frat party hosted at the nightclub Forest Fire. All the dopes and drunks were celebrating their friend removing his Band-Aid or something, a sacred ritual which it seemed required a dramatic shift in everybody's blood-alcohol levels, an act which itself generated a great deal of celebration.

But Marty Malone didn't care about any of that. He wasn't one for clubs or drinking or the whole dopey college cliché. He was just trying, trying to get out of his shell, meet some people, make a few friends. Yes, it would be nice if those friends were of the female variety, but honestly he would have been happy to talk to anyone.

He was starting to question the logic in picking a nightclub for his big social renaissance however. The place smelled of rancid desperation with laces of vomit and urine and sweat streaming down from on high. The music – if it could truly be deemed worthy of so lofty and significant a name – was played so loud it was like the DJ hated his job, hated his boss, hated the patrons and hated himself and decided to take it out on everyone within earshot, vibrating their skulls until their brains exploded outward and splattered all over the room, forever ruining the décor.

Not that anyone would notice, Marty figured, as the club was so dark and steamy – with fog machines in every corner belting out their fabricated mist while simultaneously generating a makeshift summer heatwave in what must have been the fairly subtle attempt to turn the dance floor into a wet t-shirt contest with all those assembled being made unwitting participants.

The place was a den, basically, an offensive hive of obstructive sights and sounds and smells that was created for one purpose and one purpose only: to foster and foist the mating ritual amongst those who pretended they came for the dancing. But nobody went to Forest Fire for the dancing; even Marty knew that. The guys came to hunt; they donned their ritualistic attire of low-riding pants and tight-fitting yet fashionable shirts, and they made ready for the chase. And the girls...they also came to hunt, but whereas the guys would sidle and seethe through seas of unknowns until they found their prey, the girls just waited and watched and allured by their mere presence.

This was why Marty could never get into the whole club scene; he found it crass, inelegant, unromantic. Or maybe he never could just accept that he was bad at it. He had seen this ritual play out so many times, he watched its functions, its give and its take and yet he never could quite master its intricacies.

But he had to try, he couldn't just hang out in his apartment all night every night for the rest of time. So he took a deep breath, wiped his sweaty hands on his leather pants and marched over to the pretty redhead in the corner.

"This won't be hard," he whispered to himself over and over as he walked, his pants creaking and groaning and tightening in the heat. "She's just a person like you're a person. Remember the rules and you'll be fine."

He was getting closer now, he could see that the redhead had a friend with her, a brunette, and that they were laughing inaudibly about a joke he would have given his very soul to hear. They hadn't noticed him yet; nobody ever did, really. So he kept on walking, kept on talking to himself.

"Rule 1: just agree with whatever she says. Like the things she likes. Rule 2: Don't bog down the conversation with stuff about you. Nobody cares about you, you're boring. Make it all about her. Rule 3: For God's sake, don't let her see you wipe your hands off on your pants."

He was there. He stopped talking. The redhead and the brunette saw him, stopped laughing and looked at him. He stared back, his mouth probably open, words sadly not coming out of it. Silence came then, as the DJ's equipment fizzled out in the fog and the dancers found seats on the periphery of the room. The club was actually still. No one moved, no one spoke, and poor Marty Malone stood petrified before two girls who looked at him like he just pissed his pants (which he hoped to God he didn't do).

"Hi," he eventually choked out.

Neither girl responded.

"I'm Marty. It's nice to meet you." He held out his hand, but remembering its current sodden state, quickly snatched it away.

"So," he fumbled, searching for something – anything – to say to break the ice, to shatter the friggin' glacier that held the conversation frozen deep inside like a lost fossil waiting for its chance in some far distance and unknowable future to taste the sun again.

Salvation finally came in a grinding, tumbling shriek that shook the whole club and kicked everyone back to the dance floor.

"Do you like to dance?" Marty asked of the redhead, who still stared at him as one looks at an accident victim. "That's why you're here right. You like to dance? Well, me too. I love to dance. I know, you know, the twist and the swim and I once took ballet. Only second string, I'll admit, but I thought I was pretty..."

Deep in his mind at that moment, Marty saw a wide and endless highway and across it stood himself waving his arms and shouting faintly words that could barely be heard, words that would have warned him had he known, reminded him of the traffic lights and the approaching semi, words like: "Remember the rule, numb nuts."

"So, uh, sorry, I'm just rambling. What about you? What kinds of things do you like to do? Is dancing one of them? Would you like to dance? You know, with me? Now?"

The redhead stared blankly for a minute and said:

"I have crabs."

"Oh, really? That's great! Me too! No, wait, sorry, I don't have crabs. And it's not great that you do. But it's okay, I mean, I don't mind. It's... you know.. how did you get them? Wait, no, I can guess how you got them. What I mean is... I... um...I don't know what I mean."

Marty twitched and shuffled anxiously. He was losing the girls, he realized, so he thought hard and fast, considered options, ran down a list of pickup lines and jokes; but nothing seemed appropriate and the heat was getting to him. He wiped the sweat from his forehead and without thinking, acting on the sort of instinct that sent idiots over waterfalls, he cleaned his hands on his pants.

“Gross!” the brunette sort of screamed and laughed at the same time. “Did you see that? That was disgusting.”

Both girls started laughing then, laughing and scoffing at him and walking away. And Marty knew he should have been hurt, should have been offended, he should have let them go and tried again with someone else. But what he really did was call after them in a feeble whimper:

“Wait, I never caught your name...”

They didn’t hear of course or if they did they didn’t respond. And the very act of calling out to them seemed to exhaust him, emotionally and physically, and so he left the club, unnoticed by all – even the bouncer was too busy flirting to see him go. He walked down the empty streets and found his way to his lonely apartment.

He normally would have been content to spend the night with the TV, but his experience at the club had more than just a dispiriting effect on him; his efforts – however abortive – aroused sensations, and physiology now beckoned him, urged him to actions that it didn’t understand were now impossible. Cold showers wouldn’t do the trick this time, the sensation was all-consuming. He could barely sit down, his legs wouldn’t stop shaking and his mind focused like a crystal on one thing and one thing only, one simple but ever-so-complicated thing that drove nations and ruined lives, that remains filthy and pure, the center force of creation whose act is both sublime and repulsive all at once. With no means of engaging such an action directly, Marty knew he was left with no choice but to accept simulacra.

He didn’t have a girl, but he did have a computer and that computer was connected to a repository of canal wonders. Any number of girls waited for him there – some famous, others more obscure – ready and able to fulfill any fantasy his mind could concoct, to help him achieve any desire, meet any demand, tell any story that he needed to be told. All he had to do was find the right one and then close his eyes and believe.



“Let’s talk about Monkey Boy for a minute.”

“Yes, let’s. Clearly he has become a loose cannon.”

“Spreading such filth to a church; it’s just inconceivable.”

“And yet it is clearly him standing up in those rafters and smiling as those poor people debased themselves. And imagine if children had been present, think of the horrors.”

“Well, that’s just what happens with these kids today. Look at Jodie Melodie. Once she was the cream of the poppy crop, then she was a young sex harlot and then a supercriminal and mass manslaughterer. That’s just the way these kids are now. I blame the music.”

“That’s the way of everything, really, one day we’re all enlightenment and science and art and culture and the next we’re eating each other with a side of french

fries; frankly, I think it's time that we accept the whole human race is abject and forsaken, that we're pustules on God's ass waiting to pop. Given that then, is it any wonder even Monkey Boy fell to the forces of evil? He is only human apparently."

"I don't think that's an acceptable excuse. Not all people are so wretched. You for example aren't wholly unappealing."

"What did you just say?"

"Oh, nothing, just that the way you talk about cannibalism and the inevitability of flesh-eating tomorrows, it just makes me... I don't know... makes me kind of.... Oh my, I'm feeling a little flush here. Are you feeling it, too?"

"No, no of course not. Pull yourself... closer to me. I cannot go one second longer. Let me devour you."

"Oh, yes, devour me!"

"Now, now, see here you two. This is highly unchristian behavior. You there, this is your program, is it not? Put a stop to this. Just think: what would Jesus do?"

"Missionary?"

"That is not funny!"

"Well, if that doesn't work for you, I know this other position called the Father, the Son and the Holy Spit-Roast."

"That should do it."



Out of donuts again. Again! How was it even possible for a police station to be out of donuts? Did people not understand how clichés worked? Used to be there were rooms filled with piles of the things. Now? Nothing. And she knew why, Alice did, she heard the same old excuses. 'It was bad publicity,' they said. 'It conjures images of old complacent cop clichés,' they said. 'Besides, celery is much healthier anyway.'

No celery was ever provided though. There was only the muffin cart man and his haunted treats, one of which sat on top of Alice's desk with a worm popping out and pointing at her, unmoving, unflinching, as though it were watching, daring her to take a bite of its light and fluffy home and discover what deeper horrors lurked within.

And hunger would have been bad enough, certainly more than enough to merit taking a few cathartic potshots at the blighted muffin that nagged before her. But it was coupled with the equally oppressive weight of frustration, frustration born from two cases that proved thoroughly inscrutable.

First, there was this latest swordsman, the weird sex fiend. The labs hadn't gotten back with the DNA results yet and nobody from the church could identify any missing members of the congregation or anyone with whom they had a recent dispute, except of course what they called: 'the unholy liberal harlots and man-whores who writhe naked in sin and disease and loathe us our purity.' This didn't actually narrow the list of suspects any.

But that was nothing compared to her more domestic quandaries regarding her latest houseguest who had suddenly become less monkey and more boy. She had been calling home every hour to check up on him and to ensure he was still there. He answered every time, occasionally cheerily, other times annoyed at the constant interruptions; but

always there and always fine. And this was certainly a far cry from a few weeks back when he would assume the ringing phone was attacking and throw it out a window.

Four phones that cost her. FOUR!

And yet, she couldn't believe this was an entirely fortuitous development. While she liked that her apartment wouldn't get totaled everyday now and that she could at least initiate some basic level of conversation with her strange charge, she still found his latest incarnation unsettling. Something about it was just wrong, unnatural. Where she once felt an aura of calm around Monkey Boy, a soothing sensation that seemed to reinforce her sense of hope and salve her wearied optimism, she now felt only dread around Zack, a harsh and unwanted feeling that this Dragon or whatever it was would devour them all.

He seemed like a nice kid, but his arrival didn't bode well. But still, she would have felt some level of relief if she could just place him, get some sort of context for him. But in her search over the last thirty years, she found only four Zachary Zanes living in the city. One of them was a used car salesman on River Road, one was three, one died at the age of ninety-four and the other was in jail for installing video cameras in public restrooms. Obviously none these fit her guy.

Missing persons reports didn't turn up anything either. There were plenty of missing child cases over the decades, but none with close descriptions matching Zack. There was no sign of him anywhere, no trace that he ever existed. It was as though he just blipped randomly into the world last night.

Alice tried to wrap her head around what was happening, but came up short. She figured it made sense that he could turn into a human; but the question was why did he do it? What secret necessity led him to change?

She turned on the news, hoping for – if nothing else – a break from thought, something which the news has been very helpful in providing before. But now, sadly, everybody else in the city was thinking the same thing as she was: Who is Monkey Boy? And few of them were kind in their hypotheses.

They all blamed him for deceiving them, blamed the police for harboring him and assumed the culpability of both in the recent church incident. But that, Alice figured, couldn't be true. Whatever was happening now, and however much that shadow looked like an ape man, she was positive it wasn't her Monkey Boy; it just couldn't be.

And then – quite suddenly – as the newscasters started ranting on about deceit and dark futures where man would dine upon man, something weird and horrible happened. Clothes were torn off and blubber started flying and Alice was treated to such fleshy swayings as she never dreamed to be possible. The pundits, the hosts and even members of the crew fell all over each other, groping and clawing and thrusting in all manner of unseemly ways. There were several minutes then when the shot was empty, save for vague silhouettes cast upon the walls, when the camera didn't move – its operator likely having already joined in on the fun – and all that could be discerned were the yelps and moans of those in the grips of deepest satisfaction.

And then something new appeared, something humanoid, but furry, something large and lithe like a chimp made its way onto the stage, walking calmly past the swaying shadows and the cacophony of happy wails. It sat in the host's chair, turned directly toward the camera and began its address.



Zack sat in yet another new form; he did have so many, more so than he knew probably, more so than he had reason to access. But they were there; all he ever had to do was need it, to reach out into the void, find its essence and make it real.

This one had neat black fur and long arms perfect for reaching. He had no tail in this guise and a friendly, familial face. He was a chimpanzee now, an ape which had the ability to fashion any tool or item or weapon from simply nothing. He could reach into dimensions unknown where matter was rarified and raw, a pure spring of material waiting for hands like his to craft it into something meaningful. And he used that matter to craft a simple set of clothing to be his and remain with him forever.

His different forms weren't distinct, not wholly; they each contributed a piece to the grand puzzle he was shaping across reality. And sometimes, just sometimes, they could influence each other. His human form brought words and definitions and ideas to all his guises that had never been there before, but it also brought a sense of modesty that too held in his hairless state and demanded coverings. And thus the clothes.

When they were complete, he changed, let his black fur sink beneath pink skin and his face and hands smooth and level in proportion to his taller, but lankier frame. The clothes sat before him and he donned them quickly. They weren't much: merely a pair of jeans, some tennis shoes and a t-shirt with a brilliant picture of a banana with a top hat on it. But they were also laced with a particle known only to Monkey Boys for it existed only for Monkey Boys and ensured that the clothes would appear with his human state whenever he resumed it, much as the similarly crafted sword remained with his base form until the day arrived that its purpose could be fulfilled.

Exactly what that purpose was, Zack had no idea. It was one of many pieces he hadn't discovered yet.

"Blessed be, my children."

So caught up in his task was he that Zack hadn't realized the TV was still on. He also hadn't noticed that it switched from his cartoons to some boring news bulletin. Nor did he see that the newscasters had taken off all their clothes and started rubbing up against each other in all sorts of strange ways. He missed all of that. It wasn't until *he* sat down that Zack took notice and then he couldn't take his eyes off the screen

He was an ape, one very much like a chimp, but thinner and somewhat taller. Zack didn't recognize it at first, but his various Monkey minds soon filled in the gap and told him that the bizarre creature before him was in fact a bonobo. And it was a spitting image of a bonobo too, with the exception of the strange insignia painted across its chest in deep and solid red: a basic thing in the shape of a large letter "P."

"I have come here to tell thee a story," the ape man continued. "Tis a maddening tale of corruption, of denial, of mass repudiation. Tis a story of a world gone mad, of a society so fixated on the prim and the proper that it has forgotten the ways of all life. So confused is this blighted world that the souls of all who inhabit it have become black with sin, though not a one of them has committed a crime."

Zack stared transfixed. There was something about this man, something that stank as all his type stank, but there was something else too, something that hadn't quite registered yet.

"Mine is a tale of a world so bizarre and so backward that thee mightst thinketh me a thief, plundering my morals from old science-fiction. But worry thee not, for my tale is

my own and moreover my tale is true. For the world is our world and this crime that we have fabricated, this crucial aspect of life that we have so vilified is a word that we dares not speak in public lest the shame of its brand be burned into our reputations.”

He could smell it even through the TV and it was so fierce, so intense that it made him want to cry.

“But I have no reputation left to protect and so I willst shout this word from the mountaintops, I shalt make the gods themselves kneel before my unholy gumption, I willst revel in the secret sin we all share. I shalt speak the word and thou shalt knowest that word is sex.”

The whiffs he couldn't stop himself from taking were really fragments, bits and memories that flooded his nostrils and planted images in his mind, pictures of things he didn't understand. Some were violent, others grotesque, others very much like what was going on in the background of the TV but with ridiculous amounts of peanut butter. And each of them was tinged with feeling, with deep and terrible sensations that broke through Zack's defenses and sent the tears streaming out.

“I no longer have anything to fear from society's stigmas. I have already received that brand. But thou, every last one of thee, walks around persistently in shame of what thy crave deep inside in those hidden places to which thou dares not venture; and I willst not have it anymore. I vow this now: to travel this city, to thine churches and thine malls and thine sneaker shops and I willst preach to thee mine gospel: that sex, sweet glorious sex, is not debased or perverse, but the engine of romance and creation, the source of life itself, an act that should be hallowed and cherished in all its sundry configurations.”

The force was too much, the rage and regret and utter self-loathing that radiated out of the TV hit Zack like an angry hurricane that cuts itself. He just wanted it to stop, to go away, to leave him alone. The things he saw, the images that flooded his mind: they were sick, ungodly and horrible things; but it was the feeling attached to them, the memories of shame, the absolute compulsion to hurt himself if it would make the images stop, these were what tore at Zack now. But the TV was too far and each step closer assailed him more relentlessly. The remote was nowhere to be found either, so Zack did the only thing left to him: he ran to the closet and closed the door, ducking under coats and clothes, barely making out as the monkey man said:

“Soon, thou shalt see that we are all the same and for all thine prudishness, thou art too beasts in bed and that thou art not alone in thine wants. We are all one in love and lust. Know me now for the savior I am, for the liberator of desires that I am, for I am Mr. Scarlet and where I walk, orgies follow.”



Marty never could get over how easy it was. It was so much better than the parties and the bars and the girls. So much simpler.

Of course there were nuances to this too, the world inside the computer screen had traditions and lexicons all its own. But Marty learned them fast, easy really because the consequences of failure were slight when compared to those of the real world. And these stood constantly in contrast to each other as he attempted to maintain his efforts in the dingy holes where men his age played at the mating game.

But every time the results were consistent: humiliation, scorn, laughter. And so he went home, turned to the ever-inviting glow of the screen and asked of it what he wanted

to see; the worst that could happen there was that the result was wrong. No matter, that, he could just search again. No gibes, no tears, only squandered seconds, but seconds spent blissfully alone in the empty space of his desk where no one but he had access.

And when the results were in his favor, they presented him with a carnal Wonderland of options, a smorgasbord of delicious copulations in all flavors, styles and configurations. It became a game, eventually, to think of the weirdest, most bizarre and inscrutable of wants and see if the digital realm could pluck it from his imagination and lay it out so that his eyes may feast.

It invariably did.

It was small wonder then that he gave up his nightly excursions to places he never really wanted to visit anyway. Even though he thought he might prefer the success of such excursions, he never approached it near enough to risk continued failures. In his delvings, he once thought he came upon an alternative, in forums devoted to discussions of people actively seeking to fulfill in person the very fantasies he played out nightly in his mind. Here were people who cared nothing for personality or wit or basic ability to communicate with human beings; all they wanted was willingness and Marty thought himself willing as ever.

Aroused as he was by the people whose openness and incorrigibility got him through many a lonely night, the experience was always sadly depersonalized. He watched them as they removed clothes and latched together in all ways natural – and many ways not – but there was no intimacy to the act; even the illusion presented on screen was a flimsy one. So perhaps in these groups, he hoped, all the strange wonders he had surveyed could become real and he could be like these people who were comfortable in positions the prudish would deem perverse, who looked upon their own bodies with ease and acceptance, not with clenched eyes and self-loathing as Marty did. Maybe with these groups he could be like those people: comfortable, self-assured, always laughing and smiling. After all, it was only sex; everybody did it, what did it matter with whom or how many he did it?

And yet... nothing came of it. Oh, he talked to these people, he got the invitations to their soirees, he made appointments, but he never once left his chair. Something prevented him from going. The same something that enabled his constant failures at the clubs. There would be people there and people frightened him and these would be people who would see him naked, who would look at him as he couldn't even stand to look at himself.

And so his fantasies continued on in private, where he was safe from eyes and judgments. There was an undeniable coldness to his digital wanderings, he admitted on occasion, but he pushed such feelings away readily enough because – hot or cold – it was easy.



Alice arrived outside the station to an endless sea of chattering microphones, flashing bulbs and swarming cameras. Reporters! Reporters as far as the eye could see, gathering against the horizon and charging forward like a Black Friday sale on water picks, trampling each other, creaking pavement and turning over cars through the sheer force of them, all of them running, running for that exclusive interview, that special clip

that would be theirs and theirs alone. Alice had to fire her gun off in the air to scare them away.

But it only bought her seconds because they knew, they'd known since Redwood Mall, that she was in some way connected to Monkey Boy. They knew, but never truly cared that Monkey Boy had police help, because back then they all loved him, they stood in quiet awe of him as he swung through the rooftops. Now though, now they were worried. Monkey Boy had blindsided them with his latest transformation; he wasn't a rhesus monkey with a jetpack anymore, nor was he a gorilla that could hurl cars to the tops of skyscrapers. Now he was human like they were human; he was once extraordinary, now he was average. And no one was taking this well.

And since they couldn't find him, they settled for her. They demanded things of her, answers she didn't have to questions that only seldom made sense. They wanted to know about who he was, where he came from, how his powers worked because really they didn't make any sense at all. They demanded that she tell them why the police were so inept that they need children to do their jobs for them. Was this all just a publicity stunt? Was Monkey Boy in fact in league with Richard Nixon way back when? Was he a terrorist? Because no self-respecting American would do what he does.

Alice didn't entertain them, she just strived to avoid them and their snooping lenses, as she pushed through them to the doors to the station.

They had been like this ever since the TV studio. After Mr. Scarlet started making his speech, half a dozen squad cars were mobilized to intercept him. But he just walked out. Not a single cop tried to stop him, being caught up as they were in the frenzy of thin blue sixty-nines, Magnum D.P.s and a grand group maneuver Alice was given to understand was called the Gagnet. Thankfully – she guessed – she didn't show up until Scarlet left and his effect diminished. She drove up just in time to see cops struggling with their uniforms and fighting over the napkins from the snack tables. The hosts were already dressed and firing everybody they could find, officers included.

Alice tried to get some information out of them, but they just fired *her* and went backstage. Dan was there, with no indication that he had either shown up late or was in anyway affected by Scarlet – though he was sweating a lot. He was just chomping into his gum and counting the hairs left on the anchor's seat.

“How many we got?” she asked him.

“Four,” he hissed – no, really, hissed – “Why is it always four, kid?”

“Can't say. You get anything out of anybody?”

“The bloated water-socks that just flubbed backstage like kids that got caught looking at the lingerie ads just fired me. Everybody else has clammed up tighter than a nun on Prom night.”

“I think that's a mixed metaphor there, Dan.”

“Fourth one today.”

Not knowing what to do with that, Alice just made her rounds trying to get some insight into just what Scarlet did to people. But no one was talking – not the cops, not the crew. Most seemed embarrassed and were just trying to pretend it never happened, others were furious and they unleashed so much of that fury outwardly that it made Alice wonder how much of was really supposed to be directed that way.

Eventually, she did manage to get one person to talk, a young Officer Morrison who was among the first on the scene. With a heavy head and wide, worried eyes, she looked to Alice and said:

“It was great!”

Morrison explained that for months she had had an infatuation with her partner “Jennie,” but hadn’t the nerve to act on it, too worried what people would think or say or do if they knew where her tastes lied. She fought with herself over it, insisting at times that everyone would be fine with it these days or that it didn’t matter if they weren’t. But then what if Jennie didn’t reciprocate? Would she request a transfer? Would she file a complaint? There was just too much uncertainty that Morrison could never decide on a course of action.

“But then I felt it,” she said. “It’s hard to explain what it is. It’s not simple arousal – though that’s part of it – it’s like... okay... you know how we always have these voices in our heads telling us no, that certain people will never want us, that certain drives should never be indulged? Imagine if those voices suddenly fell quiet. Imagine if you no longer told yourself no and you just acted on what you wanted.”

And that’s what apparently happened. Morrison grabbed Jennie and kissed her like she had always wanted to kiss her, knowing deep down that Jennie would respond with equal passion. She didn’t, sadly, and ran off to a guy on the stage, but all was not lost because Morrison quickly discovered a like mind in Officer Trudy Shane and the two embarked on what she called: ‘a mutually rewarding quest of physical and spiritual discovery.’

So as Alice made her way to the station, she thought on this and the ramifications of the world Scarlet proposed. It didn’t matter what she decided, of course, he had to be brought in.

And the reporters and the masses that interceded her redirected her focus and when she finally reached the silent sanctuary of her office, something new greeted her and wrested attention for itself. It was the lab report on the Mr. Scarlet hairs found at the church. There was nothing terribly surprising there and most of it was irrelevant. His name was Martin Malone, or at least it used to be. He once was 6’ 1” and had short blond hair; neither of these things were true anymore either. There was only one really interesting and ominous tidbit, though upon thinking about Alice realized she should have figured this out earlier. Among the sundry details of Martin Malone’s life scattered through those pages was one fact from a few months ago:

Apparently, Mr. Scarlet was a registered sex offender.



“So let’s take a step back here. Forget Monkey Boy at the moment, let’s talk about Mr. Scarlet.”

“What’s to talk about? He’s a pervert and a freak and he should be shot on sight.”

“I agree...”

“Who asked you?”

“I was just trying to support...”

"I don't need your support... unless it's child support in case you got me pregnant with your groping and your hands."

"I don't think that's how it works."

"Oh and of course a man knows more about pregnancy than a woman, right? Is that what you're saying?"

"Why are you so upset? Were you not enjoying yourself?"

"I... was at the time. But... why haven't you called me?"

"This happened less than two hours ago! We haven't even left the building yet!"

"But were you going to call later?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Look, what we had... it was nice, but you don't really want to make a thing out of this, do you? Would you really want to start a family in a world where the cannibal apocalypse is right on the horizon?"

"That is just like a man. First, they wine you and dine you and have spellbound sex with you on national television; then it's all the cannibals are coming. Well, fine, hope you enjoy the herpes."

"The what?"

"You'll see."

"So... uh... on the subject of Mr. Scarlet, can we say his presence makes things a little complicated?"

"And embarrassing."

"And unholy."

"And itchy."



Marty had a problem. It was something unexpected, something insidious that crept up on him one day like a slimy swarm of unusually quiet mosquitoes and latched on tight, sucking all the fun out of his favorite hobby and leaving him wrecked and panicked and turning into something he didn't want to become. It was an innocent enough morning really, he woke up and proceeded straight to the computer – as he always did – but now something happened.

As he started looking up his favored fantasy scenarios, he found that the results no longer enticed him like they used to. It's not that they were bad or poorly crafted; in fact he easily understood how a casual viewer might find them interesting. But his tastes – he decided – had grown more refined, as the things he now viewed, things which once had him rolling on the floor in ecstasy, now seemed far too plain to excite him.

It was no matter, though, he simply moved onto to other things. If two-person encounters weren't sufficiently engaging, he always had the option for three or four or five or twenty. But even these weren't doing it for him and it took sometime to find a scenario with adequate raunch to satisfy him; he had begun his hunt in the early morning hours as the sun peaked shyly over the clouds and he ended it at last at twilight as the sun sank grumpily over the edge of the world.

And this wasn't an isolated incident. Every time it was like this, with each new fantasy that satisfied and allured him once failing to do so again; so his hunts grew longer

and longer, he would spend endless tortuous days searching for thirty seconds of pleasure.

And he couldn't stop, he tried to stop. But his pre-hunt pep talks – where he belittled himself, dragged himself down for being unable to control his urges and insisted that this time, *this* time, he would exhibit a modicum of self-control – fell on ears too filled with moans and grunts and decidedly beat-heavy music to listen.

Attempting to refrain altogether proved equally fruitless. Because his fantasies, his hunts, and his prying did serve a practical purpose in abating the nagging wants of physiology. And so he would sit at his desk and try to work or lay in bed and try to sleep or go to the kitchen and try to eat; but every time his mind would wander and return always to thoughts of nudity and contortions and fifty-year-old women dressed as Catholic schoolgirls; and every time he found himself back at the computer, begging it for more.

And the computer would laugh and spit and call him names, it would show him the simple things, the easy things, the relatively respectable things knowing he would push them away. Every time he would push them away and move toward the groups and the fetishes and the things with one girl, thirty guys and a flamingo until even these ceased to satisfy; the once almost otherworldly dreams and desires and curiosities had become humdrum.

Then the computer would show him something else: a door to dark places, depraved ideas that monsters and ghouls and heathens dreamt about. There were things that were weird and then there were things that were evil and it was those things, those scary new and untested things that lurked behind the door. Everyday the computer would sing to Marty, call to him, beckon him to open it, to take a peek, to see all the new things that would stimulate as the old things once had.

But Marty resisted, he stuck to his old things, his pizza boys and janitors and Catholic school grannies and he forced these to work for him, but each time they left him unfulfilled, still hungry for more, right up until that one day that was actually three days, three whole days without interruption of hunting and searching and scouring for some new fantasy that would fill the niche the old ones had to abandon. But nothing came, nothing wanted to come and his whole body ached with the need.

And so – in pain and want and sweaty hatred – Marty opened the door and let the dark things swell in his mind and allowed his body to settle and relax. A sense of ease crept over him then, as tears burned across his face.



Alice returned home to find a darkened apartment, lighted only by the glow of the TV screen as it droned on with the laugh track from some inane sitcom quip about how some useless plank of a character may or may not have gone there. She flipped on the lights and found no sign of Zack. She also didn't see any open or broken windows, so she assumed he hadn't snuck out on her. But checking around the apartment, she found no trace of him, at least not until the faint sobbing registered in her ears. She followed it to its source and opened the closet to find a scared young boy hiding under a pile of coats and whimpering to himself.

She pulled her good raincoat off of him and he looked to her with tear-stained cheeks and asked with a tremor:

“Is he gone yet?”

“Is who gone?”

“The Stinky Man.”

Alice looked around the apartment, seeing nothing and smelling only the trash she *really* needed to take out. The only thing in the whole place that made a sound or called any attention to itself was the TV, which shrilled and blared and told her what had happened, what must have come on earlier in the day, what Zack must have seen.

“Yeah, he’s gone,” she told him. “Why don’t you come out now.”

She held out her hand and he looked at it for a few minutes, sniffed it a bit and took it into his own. She pulled him up and brushed away his tears and guided him to the couch.

“So I take it you saw the news earlier?”

“Yeah,” he sniffled out between choked and dying sobs. “It was scary.”

“You mean the guy, right?”

“Uh-huh.”

“And the people... what they were doing...”

“They were all naked.”

“Ah. Yes. But what they were doing... did you understand that?”

She sat him down and went to the kitchen to prepare some quick pizza rolls; kids loved pizza rolls and in awkward times like these, it was helpful to stick to the basics. So yes to pizza rolls, no to broccoli, and god help her during this conversation.

“No. What were they doing? It looked weird.”

“Well, that’s because it was weird,” she was very keen to stare only at the microwave at this point, never once turning toward her ward. “...And it wasn’t weird. It was... you know... sex... and it’s normal... sometimes.”

“Uh-huh.”

“See, when two people... or three people... or four people... or whatever... really, really...”

There was a bing! A glorious, thought-interrupting bing that stifled all voices and released wondrous steam into the air that flitted around and spread the smell of pizza to all those gathered therein. Alice grabbed the plate quickly and rushed it to Zack.

“But anyway,” it wasn’t those people that scared you, right? It was Mr. Scarlet?”

Zack took the plate and poked at its contents with clear disinterest. He stared at them as he answered, returning her sentiment from earlier.

“Yeah.”

“Why?” Alice asked, as she brushed her hand through his hair to calm him. “As Monkey Boy, you’ve gone up against bigger, tougher guys, why is this one so special?”

“He doesn’t smell like they do. They stank bad, they did. But he, he smells like... like mad.”

“Yeah, well he doesn’t have any right to be mad after what he’s done.”

“He’s the one making those people do sex, right?”

“Yes, he is.”

“And sex is bad?”

“Well,” Alice jumped straight out her seat and was, for some reason, standing on the coffee table. “Yes... no... sometimes. Sometimes it’s nice, great even, sometimes not so much. Sometimes it’s okay, but you say... Anyway, no sex isn’t inherently bad.”

“But he’s still a bad guy and has to be stopped?”

“Yes,” she settled herself and stepped down off the table and sat with Zack. “Because it’s also private and as long as they’re not hurting anybody people have the right to keep it that way.”

“Uh-huh.”

“Mr. Scarlet is something we call a sex offender, he’s a bad man who has abused that right and is just lashing out at other people who haven’t done anything to deserve it.”

Suddenly, like a flash of lightning that strikes the earth before even the first raindrop can fall, a look of complete understanding shone in Zack’s eyes. He looked to Alice like he had just mastered the precepts of long division and he said:

“So he’s like a bully?”

“Exactly, he’s a bully. A big nasty bully who must be brought in. And that’s what I’m going to do.”

“Okay.”

Zack stood up then, placed his dinner down onto the table and moved to open a window.

“Wait!” Alice shouted after him. “What do you think you’re doing?”

“I know how to deal with bullies,” Zack answered with a shrug.

“You can’t go after him!”

“You are!”

“I’m not a kid.”

“Neither am I.”

“You don’t even know where he is.”

“I can smell him.”

Alice stared helplessly, she could try to restrain him, but she knew that would never work, she could nail all the windows shut and he’d just jump through them. She could do nothing to stop him, say nothing to dissuade him. All she could manage was:

“Zack, this isn’t your fight. There’s no reason for you to bother. You can just stop, be a normal kid; it’s not like anyone is going to thank you for this. So why bother?”

He simply looked to her as if he expected her to already know the answer:

“Why do you?”

And she sighed and said: “Because it needs to be done.”

“That’s a good reason.”

He changed then, his humanity seemed to melt away, disappear into a mass of white fur and fiery eyes – even his clothes were nowhere to be found, suggesting that they too simply vanished into his encroaching monkey shape. The familiar yellow sword and impossibly long tail were the last to emerge and, fully restored, Monkey Boy looked to Alice and she was worried to discover that the peace and assurance she once found buried in his yellow eyes was still no longer there.

But he didn’t hesitate to settle her. He just jumped out the window and made his way to Scarlet.

“I hate it when he does this,” Alice yelled at no one in particular as she grabbed her gun and chased after him.



The hall was a din of chatter and clamor, it was elegantly adorned with banners and slogans prophesizing the resurgence of conservative values, of family-first ethics, of low taxes and infinite equality for those with the most power. The people gathered therein dressed in their most formal attire, they spoke with a sort of folksy eloquence that bemoaned the popularity of deceptive liberal hooliganism and they touched their crystal glasses in a shared toast to the demise of elitism. It was a room of mostly white men – aged well beyond reason and wrinkled like raisins in a swimming pool – and a small cluster of young women, all of them blonde and all of them seemingly incapable of blinking.

They were the Elephant Party and they gathered there that day to campaign for their mayoral candidate, a one Felix Kain, who was himself absent. But his followers were no less ardent in their support, throwing flowers at empty podiums and singing songs to he who would return this city back toward civility and away from the recent rash of beast men and ivory swords and time travel and homosexuality and transexuality and in general sexuality.

They were an old world bunch, holding onto lost values like the Amish hold on to wagon wheels. Where most men in our modern age would boast of their numerous conquests, of the scores of woman-kind that had visited their beds and left satisfied, these were men in their fifties or their seventies or in an interval of ten so high scientists had not yet calculated it who boasted of purity, of having never known the touch of woman. They would speak of their naiveté with pride and earn the adulation of their peers with pats on the back and firm, but brief handshakes.

And they did this because it made them feel powerful, superior, more civilized. They cherished their virginity, they dressed in the finest suits and ate foreign foods that no one of their political affiliation was worldly enough to pronounce because it proved that they were not animals, that they were Men with a capital M.

But to one whose adult life was spent in study of humanity, this facade was flimsy indeed and all it took to shatter it was the right chemical trigger, the right subtle suggestion. And so Mr. Scarlet walked into that hall, naked for all but his fur and that red letter P that burned and itched into his chest, he sat down at the center-most table and he watched as all eyes fell upon him. He listened as all voices shouted him down and demanded his egress and then fell silent. He saw then as all eyes left him and turned to each other, first with wary and confusion, then affection long ago buried and now resurfacing and catching its first glimpse of a brilliant bright sun.

And then came the expected, but in a most unexpected way. Clothes flew throughout the hall, pelting and covering tables, leaving the perfect cushioning for the bare bodies that soon fell upon them. Then came the grunts and thrusts and smacks of kisses, there came the eager pleas and frantic, impassioned entreaties as once-cold husks reached out and demanded to be touched, to be felt, to be desired. And they were all met with willing acceptance and approval, as across the room hidden fantasies became reality and each person there indulged those passions they once pretended to be horrid.

Well, most everyone there anyway. That was the unexpected bit. Amidst the frenzy and the throngs and the vast seas of flabby nudity, there still stood that small

cluster of young blonde women, untouched, unwanted, uninterested. They looked upon the scene with horror and disappointment and within a few minutes stormed out in disgust. It was only the men who participated this time, only the men who clung to each other for the warmth they never allowed themselves to know, only the men who now bobbed and heaved rhythmically as if to music only they could hear, to a melody that sang to them and calmed hatreds fostered all their lives, that took them in hand and said for the first time:

“This is who you are. Be okay with it already.”

And so to them, time ceased to flow, the world no longer turned and all the vile and venom that they themselves once spewed dissolved and all that mattered was that moment and that they had each other.

And Mr. Scarlet watched and he scratched his red letter and he smiled with a satisfaction that transcended simple arousal, that moved beyond physiology and eroticism, that touched the very heart of society. This was the way it was always meant to be: no secrets, no games, everybody getting what they wanted and everybody enjoying it, embracing nature and letting themselves go.

But Mr. Scarlet knew from experience that such fantasies could never persist and in the end everything shattered around him – from his utopian vision to his hope for a freer, more fornicative future to the skylight overhead, which collapsed inward under the weight of a white phantom that descended from the night sky and perched gracefully on the table before him. And Mr. Scarlet looked upon this creature – this furry, fabled beast – and he knew him for what he was.

And yet he could not help but confess a degree of disappointment. He had heard tales of the Monkey Boy and his innate ability to shame all those who would battle him, an ability which has humbled elephants and ravens and lions, but which this meager bonobo was surprised to see had no effect on him. He looked upon the Monkey Boy with its blazing eyes and sword that shone so bright that it was nearly blinding and he felt nothing, nothing at all, save irritation for his attempted interference.

“So,” he said to his enemy, “thou art the heretical beast who would seekest to impose upon my divine mission. Well, I’ll not have ye, understand? Be gone or I shalt smite thee with the full force of great and might Eros!”

It was quick, too quick for the eye, and for anyone else it might have proven the decisive blow. But Mr. Scarlet was one with the energy around him. All the pleased sighs, the happy moans and the wonderful cacophony of flesh impacting against flesh was a symphony, a grand arrangement that floated through his very soul and made him one with life itself, entwined with the forces of creation and being that were maintained by the very acts he galvanized in so many willing. And so as Monkey Boy struck at him with his tail, Mr. Scarlet could feel it in the sphere of energy in which all life floats free and he caught it, seized it, took hold of it and twirled its owner over his head and threw him violently against a distant wall.



Monkey Boy landed hard, but recovered quickly and he transformed. There was no need to prolong this, no desire for anything other than a decisive win. The only way to stop the mass of wobbly, wavy humping was to take down Stinky ol’ Mr. Scarlet and so

Monkey Boy became a gorilla. His arms plumped out, his body expanded and his fur faded to black. And he ran, ran past the pulsing blobs and strange slurping noises, he charged right at the tiny bonobo and he landed a punch so hard and so loud that the earth shook, the doors shattered, a condemned building across the street fell in on itself and a monk off in some forgotten corner of the world and seventy years into his vow of silence was startled from his meditations so suddenly that he couldn't help but exclaim:

“Dude!”

And yet Mr. Scarlet did nothing. He didn't move, nor flinch, nor scream from the perfectly round hole that should have just been carved through his ribcage. He just stood there, unharmed, unfazed, and smiling a smug smile. He swatted away Monkey Boy's fist and returned to watching his throbbing masses.

But Monkey Boy wasn't finished, not yet. He changed again, this time becoming much smaller and regaining his tail. His fur stayed black and he let out such a scream that all the glassware turned to sand which turned again into glass, that all the tables splintered and exploded and that reverberated back through the decades and ensured that a Mr. Munch's painting of a smile would be forever tainted.

But Mr. Scarlet simply yawned.

And so it continued. Monkey Boy tried everything he knew. He tried his gibbon form's super breath and blew out every candle in the world, but didn't so much as muss his opponent's fur. He used his Allen's Swamp Monkey form to pull all the water out of the sprinkler system and hurl it forward with the force of tidal wave. Mr. Scarlet didn't even get wet. He used his orangutan's rubbery arms to bind Scarlet and hold him fast, but the bonobo was too strong to contain and he pulled Monkey Boy straight into a fist that felt like iron and left him groaning on a floor that had no interest in comforting him.

And always, every single time, Scarlet would turn his attention again toward the crowd, watching them like they were cartoon tadpoles, dancing endlessly to moves that were never meant to make any sense. And as he watched, he seemed somehow emboldened by the people. His smile would grow wider and his whole body seemed to heave in tandem with theirs, as though he and they were one in a secret ritual that perpetuated them both.

It was a difficult thing to grasp, and it was purely intuitive, but looking on, the shades of Monkey Boy's human mind just knew somehow and in some way that he was going about this all wrong and so he transformed again. He became lither, sleek and slender, his fur again became black and his tail remained absent. He looked somewhat like a chimpanzee, but taller and more slender. It was a new form, but not an unfamiliar one, and its impact was immediate, as all the men in the room instantly stopped their swayings and quickly backed away from each other with accusatory looks of dread and disgust. They each groped for clothes with seemingly no concern as to whether they were theirs and moved quickly to the exit.

Mr. Scarlet too seemed changed. Once as entranced as those men who now so desired underpants, he was broken free and angry at the result. He glared at Monkey Boy – at his mirror image – with hatred like he had never smelled before, giving off a toxic wave of emotion that almost knocked him out. He held out his hand and the unmistakable ivory sword appeared in his grasp. He held it before him and shrieked like demons shriek before they get their coffee:

“Thou! Thou heathen, infidel, heretic. Thou hast cancelled out my eroticization effect!”



The rush faded, the warming sensation of relief was replaced with anxiety, dread and sweat, so much sweat that his fur weighed him down like sodden anchors on the ocean floor. The people all around, they gathered up their clothes and the remnants of what they wrongly insisted was their dignity and they shuffled awkwardly toward the exit, slowly so as not to bump into each other and remember things they had already started to forget.

And Mr. Scarlet, he just needed release, to purge himself of the energy that drove him steadily on toward the madness known only to those few throughout the ages who looked into the abyss, saw the things that looked back and licked them across the eyes. He raised his sword, that cursed blade that gave him what he always sought, held it firm and rushed at the hated Monkey Boy.

His foe evaded his attack, but only barely. And he didn't change, didn't transform into a another shape better equipped to deal with the threat he now faced. Because, Mr. Scarlet figured, he couldn't. If he changed, the orgy would begin anew and the revitalizing effect would wash over Mr. Scarlet, wade through him and immortalize him, preserve him from all harm. As long as Monkey Boy remained a bonobo, Mr. Scarlet knew he was vulnerable, but so then was his foe. Unarmed and with no special physical attributes to speak of, it was only a matter of time before Monkey Boy fell.

And he needed Monkey Boy to fall, he needed that feeling to return, that calming sensation that took away all pain – both physical and emotional – pain that now fueled his drive and gave strength to his swings, allowing his sword to streak through the air like white lightning. He struck a table and the table exploded in a mass of wooden shards, flying in all directions and piercing the open flesh of both apes battling nearby. Mr. Scarlet barely flinched, for he knew a pain too great to be superceded; but Monkey Boy, Monkey Boy stumbled onto the floor, helpless and alone.

Down came the sword, traveling so fast that it caught up to its own sound waves; the resultant shock was tremendous, but the sword connected with nothing but floor, its target having rolled away. So another strike and another sonic boom, it didn't connect either, but it was closer than before. And Mr. Scarlet could feel the relief returning, he could taste it, he could remember what it was like so distinctly now that illusion almost became reality. And boom, another blow that took some fur with it this time. His mind traveled back to the easy days, the simple days, the days when the lightest of thoughts could quell all impulses, the days unlike now where the only way to find the peace he sought was to loom over a helpless Monkey Boy, raise his sword and...

...Boom.

But this was not the boom of a blade piercing the sound barrier, not the wail of the sky succumbing to the cruel whims of ever-immutable physics. No, the sword never fell, but the arm that held it sagged to the side – loose, limp and useless – the elbow necessary to operate it having exploded in a mass of blood and fur in the wake of a very modern boom and the hideous wrath of a tiny piece of lead.

“Okay, that's just about enough of that.”

The mists faded then, the fog lifted, the haze dissolved and the world became clear amidst the pain and drowsiness. Mr. Scarlet fell onto his back and swirled revoltingly around the room to find that success had been denied him before the battle had even been joined. Even had he slain Monkey Boy, it wouldn't have mattered; the other occupants of that room had fled, there was no one there now, save himself, his enemy and an unknown woman with red hair, a firm aura of authority and a remarkable pearl-handled pistol in her hand.

She approached him, taking neither her gun, nor her eyes off him for even an instant. She kicked his sword away and ordered something he couldn't quite hear through the mess of new thoughts and wonders to assail him, not least of which was the Monkey Boy, who had again risen, who hovered over him and changed once more. His fur seemed to sink beneath his skin and in its place emerged clothes, the clothes of a young boy with cartoon characters emblazoned upon them. The boy then looked Mr. Scarlet in the eye and whispered:

“You're a bad man.”

And Mr. Scarlet laughed and replied: “Child, I am a monster.”



Marty couldn't stop. He couldn't look away. He resisted as best he could, but before too long a build-up of energy, of anxious momentum yearning for an outlet, would beckon him back to that hateful computer and the ominous things that lurked behind its screen. Even then he would tell himself to focus only on the old things, the happy things, the things with the bad jokes and cheesy music. And he would try, honestly try, and occasionally even succeed, finding pleasure in the simple formulas of pizza men looking for love or plumbers looking for love or lonely housewives looking for love or surprisingly sexy nuclear physicists looking for quarks and theorizing they could find them in the pizza man's pants.

But such moments were fleeting and before long he found himself dragged inexorably toward the dark things with the leather and gags and grand, horrible heresies, toward terrible fantasies that achieved their end result in diminishing the unwanted impulses, but did so through ignominy rather than relief. The energy and drive that once filled him to bursting seeped out and a reflective hatred replaced them, forcing him to watch things no one should ever want to see even as his tears became pitch and they burned through his desk.

And so he would continue everyday going about his normal business with a forced smile and no acknowledgement of his secret sins and every night he would return home to a place he loathed to see and to that cackling contraption that delighted in his misery. Unceasingly it seemed this pattern would go on until a fluke provided unexpected release.

Old Mrs. Winters down the hall – who it must be said knew as much about computers as a caveman knows about steam engines – was fiddling with her network settings one day – apparently in an abortive attempt to make cappuccino – and she somehow found her way into the network records of the whole building and a strange list of numbers caught her eye. She didn't know it at the time, but what she found was the list of connections made by every computer in the complex and, through idle curiosity, she

began following each one, discovering a treasure trove of cute puppy pictures, family trees and many varied uses for old 80s rock music; and she delighted in her findings.

But then she had the great misfortune to stumble upon the sick fetishes and depraved wants of the most unfortunately-minded of society, a panoply of bile and perverse things two people can do together with bile. A disgusted scream followed, as did a trip to the hospital for the shock. An uproar resulted, one that encompassed the whole building with everyone banding together to root out the heathen among them.

It was only inevitable that Marty would be found out and while his fantasy excursions were just that: fantasies; while everything he viewed was clearly and obviously simulated and his crimes were thus victimless, it didn't matter. Not to his neighbors, nor his friends, nor even the courts. These were subjective areas with contradictory precedents going as far back as written law and in cases such as his the accusation was often enough to convict him. And so they stamped him, branded him, locked in the stockade of the electronic age and forgot him.

And Marty still remembered, after all these weeks and all these changes, the last words any human being ever spoke to him:

“You're a monster.”



“I couldn't stop. Every inch of my body needed it, needed to be a part of it somehow,” Mr. Scarlet mumbled not really to anyone, it seemed, just himself. He seemed to have lost much of his flair and just grumbled now in a voice that hardly seemed his own.

Alice stayed back, kept her gun trained, but let Zack try whatever it was he was going to try. Part of it was faith in the boy for all he had done before and part of it was this fogginess in her head, driving her toward something she couldn't quite place, making her antsy and anxious and eager to go outside where all the people were.

“You can't escape sex, not really, it's too deeply ingrained. It's human nature. But if it's denied you and you have to find alternative outlets, can you imagine how dark that can go?”

Zack said nothing and Alice's head was swimming with desire now, but it was desire without a target or a source because there was no one left in the room. No one who counted at any rate.

“You wouldn't understand anyway, you're just a kid.”

“You're a police officer, yes?” Scarlet suddenly looked toward her. “Arrest me already, take me into custody.”

“Nice try,” she smirked, trying to hide the effect he was clearly having on her. “I take you outside and all those people start making with the raunchy and you'll no doubt attempt a daring escape.”

“What choice do you have? It's an autonomic action; I don't control it. You can't stop me, nothing can stop me!”

He was right about that though. They had to arrest him, but no matter where they brought him, this same thing would occur; even if he didn't try to escape, it would still be too distracting to maintain. And killing him wasn't really an option, so that made things complicated.

“You were lonely,” Zack blurted out finally.

“What?” Scarlet snapped before Alice had the chance.

Zack’s eyes had changed, Alice noticed. No longer judging, but inquisitive. He examined Mr. Scarlet, like he was looking for ticks, but ticks buried deeper than flesh, ticks of the soul.

“Nobody wanted to play with you,” he said. “So you made up your own games and now you don’t know how to play with people anymore.”

“Okay, so you do get it. It doesn’t change anything.”

“Yes, it does. All you have to do is stop.”

“It’s not that simple.”

“Ya-huh.”

“Nuh-uh.”

“Ya-huh times infinity.”

“Nuh-uh times infinity plus one.”

“Ya-huh times infinity plus infinity.”

“Curses! There’s nothing higher than that! But you’re still wrong, still naïve. I can’t just undo past mistakes, can’t just right all my evils.”

“Have you tried saying your sorry?”

And Scarlet then sighed a relieved kind of sigh, the sort of sigh of a man who realized at last the end of a lifetime of agony and saw the solution sitting right in front of him all along.

He looked to Zack with tears in his eyes and said with a tone of undeniable sincerity:

“I’m sorry.”

And with that, Alice felt the weight removed, the compulsion to mate lessened and that her clothes suddenly fit so much better. She took out her handcuffs and thanked at least six different gods that she didn’t remember what she was planning to do with them five minutes ago.



“So, what do we think about all this?”

“You mean about the sex?”

“About our rather public disgrace?”

“About how I just saw one of my family values candidates with a busboy locked in the grips of the crawling chaos? I think we can agree that we all feel pretty damn awful about it.”

“The city isn’t as innocent as it used to be.”

“Its buried sins have burst into the open, festering like sores on the ass of the unholy.”

“And we all know whose fault it is, right? Monkey Boy.”

“Clearly. We saw tonight he had the power to find and defeat Mr. Scarlet and yet for one solid day, he sat back and watched as this city was made to debase itself.”

“I must concur. It seems our faith in the boy was indeed misplaced.”

“This bodes dark things, I’m afraid. Old bastions have fallen, secrets have become scandals and our heroes have been revealed as little more than furry brats with

swords. I can't be the only one who sees the pattern. Monsters rising from nowhere, all carrying the same weapon, unifying them in a grand and unstoppable apocalypse. And in that moment, I fear the truth of humanity will be made known, we will see at last that we are not nation builders, not the architects of tomorrow or the holy vessels of civilization, but merely animals, beasts in cages, trapped in a dying world that is ready to eat itself raw."

"Okay... then... we'll be right back after these messages from our sponsor."



Once again, the kid wrapped things up. She was making a pattern of it, beating all those whackdoos and locking them away where hope don't shine. But it meant little to Dan, meant nothing in fact as he worked his way home to his empty apartment, trading bemused greetings with the roaches and rodents that sweated in the corner.

He dumped his coat and his hat on the floor and went into the kitchen where a single chair and a single table awaited him. And upon that table was a basket of moldy cheeses and untouched fruits and a note that had been read and reread so many times as to have no further meaning.

"You didn't even touch the fruit, man."

The voice came from a face hidden behind the basket, attached to a man who sat in a chair that never used to exist. The man was wrong and wry, like a skeletal harbinger from grim places with no names.

Dan simply grunted and sat down across from him.

"Wasn't hungry," he said, sticking his last piece of gum in his mouth. "So it's gonna be you, huh, Jonah."

"Yep. You see the news? Another one bites the dust."

"Yeah, I heard. Guess that means we're down to three now."

"You betcha."

"And if you're here..."

"That's right, Danny Boy," the phantom smiled maliciously then, like hyenas smile at injured lambs. "It's your turn."

To Be Continued...Probably in or Around January, 2012