



UGLY

MICK GARRIS

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Being a doctor empowers you in ways civilians cannot imagine, and Terry has helped the rich and famous of Hollywood stay young and perfect for years past their prime. He thinks he's seen everything, but he hasn't seen someone like Brittany before.

I turned around in slow motion, reeling, and saw the repellent creature behind the counter staring at me. Even more repulsive, she was starting to smile. Her teeth were horrifically staggered.

"Maybe you should stay," she said, happily. I tried to shake my head, but it just jerked spastically. I tried to speak, but my tongue was thick and my lips couldn't form the words. I just gulped and floundered like a goldfish dumped from its bowl onto the floor. And then this creature shambled out from behind the counter and crossed the room, her shadow growing as she grew closer until it devoured me. She turned off the lights, put the CLOSED sign in the window, lowered the curtains, and squatted down next to me.

"You're pretty," she told me...





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I locked the Scaglietti with a chirp and headed to the elevator before I noticed the dollop of bird shit right above the windscreen. That stuff will eat right through the lacquer given half a chance, so I poured some Fiji water on it, whipped off my jacket, and polished it away with my shirtsleeve before the chemical action had a chance to work its evil. A four-hundred-dollar Mr. Alex shirt is a small sacrifice when it comes to saving the finish on a three-hundred-grand Ferrari.

I always carried a spare set of clothes in the car, just in case I wouldn't be making it home to Point Dume on any given night. So I stripped off the shirt, allowing the cool late morning breeze to caress me for a moment before I replaced it. As I slid the clean shirt off of its hanger, I noticed I was being watched by a dark-haired woman in a two-year-old Mercedes S550 that just pulled into the parking structure opposite me. She made no move to exit her car, just settled behind the wheel and her gold Chopard shades, watching me as if I were performing a private strip tease for her. And perhaps I was.

I had just come from the gym, so I was freshly showered and newly pumped and tanned, and must say I was glowing. I'd had my chest waxed on Monday, so I was feeling in my prime, and consciously ignored her as I took my time changing

shirts and tucking it deep into my low-rise Brioni vicuna trousers. I knotted my tie anew, slid into my jacket, and sneaked a look as she finally got out of her car and headed to the elevator.

I don't know why I hadn't recognized her earlier, as she was a client: Evelyn Kilborne, nee Carleton, nee Fassenden, nee Karp, serial wife of the rich and famous. I had restructured a botched Brazilian butt lift and done her eyes a couple Christmases ago. She looked good, too, her recently freshened breasts free-floating under a loose salmon silk chemise. Had to be forty-two, but looked no more than thirty-five. She smiled at me, and nary a crease marred her perfect visage.

She was beautiful.

The elevator dinged its arrival, and I gallantly ushered her inside first.

"Which floor?" I asked.

"Yours," she replied with a smile that would have been coquettish in a twenty-two-year-old. "I'm scheduled for a peel today."

"Of course." I looked at her creamy complexion. "Take off your glasses," I said.

She obeyed, of course. Being a doctor empowers you in ways civilians cannot imagine.

"You're early for a peel. Your skin is perfect. Don't overdo it, or you're going to lose elasticity."

"Seriously?"

"Seriously." I reached out and stroked her face, and I could swear I heard a soft moan. "You have beautiful skin. Don't abuse it."

"Thank you, Doctor." It grew even more beautiful when she blushed. I find blushes charming.

"Terry," I corrected her. "You and I are way past the 'Doctor' stage." I could practically smell her arousal and sense the clenching of her thighs. "Just ask Jessica for some Guerlain Orchidée while you're here, then make an appointment in three months or so."

"You're sure?" she asked.

"Positive," I answered.

"Well," she said, "you know best."

"Yes. I do."

Right on cue, the elevator reached the penthouse floor with a soft ding, and we both stepped past the subtle little brass PERFECTED NATURE CLINIC sign and into the lobby of my domain. It was filled with late morning light, Rodeo Drive and Wilshire Boulevard laid out in a golden triangle beyond us. I placed my hand against her back, bare beneath the silk blouse, and guided her to Jessica at reception, plucked my iced soy chai latte from Irena, checked the calendar, and headed back to my inner sanctum. On my way, I heard Evelyn ask Jessica for a parking validation, and shook my head. If you can't afford to pay for parking, then find another surgical aestheticist. Besides, I own the parking structure.

I entered the office and took a seat behind the teak table, buzzed through a half-dozen emails and checked my News Feed, which offered nothing of interest. I shot my usual morning office ar-

rival pic and posted it, then flipped the MacBook Air closed and turned on the music as I sipped my chai. The office was at a steady sixty-eight degrees, as always, despite the swelter of the Beverly Hills summer.

Irena tapped gently on the door before she entered. She was quite lovely, if not perfect. Her natural blonde hair was a bit wind-tousled, and hung down to the center of her back. Her lips were a bit on the thinnish side, but not so much that they needed plumping. Her eyes were of different colors—one green and the other blue—but it worked on her. She needed just a touch of rhino-shaping that we were already discussing, and it wouldn't be long before a mini-brow lift was in order, but she was holding up pretty well for her mid-30s. The Eastern European accent was frosting on the cupcake. But in truth... she just lies there, expecting pleasure, not really offering it. Our fling was brief but eventless, and she had settled into employee servitude rather gracefully and without drama.

"I saw the board, but give me the highlights for children," I said.

She glanced up at me with a brief gaze I considered wistful, then ran down the day's work. "A mastopexy to begin with at eleven, a couple of peels after lunch, otoplasty on your actress friend at three, and then a phalloplasty to finish the day."

"Nothing like a little phalloplasty to finish the day. Enlargement?"

"Oh, God, no. Just aesthetic shaping. Eric Hardy. Vivid is sending him over."

"Right, fine. I'm a little concerned about starting the day with a mastopexy, though. I'd rather have begun the day with the peels, then work up to the surgeries."

"Of course," she said, unwilling to be chastened. "But this was last minute, you had an opening, and she is paying a premium."

Irena understands how the game is played, which is why I keep her around. She's good at this. But we will have to get that nose perfected sooner rather than later. It reflects badly for clients to see someone working here who is less than flawless. And it distracts me.

"Great, thanks, Irena."

She accepted her dismissal with a smile, and left a wafting breeze of Caron's Poivre in her wake. I breathed deep of her wake, downed my latte, and went in to scrub up for the day's first procedure.



Keep the stitches tight and tiny, that's my secret. Vitamin E is bullshit when it comes to erasing scars; just keep from keloid scarring in the first place, don't plunge into the flesh like a butcher, put the pieces together with care and precision, and you can assemble the parts with

perfection. There are various emollients that will keep the skin supple and vibrant, but it's the cutting, at an angle to overlap and layer the pieces together when it's time to suture them, that's important. I can—and will—sell you very expensive creams that will be good for your skin, but it's the deftness of the surgeon and the creativity of his blade that makes the difference. They come out from under my knife better than any higher power could create. He makes them human; I make them *perfect*.

The first patient of the day was a case in point. Haley Weathers was 26, and had already birthed a couple of babies. Obviously, that's none of my business, but if you're going to have babies, don't expect to be perfect. Your belly will stretch and your breasts will enlarge, leaving loose skin and drooping flesh behind. You want perfection, don't have kids. I'm just saying. But she wanted a litter, and like I said, that's none of my business, though it certainly does *contribute* to my business. Being so young, the ravages of childbirth had left her in surprisingly good shape. She'd obviously been keeping up a regimen at the gym, so her tummy looked good. But the breasts were deflated and hung low on her chest. They needed a boost, and they needed it quickly. There's not a lot you can do about the stretch marks, but I could make them pert again. I mean, Photoshop is fine, but not if you want to do the talk show circuit. HD cameras are merciless.

They'd been nice breasts, to be honest. And size was certainly not an issue. We didn't need to enhance them, so there would be no implantation going on. But the lift itself could bring her back to the catwalk, even in the nude, with the right amount of body makeup. She had been a beautiful young woman, but with these bags on her chest, well, it was hard for me to take. It made her downright ugly.

I was able to lift and define them with very little sculpture, actually. Within about eighty minutes, they had become twenty-six-year-old breasts again, saluting at full attention, beautiful and perfect all over. I smiled as I checked out my handiwork. Some tweaking, a little gravity defiance, and in a couple of hours I'd just clocked in another \$17,000. And it was just the first procedure of the day.

Fuck James Cameron; *I'm* the fucking king of the world.

It is my job to make the world more beautiful, more aesthetically pleasing, to take what nature provides and make it better, to stave off the ravages of illness, age, and gutter luck, to take a giant rock and turn it into a beautiful sculpture. Beauty is not just a matter of taste, either, no matter what the unattractive may say. Symmetry, color, smoothness and shape are not subjective. They've done all kinds of tests that prove it. Give little babies a choice between beautiful faces and

ugly ones and they'll choose the pretty ones every time; it's science.

I went into my bathroom to wash up after the surgery and looked at my own face in the mirror. Nature had been generous to me: the symmetry had been laid out as if on an artist's grid; if you held a mirror to the middle of my face—as I have done on numerous occasions—it would look the same as it does on its own. The pores on my nose had been a bit generous, but it wasn't difficult to shrink them with a simple combination of astringents. The nose itself was noble and sturdy, and I was blessed with a full head of nearly blue-black hair, as well. I let it grow long to give me the look of an artist; some might call it my Fuck You Haircut. My eyes were an even blue, the color you would choose if you were looking for tinted lenses. When I smiled, I had dimples, but no laugh lines. My eyes might crinkle a bit in laughter, but there were no crows' feet. It would be a good few years before I would have to do anything about them. But I'd been keeping an eye on one area of concern. Two very light lines seemed to be crossing my forehead. I had to nip that in the bud, so I got the syringe and a bottle of Botox and made the injections then and there. I massaged my forehead, applied a light dusting of a custom powder I'd had made that was a perfect match to my tanned summer skin, and I was ready for the rest of my day.

I'm proud of what I do, and the world is a much better place because of it.

At the middle of the day, I decided to walk a couple blocks to the Grill on the Alley for lunch. It was a noisy, active place that was filled with an older Beverly Hills crowd, Hollywood agents and their beautiful clients, and I enjoyed the energy and the buzz of the room. There would be a fair share of tourists there, as well, but Beverly Hills tourists are a slightly higher caliber than the ones in Hollywood, and they'd settle for the tables off in the hinterlands where no one would have to see them when they ate. Fortunately. Inhabitants of the fly-over states seem prone to eating with their hands.

So I settled into my usual booth and ordered the John Dory and a vodka Arnold Palmer. I sopped up the bread in a puddle of olive oil and burned through my texts and emails on my iPad, when Randy Setwell marched right up and slid tightly into the snug booth, snagging the table cloth with him and yanking it away as he sat down. He apologized and fumbled to put everything in its place before one of the attentive busboys took the job in hand and smoothed it all over in seconds. Randy was embarrassingly overweight and his face was flushed and sweaty—not just now, but all the time. His chipmunk cheeks and weak chin were forested by a formless greying beard, and his thick horn rim glasses shrank his violet eyes into beads behind them. He reached his hand out

to shake mine, knocking the water glass over in the process. The busboy, who was keeping a careful eye out for just such an incident, was quick to mop it up.

I couldn't avoid shaking Randy's hand, and it was soft and moist. It was hard to keep my gorge down, but I did my best to be civil with him. Part of my future may well rest in his hands. But I did hope that he'd finish before they brought my food.

"Hey, Terry, I was hoping I'd run into you!" he exclaimed. He seemed only to speak in exclamations.

"And bingo! Wish granted!" I said. "You have two more."

"I'm keeping those a secret!" he riposted. I didn't give a shit.

"What's up, Randy? Any news?" Randy had produced our pilot, *The Knife*, a reality show that followed me around and recorded my life.

"Bravo is close!" he, well, exclaimed. "If we can make the numbers work, I think we're home. E! wants a shot, but I don't think they can come up with the dollars."

"That is good news," I said. We'd shot it at least six months ago, and I just assumed that it had died the ignoble death that the previous four pilots centered on me had succumbed to.

"There's one thing that I think would really push it over for them," he said, leaning in closer, as if we were friends or something.

"What's that?"

"A name. If we could shoot a procedure with one of your celebrity clients, then I think we're there."

"If I shot a procedure on one of my celebrity clients, they would no longer be one of my celebrity clients." You'd think it was obvious.

"It doesn't have to be someone in their prime, you know! They like washed-up TV stars! It's even better if their lives are already humiliating! You know, get a David Hasselhoff to get pec implants or something and they'd eat that shit up! Somebody like him would piss on his own mother to get back on TV!"

"I don't know, Randy, my business is a bit more, well, *refined* than that."

"It might be the difference between your own television series and no television series."

"I've driven this highway before, Randy. The clinic grossed seventeen million last year. I don't need a TV show."

"You get this show and you'll gross double that next year."

It gave me pause.

"Double?"

"Doctor Beverly Hills *doubled* his clinic's gross in the first year after he went to air."

"Shit."

"No shit."

He grinned. There was spinach between his teeth, which were widely gapped. Braces, Bleaching, and Bonding would get him started. "Just

think about it, would you?" he said. "Suzanne Somers butt lift; Kirstie Alley lipo; Tara Reid boob job; Bridgette Nielsen facelift; Steven Seagal penile implant. That's great fucking television!" He was exclaiming again.

I was fast losing my appetite. His entire body was quaking in excitement, from his man tit-ties, which were doing their best to hide the huge swathes of sweat under his armpits, all the way to his belt, which was straining against the earthquake of his belly. Spittle was collecting in his beard.

"You're putting me off my lunch," I said.

"Not all of 'em," he assured me. "But if you get just one, it's a homerun. Just promise me you'll think about it, okay? They're gonna want an answer by Monday."

"Okay," I said. Anything to get him to leave the table.

"Promise? Pinky swear?"

"I promise," I promised.

He left, a shit-eating grin devouring his face. I thought about it. Then I was done thinking about it. No fucking way. Not unless they financed the whole season up front.

At that moment, Eric appeared with my John Dory. I took a big gulp of the vodka Palmer, and stared at the fish and broccoli trunk. I couldn't eat it. Looking at ugly people makes me literally nauseous. Randy's grotesquerie actually pissed me off. I mean, we all have a choice about the

flesh sheaths we wear. I couldn't understand how he could allow that pork rind jacket of fat to keep building up around him, squishy and sweaty and smelly, despite the antiperspirant. Unkempt hair, grotty fingernails, thick glasses. I found it hard to be around those so lacking in pride that they polluted their surroundings with their presence. Get on the fucking treadmill, lay off the breakfast burritos, get some Lasik and manscaping and you might improve your life... if not *mine*. I realized I was starting to growl, and I was not about to let this, this *producer* poison my day. I had to get the fuck out of there and breathe.



I normally keep out of the sun as much as possible, but the Southern California ball of fire beckoned so romantically that I could not spurn her call. The minions were out on Rodeo Drive, and I was happy to walk amongst the Look-at-me Darlings as they promenaded the boulevard in their slinkiest, most revealing summer togs. Nature and nurture had proffered up some prime examples of humanity, draped and polished and primped to perfection, displayed for my appreciation, and the bad taste was rapidly wiped from my mouth. It was my duty to give them my attention, and I was glad to abide. At its best, the human form was the greatest contribution of art the world had to offer.

When it is properly attended to and presented, human flesh is magnetic, sleek, electrical. When it glows with a healthy, smooth, even sheen I just want to rub up against it like a cat, to breathe it, to taste it. I get all tactile. Several such bodies strode past me on the Drive today, and the blend of the palate of skin colors and scents was heady. It made me smile. It was not entirely sexual, but it was difficult to remove beauty from the realm of the sensual, from the desire to touch and stroke and penetrate such loveliness. It was primal, even primordial, beyond intellect, an emotion that bordered on the Jurassic.

Though I am quite comfortably heterosexual, I could also appreciate a well-turned-out member of my own gender. I didn't want to fuck it, or even touch it, but I could certainly enjoy a good-looking man with a tight, molded body in an artistic sense.

Surrounded by sterling examples of the human race as they meandered restlessly from *boîte* to jewelry salon, I grew happy, content, even delighted. The sun was high, there was a subtle breeze rustling the palm fronds overhead, and I was surrounded by prime cuts of well-pampered humanity in the balmy Beverly Hills heat. Life was good. I decided to celebrate with another latte; I'd get it ice-blended this time.

I wandered a few blocks over to Cañon and into the Namaste Tea Room, not willing to be defiled by such corporate refreshers as Starbucks or

Peet's; I was in that good a mood. The place was deserted when I entered, and there was a hush barely enhanced by the gentle sounds of Tibetan bells. The lights were dim, but the place was obviously open for business. There was no one behind the counter when I entered, which was strange. There was a little brass bell on the counter, and I picked up the tiny wooden hammer and rang it.

I heard movement from the back room, then someone emerged in a shambling silhouette to the counter.

"I'm sorry," it said as it moved forward into the beam of light spotted from overhead. "I didn't hear you come in."

Her appearance froze me. It was a young woman, lumpen in shape, with limp, unwashed, dirty blonde hair that hung listlessly over her eyes, which were heavy-lidded and hazel. But most notable was the very center of her face, a nasty proof that there is no God: her face was made even more repellent by a cleft lip that had been hastily sewn up in some third-world patchwork, leaving her visage deformed and hideous. What would have been shocking in Pacoima was truly repulsive in Beverly Hills.

I could barely keep my gorge down.

I wanted to leave the store, but I was frozen in place by her unexpected appearance. We looked each other in the eye, our gazes locked, hers unblinking and seemingly thoughtless. I'm sure my eyes were wide with shock and disgust, but she

was no doubt used to that if she had been allowed to go out in public.

“What can I do for you?”

I felt my stomach rumble and my throat constrict. But I reacted slowly and by rote. I stuttered and spat out my order: “I’ll take an organic masala chai with vanilla soy, ice blended, please.”

She looked at me as if I were speaking a foreign language, trapping me in her sloe-eyed gaze. I repeated it, though God knows I didn’t want this creature preparing anything that I might actually intend to *ingest*. “Organic masala chai with vanilla soy, ice blended.”

“How do you make that?” she asked, speaking distressingly through her nose.

“I’m sorry,” I said. “Do you *work* here?”

“Not usually,” she snorted. “But Uncle Ryan is in the hospital, and Mom had to leave suddenly. She couldn’t reach Sheila or Amy, so that leaves me.”

She looked at me through the hank of hair that curtained her muddy hazelish eyes.

I started to feel a bit dizzy. Even from a distance I could feel the air as it blew from her nose like a bull, so I backed away a few steps.

“What was that again? Organic chai, right?”

“With vanilla soy, ice blended.”

“I can do that.”

I suddenly really didn’t want that. I could see that she bit her nails to the quick.

"You know, I think I'll come back when the regular staff is here. I'm pretty particular about my lattes."

"No, please, let me do that. I can do that." She slipped on some clear plastic gloves and started rummaging through canisters of tea, cartons of soymilk, and various powders and syrups. She kept her eyes on me throughout the process, and I felt unable to escape the otherwise empty parlor. It was starting to creep me out.

"Iced?" she asked.

"Blended," I replied.

She dumped everything into the blender, then threw in a cup of ice and fired it up, watching me without blinking as the machine ground away in an annoying metallic roar. Soon the process was complete, and she set it down in front of me in a tall glass.

"I'm sorry," I said, "I meant this to go."

"Oh," she said, watching me through the eyes of a basset hound. The lower lids gaped wide and pink, like Malcolm McDowell in *A Clockwork Orange* when he's forced to watch filmed sexual acts without being able to blink. "Go ahead and have a seat. What kind of music do you want?"

"No, really, just dump it in a paper cup and I'll take it with me."

"It's awfully hot out. You sure you don't want to have it here?"

Totally sure. "That's okay. I'll take it with me."

She stared at me for a moment, motionless, then pulled out a paper cup and poured the concoction in and lidded it in cornstarch plastic. She handed me a wrapped straw and I poked it in as I paid her.

"Taste it," she said. "I want to make sure it's okay."

"I'm sure it's fine," I told her, just wanting to get the fuck away from her before I threw up.

"Just to make sure. I can make you another one if it's not perfect." Perfect. She said *perfect*. As if she had any right to even use the word. But I just wanted out, so I took a sip.

It was actually pretty good.

"Is it okay?"

"Very good, thanks."

"You sure you don't want to have it here where it's nice and cool?"

Nice and cool sounded horrible when spoken through her nostrils. I took another long sip just to not have to look at her.

"No, I'm in a bit of a hurry."

"It's hot out there."

It was. I was suddenly feeling a bit twirly, just slightly off-balance. Maybe the heat was more extreme than I had thought.

The taste of cinnamon was heady, really delicious. And the frozen blend slid down my throat like a soothing snake. I grabbed the counter for a second as my mind filled with helium. My body took a step, but my head stayed behind. She

watched me, and her gaze felt like a slimy blanket wrapped over me.

I felt *hot* all of a sudden, and the only thing that might fight off the fire was the icy latte. I took another long pull and swallowed. Brain freeze. A spike of pain stabbed me between the eyes. Something was really, really wrong. I was starting to feel nauseous. I took the drink and stumbled toward the door. But I couldn't hold onto it; it slipped from my hands and splattered the floor in a wide, wet, mahogany pattern. My foot slipped in the latte, and I sprawled on the floor. What the fuck was going on? I wondered if I were having a stroke or something.

I pulled myself to my feet, wavering like the ancient mariner, feeling as empty as a hologram. As I reached for the door, I heard a hard, metallic *clank*. When I reached out to push it open, it was *locked*.

I turned around in slow motion, reeling, and saw the repellent creature behind the counter staring at me. Even more repulsive, she was starting to *smile*. Her teeth were horrifically staggered.

"Maybe you should stay," she said, happily.

I tried to shake my head, but it just jerked spastically. I tried to speak, but my tongue was thick and my lips couldn't form the words. I just gulped and floundered like a goldfish dumped from its bowl onto the floor. And then this *creature* shambled out from behind the counter and crossed the room, her shadow growing as she

grew closer until it devoured me. She turned off the lights, put the CLOSED sign in the window, lowered the curtains, and squatted down next to me.

“You’re pretty,” she told me.

I tried to tell her that she was *not*.

She stood over me on the hardwood floor, her flower-print dress ruffling in the air-conditioned breeze. It opened before me, revealing dimpled cottage cheese thighs that gathered about her knees, but I forced my head to turn so that I could look away. But it was too late to un-see what I had seen. She knelt to her naturally padded knees, staring deeply into my face. I turned, but she took my head in both her hands and forced me to look at her. It was not a pretty sight.

She just kept staring, a strange delight lighting her murky, half-mast eyes. I could barely focus on her, which was a relief.

I could feel my nostrils closing up as my face started to feel flushed. I had to breathe through my mouth. A bluish tint seem to settle over the room, and when I turned my eyes, even in the dimness, all the images seemed to have the lag of a cheap video camera.

Then she stood, and I noticed for the first time that she was wearing a nametag. This being was called *Brittany*. I couldn’t move; well, I could wriggle and jerk a bit, but nothing that required any kind of control. My body was flushed with heat, and I felt a tingling running through my veins,

centering in my crotch. Unbelievably, the center of my being was feeling arousal.

Brittany picked up my feet, and started to drag me across the floor. The vicuna sled effortlessly across the polished oak, so it took no particular strength to move me. Her palms were hot and clammy, even through my socks, but her grip was firm, deft, committed. She pulled me to the thick leather couch in the quietest corner of the room. Once there, she gathered herculean strength and actually rolled me up onto the couch. I'm six foot three and weigh about one-ninety-five, so that was no mean feat. She had the strength of the gorilla she resembled.

She was panting with the effort, and I lay on my back into the thick, squeaking softness of the divan, helpless and hard, staring up at her. She wiped her brow with the back of her hand and looked at me, the smile dropping from her face like a lead weight. She stared, still breathing hard through her nose. A bubble inflated and deflated from her left nostril before it burst and she wiped it against her sleeve. Then she reached out and touched my face, as if she were Zsa Zsa Gabor in *Queen of Outer Space*, where the female inhabitants of the planet have never seen a man before.

I had no idea what she had planned for me, but it was a plan that was hatched spontaneously. She could not have known I was going to come into the shop; I didn't even know myself until I was strolling down Rodeo. But here I was,

drugged and at her mercy, her swampy, fetid breath gusting out of her mouth now against my face and nothing I could do about it. And with the constricting of my nasal passages, the flushing of my face, and the stiffening of the most private part of my anatomy, it became obvious to me that that narcotic had obviously been spiked with Viagra.

Brittany reached down and undid my tie, sliding it out from under my collar and dropping it to the floor, staring me in the eye without blinking the whole time. Then she rolled me over and slid off my jacket before returning me to my back. One by one, she carefully unfastened the buttons of my shirt, opening it and running her damp, stubby hands over my immaculately groomed chest. The horrid intimacy of her skin against mine curdled me; I felt invaded, despoiled. I tried to pull away, but had lost control of my motor system and just had to lie there and take it.

Then she took her hands away and stood over me, looking down at me. It was a relief, as if I were being released by a squid.

Finally, she spoke.

"Do you think I don't see your contempt?" she asked me, surely not expecting an answer.

"Do I repel you?" Again, it was surely a rhetorical question, as I had lost any ability to reply. "Well, what a shame. You repel me."

Ha. As if.

"I'm sick of the way you look at me. Every time you come in it's the same."

Every time? I'd never seen her before.

"You don't see me, you look away. You spoiled, arrogant, rich, pretty slimeball."

Yeah, the spoiled, arrogant, rich, pretty slimeball she wished she could have. That *any* woman wished she could have. But I would not be had, and certainly not by the troll under the bridge, even in my worst nightmare; I would only *have*.

Unfortunately, she was in control now. To my horror, she reached down and unbuckled my belt. After pulling off my shoes, she whisked my pants down and off, and they nestled softly on the floor. My private parts rebelled against me, engorged and raging, pharmacology and primal pulse fighting the true repulsion I felt, raised in mutiny like a flag. She stripped my boxers off as well, revealing my staff as it hovered proudly an inch or two over my stomach.

She looked at it as if she had never seen anything like it before, and surely she hadn't. It *pulsed* with the pounding of my heartbeat, and she just watched it bounce. I tried to roll off of the couch, but I didn't have the control, and she wouldn't let me. All at once, she *backhanded* it, and it hurt. It did not, however, diminish its pressure, which maintained its proud stature. She watched it wave back and forth like the Queen of England in a parade.

I was terrified to think what might be coming.

"You want me, don't you?" she asked in all seriousness. Then she broke into howls of canine laughter.

"I disgust you, don't I?"

I wouldn't have answered even if I could.

She slapped me across the face—*hard!*—with the back of her hand.

"*Don't I?*"

She knew she did. And I feared what was coming.

"Good."

Then she grabbed my manhood, gripping it in both hands, so hard that it hurt. The head was so red it was almost purple as she squeezed it. Then she let it go. I was barely breathing, my eyes clenched tight. But my relief would be short-lived.

When I opened my eyes, I saw that she was stepping out of her king-sized underpants. They were flowered cotton, big, ass-covering granny pants that dropped to the wood floor with a thud. No. Please, no.

Still dressed, other than her pantaloons, she climbed up to stand over me on the couch, the leather squeaking under her wide bare feet. I cowered from the view of her thick, matted black web of pubic hair, tried to turn away, clenched my eyes as tight as they would close. And then, to my absolute horror, she lowered herself and, using her hands, guided me into the thick, pungent entrance to her lady-cave.

Oh, God, the horror! The horror!

She stared at me the entire time as she raised and lowered herself onto me like a Thanksgiving Day parade balloon. She was expressionless, just staring, glaring, *watching* me as she rocked and I helplessly penetrated her. When I tried to look away from her she grabbed my face in both her hands and forced me to look her in the eye. Her face grew flushed and she began to grunt, but never took her eyes from mine, fixed and focused as she sped up the movement.

It was horrible. Her loose, flaming hot and perspiring flesh was slapping against me with a sharp, ghastly spanking sound, feverishly building toward her own personal detonation, and my Waterloo. Faster and faster she pounded, her eyes never leaving mine and never blinking, her breathing accelerating, blasting me with the furnace of her dragon breath. When I would try to close my eyes, she would pull them open with her blunt, nail-chewed fingertips to make me watch. I couldn't believe that my manhood would betray me like this, that it would not only remain rigid and questing, but that it would build in intensity, as if I were fucking a perfectly fashioned runway model rather than the beast from the haunted cave.

Faster and faster, and she became disgustingly more lubricated. And then, certainly without intending or even wanting to, I—or more accurately, a singular mutinous portion of my anatomy—ignited within her squishy, squashy body.

She smiled a Mona Lisa grin as she started to buck, achieving her own personal nirvana. My bastard member continued to contract spastically as she trapped me tight in her clamshell grip. Her eyes closed at last as she allowed her body to be overtaken by her orgasm, and shook, quivering as it raked over her, seemingly overwhelmed by its power and magnitude.

Finally it subsided, and I could feel my head begin to clear. I lay on the couch, stuck to the leather by a layer of perspiration, as she climbed off of me and looked at the sticky, still chemically rigid pole that would not subside. She grabbed some napkins from the front counter to clean herself, then climbed back into her voluminous underpants. Then she gave me the finger, tossed a pile of napkins to me, though I was unable to do anything with them yet, and walked away from me.

"You can let yourself out," she said as she held up some kind of remote control, unlocking the front door.

Then she went behind the counter and into the back room, closing and locking the door behind her. I could only stare at the door, devastated, violated, sickened.

And now, at last and for the first time, impotent.



I had seen horrifying things in my profession—the flap of a face removed by a car crash, a zookeeper’s midsection mauled by a chimpanzee that wanted its toy squeaky monkey, a beautiful teenager’s face and chest rotted away by a flesh-eating bacterium—but watching my fluids leaking out of Jabba the Hut, seeing her turn from me with the glow of satisfaction as she tossed napkins on me to wipe away the residue of my fouling by her... it was by far the most horrific of all. The first thing that happened as my body began to return control to me, as the effects of the drugging began to fade, was to vomit painfully and repeatedly all over the floor of the teahouse. I wiped myself furiously until I was raw, but it was never enough to feel clean. When I could stand, I rushed to the door of the back room, pounding on it with everything I had. If it had not been made of steel, I’d have shattered it.

But the shop was quiet, and I stood there in my unbuttoned shirt, my member a flesh compass pointing out the guilty. I sobbed with fury, but was alone and powerless. I slid into my clothes and out of the shop, radiating hate and anger. I rushed quaking through the sunny streets of Beverly Hills, hiding from the gaze of all around me. I felt empty and foul.

I rushed right to the car park, phoned Jessica and told her to cancel the rest of the day’s appointments, and tore out of the building like the proverbial bat out of hell.

I turned left on Santa Monica and found myself trapped in the plaque of Beverly Hills' most clotted artery. I fumed and shouted and tried to weave my way around the lazy, otherwise preoccupied assholes that blocked my way home. The Scaglietti squealed as I pulled it up onto the sidewalk and ripped around the sludgy traffic that taunted me, took Beverly up to Sunset, and tore ass toward the beach.

At least, that was my plan. But the traffic here was dire as well, and I just had to sit and crawl with the proletariat, inching my way towards Dead Man's Curve, cursing the gods, my stomach empty and screaming, my privates raw and prickling. They seemed to be crawling, *alive*.

There are no shortcuts heading from East to West in LA; every road is over-burdened, impossible and impassible. You just have to sit and wait, especially while they're rebuilding the 405, which is fucking *always*. I tried the radio, but could not stand music right now, and the talk was dominated by the screeching right-wing maniac harpies that made me want to kill myself when I was in a *good* mood.

So I suffered in silence under the relentless sun of a Southern California summer, filled with hate and loathing and fury and disgust. It only bloomed as the car, which was built to blur, crawled along behind fume-belching Chevys and Fords and countless other pieces of shit that didn't deserve to share the road.

By Westwood, I was filled with vehemence; by Brentwood, I wanted to smash into every car that was in my way; by the Palisades, I wanted to blow my brains out; and by Malibu, I was ready to kill. I truly felt capable of taking a life. One certain life.



I pulled into the driveway as the garage door opened its maw, then drove inside and let it swallow me. I sat in the car, quaking, furious, my hair matted by the wind. Finally, I climbed out of the Ferrari, slamming the door behind me, and did the same with the door into the kitchen.

The house was still and quiet. The distant sound of the waves crashing against the cliffs below the house tried to calm me, but nothing was going to extinguish the venom that was coursing through my veins. I charged into the bedroom and tore my clothes off. Even the grandness of the setting sun outside the French doors of my bedroom could not wither the anger that festered within me. The sky turned bright orange and the scuds of clouds flamingo pink, but left me unaffected. Once stripped, I went into the bathroom, turned on the shower as hot as it would go, and stepped in under the scalding spray, soaping and scrubbing the detritus of her attack off of my body. The bathroom was all windows, allowing me a full view of the cliffs of Point Dume as I bathed, and I watched the sun sink into the sea with my heart.

The purloining of my manhood, my success, my testosterone, my singularity and my very *being* by this beast, this creature, this curdled mutation would not go unavenged.

I turned on the 70" Panasonic plasma, but it was just colors, bright and annoying, a screeching cacophony of voices and images that just jumped all over the place, yelling at me before they ignited into headache-inducing surround sound explosions. I turned it off and switched on the stereo, but it too grated rather than soothed.

Off. Silence. Solitude.

I could see myself reflected in the glass that made up most of the exterior walls facing the ocean. It was hard to tell by looking what had happened to me, which was a good thing. I couldn't stand to see myself staring back at me so plaintively, so I turned off all the lights and sat in darkness as the Pacific Ocean swallowed and doused the fiery sun, then turned silvery as it reflected the emerging moon. I cracked open a prized bottle of special-occasion Ladybank single malt and sipped at it, but even that burned as it went down. I gave up and climbed out of my towel and into bed, where I lay awake for another hour or two before finally throwing back an Ambien tablet. After another sleepless hour, I tossed back another. In another ten minutes, I was asleep, thankfully dreamless.

The early return of the sun awakened me the next morning, and I spent a blissful three min-

utes of consciousness before remembering what had happened to me. So I rose, made a smoothie and ate my granola with vanilla almond milk, and jumped back into the shower, needing to be cleaner, ever cleaner. I shaved and noticed that my crotch was still prickling. I hoped that it was because it was time for my pubic waxing, and not because I'd *caught* something from the creature called Brittany. So I shaved there, and once it was smooth, the creepy-crawlies ended. The ones inside, on the other hand, wriggled through my brain like earthworms.

Showered, shaved, and exfoliated, I dressed and wore the face and costume of the prosperous and popular Beverly Hills cosmetic surgeon that everyone knew. Into the Scaglietti, out of the garage, and eventually onto Sunset, which was remarkably light on traffic.

The air at the beach was still cool, and it felt restorative as it blew through my hair. My gorge was settling as I wound my way across the West Side, racking up imaginary points as I zoomed through imaginary Brittannies all the way to Beverly Hills.

I pulled in to the parking garage and sat there in the rumbling Scaglietti, filling the concrete tower with high-octane fumes. Finally, I put the top up and powered down, locked the car with a chirp and headed to the elevator. I pushed the button and waited. And waited. And waited. I pushed it again. And again. And again. I snort-

ed through my nose, then pounded on it like a banshee, slamming the side of my fist against the button until it turned red and bruised. Fucking piece of shit! I kicked it, and kicked it again, and again. But it resisted all my persuasions, and just pissed me off. I yelled at it in growls and howls, not words, then resigned myself to the stairwell, which, even in Beverly Hills, smelled like urine.

My A.Testonis clanged hollowly but musically as I made my way up the metal stairs, which was an escalating oven, hotter and hotter the higher I climbed. By the time I reached the penthouse, I had perspired all the way through my shirt and into the pits of my Caraceni, making the sweet, almost floral natural scent of its Venetian wool reek. I would not wear it again.

I was in a foul mood when I finally entered through the whispered hush of the clinic's doors. The ladies knew not to address me when I wore this mask of foul temper, so I just strode past them and into my private chamber. I sat behind the gleaming, empty table, just breathing through my nose and glaring at the Chinese Fighting Fish in the aquarium, daring them to piss me off. The sun outside mocked me with its joyful brightness, as the air conditioning chilled my sweaty flesh and the damp clothing that stuck to it. I didn't even turn on the light; the window filled the room with more than enough illumination. I lifted the remote and shut the blinds. The only light now came from the aquarium, and the Chinese fight-

ers cast huge liquid shadows across the walls. It was only 11:00 a.m., but my head was already throbbing.

There was a barely audible tap on the door. Irena knew to exercise caution with me. I aimed the remote at the door like a laser weapon, and it opened unto her.

"Mrs. Jameson is prepped and ready for her lipo, Doctor," she practically whispered, expecting a growl in return.

Resigned, I slid silently into my white coat and went in to scrub up.

Ellen Jameson was thin as an Italian greyhound, but whenever she overindulged, she imagined pounds of pudding forming around her waist. True, when she gained ounces, they found their way to her midsection, as the rest of her was so skeletal. Her ass was so tiny that it was one flat cheek with a hole. So she would come in to do penance for her hot fudge sundae, and I would pocket another six grand, a dirty cannula and a nearly empty fat collection jar.

We gave her a general anesthetic, because none of the upper classes really want to be conscious when they're undergoing a procedure. Nobody wants to see the fat collection gun sucking buttery yellow sludge from under their skin and watch it splatting out into the clear glass collector. Even the sound of the process alone is like a fat man with sputtering diarrhea in a public restroom. So when I walked into surgery, Ellen was

deep in twilight sleep, her face at rest, resembling nothing more than a corpse, her taut facial skin holding her eyelids open a bit to reveal the whites of her rolled-back eyes. Oxygen was fed through a tube in her nose, and she'd been scrubbed and her belly painted with brown antiseptic.

Just looking at this dowager pissed me off. I grabbed the suction gun as if it were an AK-47, wiped down the tip of the cannula, searched for the barely visible pockets of fat, then jammed it into her skin, pumping it in and out like a rutting weasel, jamming it, grunting without realizing it, cramming it hard and deep beneath her skin, gritting my teeth in an unconscious snarl. I looked up and held out my hand for a wipe-down and Beth's face was frozen in horror, which she tried to whisk away as quickly as possible.

"What?" I growled.

"Are you okay, Terry?" she asked, timid with trepidation.

I had to be careful. This could bite me in the ass; even with my malpractice insurance, which was sky-high though I had never been sued, just one matron of the Hills with a hotshot lawyer husband could mean the end to my professional life as I know it.

"I'm okay, Beth." And I was, for the moment. But this day could not go on like this.

I took a deep breath and let it out, steadying myself. I had to let my sane, confident self take control. *Peace*, I thought. *Ice. Cool.* I looked down at

Ellen Jameson's withered, concave stomach and the ripple of her ribs. The extraction gun rested in my hand, eager to suck, but I held it back for a moment longer, letting the cannula sit under her skin, eager to swallow. There was very little blood, and the incisions were tiny. There would be bruising, but there always is. And it would hurt a bit when she woke, but that helped the patient feel like something had truly been *done* to her. It's all part of the effect. She would know she'd had *work* done.

Even-keeled again, I had Beth wipe my brow and slowed down the maneuver, easing my way into the tiny pouches of pudge and sucking them away, and finished it up gently and carefully. And, of course, artfully. She would be sleek as an anorexic anaconda.

The day was busy, and I had to make up for the overflow from the cancellations yesterday. I was not very chipper or conversational, but my mood did not get in the way of my work, which kept my mind off of what had happened to me the day before. But when the day was done and the lights turned off and the office door locked for the day, there was nothing to block my thoughts of the hideousness of Brittany, and how she had stolen my intimate being from me. I could feel my heartbeat accelerate, and my skin flush. Now, the Monster of Cañon Drive was eating my brain. My mind was filled with the repellent images of a jellied, hare-lipped creature named Brittany climb-

ing atop me and repeatedly lowering herself upon me, coating me with her excretions and befouling me forever. All I could see was ugly, and it was bright red.

I wasn't ready to go back to my car. I heeded the clarion call of Rodeo Drive (if you pronounced the name of the street like the cowboy carnival, all would know you were a rube: the accent was on the second syllable, of course, which rhymed with "A"), and stepped out into the brief flare of California's golden summer twilight. Valets hopped as the beautiful and fashionably dressed denizens of the Hills climbed out of their Bimmers, Bentleys, and Benzes and into 208 Rodeo, Urasawa, and McCormick and Schmick's, but I barely took notice of them. Beauty was all around me—the people, the cars, the architecture, the sunset, the jewelry, the soft kiss of a Southern California summer breeze—but all I saw was ugly: the Chinese Crested crapping on the sidewalk in front of Fred Joaillier: an ancient, rotund, apparently female thing with coarse, white whiskers sprouting from her chin, creeping along in a walker and dragging an elephantine leg covered with sores, dirt, and ragged bandages apparently inherited from Imhotep; a 1979 Datsun B210 with Arizona plates filled with shouting, pimply teenagers, holding up traffic and belching clouds of choking black smoke from its tailpipe; and perhaps worst of all, an ugly couple kissing.

What had become of this neighborhood? Once a symbol of all that was special in the world, Beverly Hills was being poisoned by the zombie invasion of the ordinary, the defective, the casual, the fat-over-belt, biscuits-and-gravy-eating, *TMZ*-worshipping, gum-chewing lower classes. I thought we'd priced them out of this neighborhood decades ago, but it appears that the lives of the privileged are so revered that the *hoi polloi* will go into hock to rub up against us.

My life was devoted to beauty, yet all I saw around me was ugliness.

I had to go to the habitat of this ugly beast and yank its heart out, slay the dragon, extinguish the flames of its breath.

Having a curdled mind and an angry monkey on my back, I walked mindlessly in an increasingly tormented rage up Rodeo Drive, turned right on Brighton Way, round the corner onto Cañon, and found myself across the street from the Namaste Tea Room. Its glass windows were tinted and I could not see inside as night was beginning to shroud the evaporating daylight. A tiny, tasteful OPEN sign was propped inside the window. I stood there and watched for several minutes before a young mommy pushed her twin babies out in a double-wide stroller, onto the street and around the corner. The shop stood still on its quiet block, no customers coming out or going in. It was after seven o'clock, and this block was winding down, the action moving closer to Wilshire.

The OPEN sign sat there, begging for final customers, but there were none to be seen.

A group of three pretty young things were laughing as they came around the corner behind me, tossing their hair and acting all Californian. They were all teeth and enhanced breasts and spray-tans: quite sweet, actually. But I was not in the mood. Not now.

I was watching the shop, but could see them in my peripheral rearview vision as they spotted me and came to a stop. They whispered to one another, thinking wrongly that I could not hear them; well, I didn't hear their words, but I knew what they were talking about. The boldest of them, a frosted brunette in what had to be a tastefully revealing Chanel, approached me as she brought a slim, tapered cigarette to her lips.

"Do you have a light?" she asked me.

I'm sure I expressed even more disdain than I felt. "Do you know what cigarettes will do to your face?" I asked back, freezing her into place. She looked at me with wide, Bambi eyes, blinked twice with ultra-long lashes. "They'll put creases in your lips, turn your skin grey, suck all the moisture out of your flesh, and create a roadmap of wrinkles all around your eyes, your cheeks, your forehead, and your neck. No. I don't have a fucking light."

I think she sobbed once before she flipped me off and dragged her girlfriends away in a huff. "Faggot!" the blonde called out when they were a

safe distance away. They were disposable. I had my pick of the litter when I wanted it. And I didn't want it now.

I looked up just in time to see a hand turn the little sign in the teashop window to CLOSED, and the lights inside went off. I backed into the shadow of a palm tree and waited for several minutes for the door to open. A twenty-year-old boy with dyed black hair over his eyes and tattoos of horror movie stars on his slender biceps came out first, followed by a girl with creamy mocha skin barely covered by a ribbed white wife-beater and a beautifully proportioned shaved head. It took balls for a woman to shave her head so completely, but it worked on her. She was stunning. Her lush lower lip was pink, in stark contrast to the glowing brown of the rest of her face.

The girl pulled the door shut behind them and locked it up. The boy and she left on foot in opposite directions, and the street went quiet again. There was no sign of Ugly Brittany anywhere. Just to be sure, I waited several minutes, then gave up, walked back to the car, and managed to speed home to the Dume.

My tolerance for the unattractive and aesthetically challenged was always low, but now it grated against me, pissed me off, boiled my blood. I found myself in a constant state of anger; anything could set me off. In the days to follow, the girls at the clinic kept their distance, afraid of igniting the powder keg of my fury. All I wanted

was to work, to keep my mind occupied on creation, on art, on beauty, on perfection. That kept my head straight, kept me moving forward like a shark, which would die if it were to remain motionless.

I, too, experienced a sort of death by inertia. As soon as I was finished for the night, my brain festered all over again, and Brittany Fever would break out all over my body. I would walk down the street each evening, park under the shade of the date palm, and wait. Invariably the shop would be shuttered by the Black-Haired Boy and the Cocoa Angel, though one night it was a lone, middle-aged Latina who locked up. For nine weekdays straight I followed the same regimen, only to be foiled each time by my evasive quarry.

But then, on day ten, a Saturday, I found myself in the Golden Triangle early in the morning to pick up my iPad, which I had left in the office. The town was still recovering from a raucous Friday night, still sleeping it off when I got there. As I came off of Santa Monica Boulevard, my mind wandered as I was changing music on my iPhone, and I passed Rodeo. I realized it just before I hit Cañon, with enough time to skid into a quick right turn. I turned onto Cañon just in time to see a familiarly trollish water balloon of a body coming out of Namaste and locking the door in its wake. I gasped, and my heartbeat doubled, pounding a tattoo against my ribcage. I stomped the Scaglietti to a tire-shredding halt, and saw

her look up at me. She froze as she recognized me, taking in my snarling rictus of hatred. Neither of us could move; she dropped her large iced whatever it was, and it splattered on the sidewalk against her feet. I could feel my breath turn to quick, shallow panting.

I slammed the car into gear and tore a quick U-turn; skid marks followed me to the other side of the street where I squealed to a stop, threw open my door and charged out and after her.

Brittany remained rooted in place, a fat, misshapen, hideous deer in the headlights, her snaggle-toothed mouth agape and drooling, her billy goat eyes like watery eggs. Before she could even react, I threw open the passenger-side door, hefted the punching bag of her body with a weightlifter's grunt, threw her inside, slammed the door, and rushed back to my side, yanking my door shut and locking it tight.

Before she could resist, I grabbed the seatbelt and pulled it around her soft, pot-bellied body, and locked it in place. There was no more give in the belt, it was that tight. She was that grotesquely fat. I pulled the shirt off the hanger from behind my head, wrapping the sleeves around her mouth and the headrest and tying it tight. She struggled like a beached sperm whale, but her never-exercised, flailing, sloshing bag of squishy bones was worthless against my pumped and primed musculature. I pulled off my tie and tied it taut around her wrists, swiftly undid the seatbelt,

slid it between her arms, and locked it into place. She fought and huffed and puffed, but this time *I* backhanded *her* across the face, and though it seemed to have no effect in calming her down, it made me feel a hell of a lot better.

I glared at her, breathing hard from the struggle, just looking at her, my disgust building. How could someone let herself devolve into *this*? We are given our bodies, some of them challenging, but they are our temples, our shrines, we have the responsibility to make them into odes to the beauty of humanity, corporeal art of the highest kind, flesh sculpture to illuminate, to titillate, to provoke, to inspire.

But here sat a thing called Brittany, a human tenement, guilty of the Eighth Deadly Sin: being *Ugly*.

I wanted to spit on her, to vomit her away as you would the stomach flu. I wanted her washed down the gutter to the sewer with the rest of the detritus that was carried out to the sea and out of our lives. I hired a great architect to build my home to my standards of beauty, brought in one of the area's highest paid interior designers to furnish it and my clinic. I dined in restaurants of style and elegance that served foods where presentation was as important as flavor, dressed in clothing that looked as good as it felt, that flattered me and my form. I spent a lot of time and money to surround myself with beauty and perfection; indeed, aesthetic purity was my life's work,

my vocation and my avocation. And yet, lashed to the buttery leather upholstery in one of the world's finest evocations of automotive elegance, this worthless, meaningless, mindless example of physicality in its lowest form glared at me with some kind of sense of superiority.

"You are so fucking *ugly*!" I spat at her.

She choked on the sleeve of the beautifully tailored shirt that held her head strapped in place, trying to pierce me with muffled words that could never be heard, and I just backhanded her again.

"*Shut the fuck up!*" I screamed at the top of my lungs.

She stopped struggling. Her expression changed, from hatred and anger to *fear*. And it made me smile. She would regret what she had done. Perhaps she thought she was trying to teach me a lesson or something. Well, it was my turn to play professor now.

As hard as it was to look at her, it was easy to decide what to do with her.

I took one last reconnaissance of the area to see that no one was watching, then slammed the Ferrari into gear and laid down another patch of rubber in the quiet Beverly Hills morning. I could retrieve my iPad on Monday; I didn't need it now.



I drove up the long drive to the house as the gates eased silently shut behind me, then drove

into the garage, which closed like the curtains at the end of a play. But this show was just beginning. She had started to struggle again on the way here, but a hard chop to the throat cut that short. She was lucky she could even breathe, and she knew it. Her breath wheezed through her wounded, possibly even ruptured trachea, tears and snot running down her face. It made me sick to look at her... but now I had to *touch* her again. I lifted her out of the car, and she lay like limp weight, her repulsive bulk shifting like a giant silicone bag. It might have been better had she struggled.

But she chose passivity, which was fine with me. It didn't ease my anger a bit.

Like many successful Southern California cosmetic surgeons, I had a small operating room built within the house. I didn't use it often, but there are celebrities who are afraid of being seen even in the *neighborhood* of a plastic surgeon, so great is their fear of the tabloid press. They are willing to go to great expense, with an emphasis on the *great*, to keep their procedures a secret. I could tell you some of the extremely rich and famous patients that benefited from my artistry, but then I'd have to kill you.

Morning sun streamed through the floor-to-ceiling windows as I pulled her through the kitchen. She bucked and tried to scream through her incapacitated throat, really giving me my morning workout. I grabbed a trash bag and wrapped

it around her mouth, and that shut her up just fine. Her burlap muumuu, or whatever it was, slid her across the gleaming marble tiles like a sled, and I didn't even look at her as I pulled her out of the kitchen and onto the bare wood, polished ash hallway, through the living room, and back to the private clinic.

She was struggling more than ever now, but her protestations were weakening and she was drenched in her potent sweat as I worked up perspiration of my own trying to heft her onto the operating table. I'd lifted dead weight equal to hers before, but it didn't squirm and shift and get me wet. With a final animalistic grunt, I plopped her onto the table and stood over her, breathing heavy, then locked her down with thick leather straps. Her eyes were wide and her breathing broken as she struggled to take in oxygen through her blocked nasal passages. I went to the cabinet, withdrew a syringe and a rubber-stoppered bottle, jammed it in without bothering to disinfect it with alcohol first, then plunged it deep into her carotid artery and ejected clear fluid into her thick red blood.

Before she could count to ten, if she could get that high, she was unconscious. Immobilized, this bulging slattern might have been even *more* repulsive. Inert, at rest, her flesh spilled off the sides of the table; expressionless, her face was drawn toward the floor by gravity. When I unwrapped the Hefty bag from around her head, her

cleft lip lifted to reveal two of her most crooked yellow teeth. Her mouth opened, and breath came in and out in great, long, sleepy draughts.

I couldn't look at her any longer; I had to turn away. I stepped to the sliding glass doors that looked out onto the ficus trees blowing in the ocean breeze overlooking the cliffs, and watched grey-bellied clouds begin to roll in to obscure the face of the sun. The room darkened, and I had to turn on the lights, which were lemon-warm and relaxing. Funny how it could be a hundred degrees inland, and still be grey and cool just a few miles west at the beach.

The day was growing dark to catch up with my mood. Even though I had regained control of my own destiny, I bristled inside. Then I went to the chrome and glass casements, opened them up, and slid the array of medical instruments out in their pyramid of drawers.

The perfect, polished surgical steel gleamed under the soothing lights, and my spirits rose as I laid them out before me. Oblivious, Moby Brit-tany lay vulnerable before me, so I took the shining shears, fighting down my gorge, and snipped through her clothing and lay her bare. Her breasts slid down from her chest, hanging on either side. Her thighs spread out from one edge of the table to the other, and still spilled over. I hooked her up to the gas, and she began to breathe it easily, and was sure to be unconscious for at least the next few hours. My gloves firmly in place, I swabbed

her down with antiseptic and stared at her, wondering where on earth to begin. With a body like this, I guess it didn't really matter. Decisions, decisions.

I plugged in the Hercules aspirator, then hooked up the fat collection gun and the attached 12-hole harvesting cannula. I had a high-volume harvesting canister, but even at 3000ml, the largest size that was available, it would have to be emptied repeatedly. This was one big fucking girl. Unable to stand looking at this sorry, drooping excuse for a body any longer, I flipped the switch and began the chugging suck of the machinery, wiped down the cannula, and slid it beneath the skin of her belly. I worked it under her skin, plunging the wand in and out, in and out, as it sucked and spat pink and yellow curds into the canister. Her body jerked now and then, but it didn't bother me. I just kept going. Suck and spit, suck and spit, the wand snorted and hocked repeatedly, rhythmically, efficiently, leaving loose flesh where the mounds of her fat once resided. Before long, I was in my zone, doing my job, body sculpting, and for a while I forgot whom it was that I was actually working on. Sucking the fat from this fleshy thing before me was natural, procedural, and I moved from belly to thighs to arms to back to ass, operations I would have done separately under normal circumstances. But here, no, here I wanted it to hurt. I wanted it to be felt. It needed to be done and it needed to

be done now. I don't remember how many times I emptied the jar of Brittany fat, but it collected in at least a couple of trash bags, nasty stuff that I would have to incinerate later.

I was tired and hungry now. I hadn't eaten anything all day, and my stomach was starting to rumble. I looked up to see that I'd been at work sucking the sludge from this overstuffed body for over two hours, and my vision was starting to blur. This is a procedure that should never be done alone, but I felt some pride that I had accomplished it by myself. I looked down at the evacuated results of my handiwork and smiled. I felt powerful.

And really hungry.

Making sure my patient was fully strapped to the table, I left the surgery and headed to the kitchen for a sandwich. I'd picked up some take-out salmon and eggplant at Spruzzo the previous night that I had never gotten around to, so I got out some 9-grain bread, slathered it with coarse mustard and some petals of spinach, and closed my eyes in delight as I took a big mouthful. But I hardly got the chance to savor it when the air was rent by the most horrific scream I'd ever heard. I am loath to use such a hoary hyphenated descriptor as *blood-curdling*, but that was the only way to describe it. The cry was a high, wavering squeal, shrill and agonized and filled with terror. At first it drew goose bumps and I froze with a mouth full of unmasticated sandwich. Obviously, her vo-

cal cords were still intact. When the howl grew more plaintive and painful, I smiled and chewed my weekend brunch, letting the voice ring out in what was to become a song to me. It grew louder and more filled with choking sobs, so I finished my hasty meal and returned to the surgery and the source of the mournful wails.

“Good morning, Glory,” I said with chipper abandon. “How are we feeling?”

We were reflected in the full-length mirror I had placed *just so*, Brittany and me, a perfect view from her perspective. She was still strapped to the operating table, naked, fish-belly white, the loose folds of her vacated flesh hanging from her like empty laundry bags. She could see it quite clearly, and she could not take her eyes from the display of her shameless, defatted body.

Her voice grew hoarse as her high-pitched screams began to fade into inarticulate croaks. Tears soaked her hair.

“What did you do to me?” she shrieked.

“People pay me a fortune for what I’m doing to you,” I replied.

“You’re fucking crazy!”

“Am I?”

“You’re crazy and fucking disgusting!”

“Hm...” I replied, as if considering what she had to tell me.

I gave her my most charming smile before I stuffed a wad of gauze in her mouth and taped it shut.

“Mmmfff!” she said. “Mmmfff!!! Mmmmmfffff!!!”

I sighed, not interested in continuing this conversation.

“We’ve done some pretty extensive lipo,” I said, “leaving a *lot* of loose skin. We’ll have to tighten you up a bit, don’t you think?”

“Mmmfff!” she said, as I might have guessed.

I slipped into a new pair of Latex gloves and snapped them around my wrists.

I lifted the folds of loose, colorless flesh, and it felt empty and useless. Skin not wrapped warmly around a shapely body or a lovely face has no worth. I squeezed it, and it was squishy in my hand. Feeling was obviously returning to her body, as she winced and tightened and *mmmmfff*ed again.

“We’re going to have to get rid of some of this excess skin, aren’t we?” There was a lot. The shears would be more effective to begin with than a scalpel here. I picked them up and cleaned them with antiseptic, looking at the reflection of my eyes in their hungry blades.

“Awake or asleep, Brittany?”

Her eyes were as wide as they could go without falling out of her head.

“Awake you can watch the process, which is actually quite fascinating, almost like creating the most perfect form-fitting clothes from an elegant designer. Of course, it will surely be painful. I mean, even with a gallon of local anesthetic, we *are* going to be cutting through a *lot* of your skin.

So you might choose to be unconscious if you're a little squeamish. Your choice."

She started to quake and violently shake her head.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I can't quite understand you."

She grunted and strangled and tried to spit words out from behind the tape, but was completely incapable of communicating a simple answer.

So I picked up the mask, put it to her face, and turned up the gas. By the time I lowered it, her eyes were already at half-mast, so I dramatically snipped the gleaming shears in her face a couple of times before she lost consciousness, then gathered up the loose flesh and began to cut.

The initial trims were of necessity bold and indelicate. Clipping and snipping is not as refined as the detailed sculpting that would follow with the scalpel. But even the removal of vast quantities of flesh requires some surgical care. I loved the sound of the surgical scissors as they bit away chunks of the gelid drapery of her loose flesh, and soon, a human form began to reveal itself from underneath. It was like the first rough chunks of marble that a great sculptor would bash away before revealing the beautiful statue that lay waiting to be unveiled... just bloodier. I found myself humming Coldplay's "Yellow" to myself as I trimmed the fat that fell to the polished granite floor with a fleshy *splat*.

Snip.

Plop.

Stitch.

Snip.

Plop.

Stitch.

The process was time consuming and tedious, but far from laborious for me. It energized me, tested the boundaries of my talents, invigorated the artist that lived within my own flesh sculpture. I was really enjoying this.

With the bulk of the flab now trimmed away, I would soon dig into the more artistically demanding assembly of the body laid out before me. But first I had to attenuate the broad strokes, refine the scissor cuts with the brushstrokes of my scalpel. I'd had a collection of them made specifically to order by an old artisan on Pico, who crafted them not from surgical steel but from silver. They were softer than the steel, and could not be used as often or as vigorously, but their cut was finer, more delicate, more elegant somehow. And they cost a fucking fortune. But no one else had instruments like these.

So I moved in closer, gently slicing and carving and molding the smooth, evacuated skin to the frame that lay beneath. The skin was still young and supple, with a resilience and elasticity that was eager to be guided into shape. Shaping the stomach was *de rigueur*, really something I'd done over and over. The thighs were also undemand-

ing. I had one former movie star who had taken her approach to middle age poorly, and had binged for several years on cocaine, Seconal, tubs of gelato, and Mrs. Field's cookies before making a very public Weight Watchers deal, then placing herself in my hands and on this very operating table. It had taken a series of procedures over a period of months, but I made her svelte again, and her multi-media weight-loss campaign put her back on the covers of all the tabs, and she's got her own sitcom premiering in September. I'm sure I don't have to tell you who she is.

But this *Brittany*, this was a different story. She was fat, but she was also hideous. This would require far more than just trimming and slimming and sculpture. She was fucking *ugly*, a reprehensible, slovenly waste of space. She despoiled Beverly Hills; she would ruin any day just by being seen. She was a troll, a troll who thought she could use me, to fuck me, to pleasure herself with me.

Well, she couldn't.

I don't fuck trolls.

So I painted with my scalpel, I stitched with style and panache and delicacy, and got lost all over again in my work. My passion. My *art*.

I don't know how long I'd been working before I noticed that fatigue was settling into my hands, which were starting to tremble a bit. The sun had long ago dropped into the sea. Brittany's breath still whooshed out of her nose in a peace-

ful rhythm, but I realized as I started to come out of the trance of my work that I was growing tired. I stepped back, took a deep breath, and stretched, twisting at my waist from side to side until my back let out a satisfying *crackle*. And then, I cranked the operating table into its standing position, and took in the fruits of my handiwork.

The body was almost unrecognizable as it stood before me, conjuring images of the Bride of Frankenstein. It had a shape now, rough, but human. The rows of black stitches were coarse but temporary, and had been carefully aligned so that the resultant scars would hide in private places, and even when they had been refined in the smaller, more specific, beautifying procedures, would eventually not be noticeable. The breasts would need filling and shaping, as would her ass, but the groundwork had been laid, and her frame was actually a perfectly respectable one under all the hideousness that had been cut away.

I felt like Donatello. A very tired Donatello.

I cranked the table down to halfway between prone and standing position and started to clear the floor of the discarded flesh, loading up yet another couple of garbage bags before I disinfected the granite. I tied the bags tight and took them out to the kitchen. It was too much trouble—and there would be too many questions—to take this stuff into the office and send it out for incineration. I know that Hefty bags are not sterile, but if I double-wrapped them I doubted that it would

create much trouble down at the city dump. It might prove to be quite the feast for the feral creatures that dined there.

The bags in hand, I cast a look over my shoulder at the trimmed and sutured body that lay exposed before me under the warm lights of the surgery. The body had a shape now, beyond the patchwork: a shape that promised, a shape that beckoned. And on top of it, a revolting, repellent head. I looked at this creature with contempt, detached from my work as an artist now, seeing it anew for what it was: a vile corruption of humanity and nature, an insult to life itself. It just pissed me off all over again.

I was tired and hungry and sweaty and covered in the scent of Brittany. I headed directly into the bathroom to strip and shower, content with the work that I had completed. There was much more ahead to do, but I was confident that it could be done. I scrubbed up all over and looked out across the ocean outside. It was a cloudy night, and there was no moon.

Night had settled in my head. I took a long, deep breath, closed my eyes for a moment to calm my heartbeat, then turned off the light and headed into the kitchen.

I tossed some baby greens and baby corn and heated a pan, and was just starting to sear the graceful slab of hanwoo beef I'd had delivered from the best place in Koreatown when I heard her. Not screams, no; she was too weak for that,

I suppose. But in the distance, I could hear her sobs, long and deep and wracking. In the thick of activity and a burning hunger, I'd actually forgotten about Brittany. She could wait a few minutes; I wasn't going to fuck up a hanwoo filet over her. So I let it grill for about thirty seconds, flipped it over and did the same, then laid it out on the plate with the vegetables and dug in while the steak was still steaming.

It was incredibly delicious, its pinky-red center giving just enough chew to release its intense beefiness.

Sated, I stood from the table and washed the dishes. I would hate to come into the kitchen in the morning and find dirty dishes waiting for me. I carefully wiped them dry, put them away, then followed the sounds of the continuing sobs to the operating room. I was in slippers now, padding silently down the hall, so that she didn't hear me when I reached the door. I stood in the doorway for a full minute or two and watched her cry obliviously, the tears rolling down her face as she stared into the mirror. I almost felt some sorrow for her, so wracking were her sobs; but then, the clouds cleared, and a shaft of blue moonlight broke through, illuminating the hideousness of her face as she looked up at me. Her sorrow was replaced by a sudden burst of crimson anger, and she tried to scream at me from beneath the tape. Even with her mouth stuffed with gauze and a strip of silver tape holding it tight, I could make

out the two works she kept yelling beneath the muzzle: *Fuck you! Fuck you! Fuck you!*

It just made me mad.

"I don't fuck trolls!" I screamed back at her, then slammed the door and made my way to bed.



Sleep came easy and deep, for once without any pharmaceutical assistance. Once my head hit the pillow of my marshmallow bed, I was out. I didn't wake until Irena called at eleven the next morning to ask me when I'd be in. The guy on that police procedural was scheduled to get his eyes done at 12:30, and one of my regulars had scheduled a labiaplasty later in the afternoon. I looked out to see that the sun was high and vibrant, the colors outside were rich and sharply focused, and I felt fresh, newly born, even *happy*. I was really in the mood for blepharoplasty, and even the labiaplasty could be fun... on the right labia. I told her I'd be there in time, and then set about my morning toilette.

I felt scrubbed and pink and jolly as I went from the bathroom to the kitchen to blend up my morning smoothie. It was summer, so I was able to make it with a fresh peach, which was a treat. Frozen peaches just would not do. Clean and refreshed, I filled another glass with smoothie, popped in a straw, and went back down the hall and into the surgery.

Daylight filled the room; Brittany darkened it. She was wide awake, with dark circles under her gleaming red eyes. The stitchwork across her body was crimson and raw, with just the tiniest bit of pucker. I'd tend to that later. Bruising was just starting to appear on her otherwise smooth, ghost-white flesh. She looked up at me, morose, forlorn, without the energy to even generate her hatred.

"Hungry?" I asked, all chipper and shit.

She didn't even have the strength to growl. Her nearly translucent white skin was shining with oil from her overactive pores. Her hair was lank and greasy, but her body... well, her body was no longer her body.

"Here," I told her as I removed the tape and gauze from her mouth and extended the smoothie. "Have some breakfast." She turned her head away.

"It's delicious. I just made it."

Her stomach gurgled in protest.

"You sure?" I pushed it up to her face again so that she could take the straw in her mouth. She looked up at me, hungry, but filling with hate.

"You'll be sorry if you don't take it now. Last chance until this evening."

I kept it in front of her revoltingly bifurcated mouth.

"One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six..." By *seven* she had taken the straw in her mouth and started

to suck. This time, I was the one who had to turn away. She slurped and swallowed disgustingly.

I interrupted her meal with a handful of painkillers. "Here," I told her. "You'd better take these." She hesitated, but knew better to refuse them, and I dumped them into her mouth so that she could swallow them. And then, she hungrily gulped some more.

Soon, the straw started to sputter, and the glass was empty.

"No more French fries and pizza for you, Brittany," I said. "The body is a temple. Do you understand me?" My body reared up in anger again. "*A goddamn temple!*"

I threw the glass into the corner, where it shattered theatrically. She cowered, and I took a deep breath and slowed my heartbeat back to normal. *Ice. Cool.*

"Have a nice day," I said, then closed the door in my wake, leaving her to face the mirror for the rest of the day. To *reflect*, I giggled to myself.



I enjoy the intricacy of eyelid surgery, to remove the folds of flesh and bits of fat in a way that looked natural, organic, without the wide-eyed stare and inability to completely close one's eyes that is the trademark of so many talentless technicians. Cosmetic surgery has become a business, a void that pulls the ham-fisted, money-grubbing

flesh-cutters in with its promise of high pay and renown. These carpenters with a scalpel make life difficult for those of us who aspire to more, who see our work as a calling, who are divinely inspired. I'll say it again: it's the difference between art and craft. The work before me was on a face that was seen weekly on ten million televisions across the country, so it had to be subtle, beautiful, natural, and yet take a dozen years off of his appearance. To take a face that is well-known, even well-loved, and freshen it, to christen it anew without the *tsk-tsking* of *TMZ* or a mocking three-page spread in the *Enquirer* was the balancing act I was born to perform. The actor—again someone you'd know, starring in a series titled with an abbreviation—was understandably skittish, but he, and all those who advised him, who were legion, had given me his trust... and a fistful of cash. And I would earn it.

In a matter of hours the man had lost at least a decade; in a matter of weeks—less than the length of your average series hiatus—he could show it off.

One single-minded task led to the next. I had only about a half hour before beginning Mindy Perkins' labiaplasty, so I washed up, hydrated, and listened to a few minutes of Joyce Cooling to replenish my mood while the staff prepared the surgery. Mindy was about to shoot her first-ever nude scene, and was justifiably concerned about her rather oversized and asymmetrical vaginal

lips. It was a big break from her fourth-billed role on that ensemble cable sitcom to female lead in a big David Fincher *noir* thriller, and would bring her a lot of attention. The last thing she wanted was to finally show it all with the unfortunate crotch of a seventy-year-old. I had to pretty that pussy in the event that it would be seen on a sixty-foot screen. She had a rather spectacular body in all other regards, from her tight little breasts and taut tummy to her beautifully pert and rounded little ass, but nature had been less kind between her legs. It wasn't that uncommon, really, and to tell the truth, the procedure was a joy to perform. In days, she'd be ready for her close-up, Mr. DeMille.

I was fine during the operations, which filled my conscious mind. Work invigorates me, takes up all of my thought processes. But in between, all I could think about was the work-in-progress that was strapped to the operating table at home. So when I finished work, I couldn't wait to go home... and work.

I stopped at Spruzzo again for some takeout before I got back to the house. I got the filet with rice instead of potatoes, and for my patient, the chicken piccata with steamed vegetables, but without any of the starches. She didn't need those.

She was asleep and snoring when I arrived. It was still a couple of hours before dark, and the sun cast a lemon wedge of light over her body. When I came in to inspect her, her eyes opened,

staring balefully and hopelessly at me. Drool was running down her chin.

"How are you feeling?" I asked, as if I gave a shit.

"Fuck you," she said.

"Do you kiss your mother with that mouth?" I asked her. She didn't think it was funny. Not that it mattered to me.

"Let's see how you're coming along."

Her body lay completely undraped and exposed. I swabbed the sutured areas, which were many, but they were looking good. The post-operative swelling had already substantially subsided, and the wounds seemed to be closing up nicely. I had done excellent work. I cranked the table up into the standing position again.

"Take a look," I told her. "You're on the verge of having a lovely body."

"Fuck you!" she said again. This was getting monotonous.

"Hmm..." I said as I looked her over. "What's next, implants? Or should we just start right in on the face?"

"*What the fuck are you doing to me?*" she suddenly screamed at me. "*Let me go!*"

I walked right up to her hideous face.

"You're ugly," I told her. "I'm fixing you."

"*I don't want to be fixed!*" she shrieked. "*I don't NEED to be fixed!*"

"Well, that's not for you to say, is it?"

I cranked the operating table down against her struggles, then sprayed her down with a cleansing disinfectant while she fought the sturdy leather bonds. It was a struggle she could not hope to win. I taped her mouth shut again so that I at least didn't have to hear her potty mouth any longer. It was really beginning to irritate me. So I opened up the padded metal tour case I'd brought home from the office, and laid out an assortment of black market Eurosilicone breast implants in various sizes. Silicone isn't legal in the United States, but who was going to know? Saline and soy oil are all right, but there's nothing like the feel of silicone if you want lifelike breasts. Dow and Mentor and Allergan are constantly trying to come up with new and "safe" replacements for silicone, but nothing they've come up with to date comes close to its naturalness. Getting them isn't all that difficult if you are as connected as I am. Not that I'm a black marketeer or anything, but when you've reached a certain level of stature in this industry, they all come to *you*.

Brittany looked like about a thirty-four under those hollowed breast carcasses lying on her chest, so I held an ample pair of glass-transparent hooters up to her.

"What do you think? D, maybe?" The giant balloons looked ridiculous, like the tits on a Las Vegas lap-dancer.

"Just kidding!" I laughed, but she cowered in horror.

I swapped them out for another couple of pair.

"I'm thinking maybe... I don't know, somewhere between B-minus and C-plus." I considered a few sizes before deciding conclusively. "B-plus. Definitely a B-plus. Perfect for that frame." A frame that was, by now, actually petite.

She struggled again, and I thought she might start to pop a stitch or two, so I reached over, placed the mask over her face, and turned on the gas.

"Night, Brittany," I said, and she went deep into sleep.

Her nipples were somewhat undefined, a rather large pink smear, and it was a little tricky to make the incisions so they wouldn't leave a solid line, letting the darker tone drift into the stark whiteness that surrounded them. But I found the right place and the right angle, and soon the bags had been popped inside and sutured up. I worked them into place, and even through the gloves, they felt rather lovely, soft and fleshy. They even fell slightly to the side as she lay prone, unlike most boob jobs you see on the beach that stand up straight no matter what the position. Even under sedation, and having just been sliced and sewn, the nipples contracted naturally as I felt them, indicating good circulation and full sensitivity. I smiled, giving way to pride.

A blepharoplasty, a labiaplasty, and a mam-moplasty: that was more than enough for any surgeon's day. It certainly was for mine. Yawn-

ing, I went into the shower, scrubbed up, then went into the kitchen and put together a tray of food for her.

She was just waking up as I entered the room with her food, still groggy but aware.

"You must be hungry," I said.

She looked up at me, weak, broken, almost pitiful. She didn't even bother to hiss at me; she merely nodded. She hadn't had a meal in a long time.

Oh, fuck; I didn't realize it until now, but I was going to have to feed her by hand. I couldn't trust her enough to unbind her hands. I rolled the stainless steel tray next to the operating table and sat down next to it. I strapped on another set of latex gloves and cut the food up into little bits and fed them to her with my fingers. Her lips touched me as she sucked a big bite of chicken into her mouth, and even through the rubber it made me shiver to feel the contact of her hot, wet maw.

"Do that once more and you'll never eat again!" I shouted. She just chewed and swallowed, staring rusty daggers into me with her bloodshot, drooping eyes.

I wiped my wet fingers onto a towel, then continued to feed her. Suddenly her head popped up and she clamped her teeth onto my fingers! *Hard!*

It was a pit-bull grip, and she just dug her canines into me, shaking her head like a Jack Russell with a rat, her jagged, ragged teeth digging

deep into my digits. She even snarled, growling and biting, jerking her head, her saliva flung all over me until I made a fist and slammed it into her face.

Stunned, she pulled back, her fangs parting, and I yanked my hand away from her and held it to my chest. The fucking bitch had bitten through the latex and into my flesh. *I was bleeding!*

I took her dinner plate and threw it to the floor and stormed out of the room and into the bathroom, where I washed out my fingers and treated them with disinfectant. They didn't need stitches, but bandaging them, even with a liquid bandage, would interfere with the delicacy of my touch.

I had to think it was worth it.

Even though the next day was a Saturday, I woke early, transfixed by the wind-sailors out on the sparkling, glassy waters beyond the French doors of the bedroom. Point Dume twinkled in the California morning, and a gaggle of seagulls put on an airshow against the powder blue sky. My mood was high, the sun warm and bright, and a new day had commenced.

Showered, shaved, fed and evacuated, I made my way down the hall to the surgery. I had left the door open a crack, and quietly approached, not knowing whether Brittany was awake or in slumber. I quietly, surreptitiously peeked inside to find her wide-awake, craning her head from her prone position on her back, staring into the full-length mirror across the little room. Her eyes were de-

void of the somnambulance that was so characteristic, peering hard at the reflection of her body before her. She squirmed under her bonds, trying in vain to see more of herself, her expression curious now, even fascinated. She looked at the stranger's body that she now wore, and I could swear she was *pleased* with it.

Hm. I'm not sure this was the reaction I had sought.

"Nice, isn't it?" I asked, breaking the silence, and whipping her head around to me.

"*Mmmfff!*" she snorted. "*Mmmfff!*"

Her outrage seemed forced now, phony, a charade.

"A shame about that ugly fucking face, though, isn't it?"

"*Mmmfff! Mmmfff!*"

Oh, hell. The day had started so well.

She struggled and grunted and tried to yell through the gag, and it was really getting to me. Enough, as they say, is enough.

I walked over to the stainless steel instrument tray, picked up the largest scalpel, and cut her fucking throat.

Now maybe we could have a little quiet.

The laceration was thin, followed the crease in her flesh exactly, and would easily be hidden when the wound had sealed itself. But with a quick couple of flicks of the blade, the vocal cords were cut and I could get some relief from her relentless caterwauling.

I stitched it up in just a few minutes, and made ready for the real work to begin.

"I warned you," I told her as I peeled the gaffer's tape from her mouth. "Now scream all you like." I ripped the tape off of her mouth to accommodate her.

She tried to howl, but the only sound she could emit was like a steam leak. I could take that.

And now, the face.

The face.

This would be a challenge.

Where to begin?

Her nose was prominent, with a large dromedary hump in the middle, and hung down into a big drooping hook at the end. She'd had virtually no chin before the liposuction, but there was competent chin and jawbone structure newly revealed from under the fat. Her brow was simian and her ears clumped like fists. And her eyes were hooded by lids that made her appear stupid, inattentive, dull. Perhaps she was all of those things, but she certainly didn't have to look it. Some of the dumbest people I've ever met are some of the best-looking.

But her mouth. The lip. That lip. That hideous, leporine split where there should be a philtrum turned her from human to beast. *This* would require patience; *this* would require persistence; *this* would require artistry.

This would come last.

The starting place presented itself clearly, since it was the very center of this oh-so-offensive face. So I gassed her, flayed open the nasal structure, picked up the hammer and the osteotome, and began the sculpture anew, chipping away at the overly generous cartilage in her proboscis to turn it from a trunk into a human nose.

The brow was at least symmetrically overabundant, and it didn't take much more than an hour to refine it into a gentle slope that gracefully swept from the hairline to elegantly shade her eyes.

The eyes were a project in themselves. The day grew a beard as I moved on to give them shape and character, the illusion of thought and reflection. This was in some ways the most demanding, the most challenging of the procedures, and maybe even the most prone to failure. Somehow I was still energized by this operation, an operation that should have been several operations and spanned months to do it properly. But properly was the only way I knew to do my work, and I would not settle for less than perfection here. My hands were deft and talented, and the work directed itself.

I unfurled the ears like blossoms opening to the sun. It didn't take a whole lot to fashion them into slender, natural shape. I'd had to cut away some of the cauliflower, but if I could do it for a Golden Gloves champion, I could do it for this valueless creature.

And then, finally, I began to tenderly, subtly craft a new upper lip to replace the repellent cleft that had been so clumsily closed in childhood. Borrowing snippets of discarded face flesh, I patched and worked and reworked to fashion a beautifully natural dip beneath nose and lip, pale and pink and seamless, the cuts minute and cautious and nearly invisible. In time, they would completely disappear. Then, the lips themselves had to be abetted, given just a slight bulge to make them distinct from the face around them, to give shape and expression to her mouth. I would never pump up the lips to give the dim-witted appearance of the fish mouth so popular on the catwalk for the last many years. Every day I would pass women on Rodeo with gawping guppy faces that looked like you could stick them to a window by the mouth. The mouth alone had to have taken a good four hours to reconstruct and beautify.

Night had fallen and a new day was in the works when finally I had completed the fine-tuning and suturing, and set about to clean it all up. There would be refinements, of course, but the work, for now, at least, was done. The sun belled as it rose, and covered us in its blanket of amber rejuvenation. In the warm morning light, I inspected my work, ran my fingers lightly over the fine, almost microscopic lines of stitchery, prodded the elasticity of the flesh, squeezed newly constructed breasts and gluteus, gently guided my hands across this newly created body, even

stroked the redesigned face so expressionless in repose. The lips, overly swollen for now, seemed to beg for a kiss... the kiss of life.

I could not believe my own eyes, but the evidence was here before me. I could see beyond the stitches and the bruised flesh, the swelling and the abrasions. I had singlehandedly taken the worst thing in the world, the bane of my existence, a roadblock in the road to human evolution; I had taken something horrendous, something foul, something unspeakably *ugly*... and I had made it *perfect*.

It was time to sleep. Hell, even God rested on the seventh day.



Brittany's recovery was astonishingly quick. Though purple blossoms of bruise covered her face and stomach and thighs and ass, they faded and yellowed at a rapid rate, soon taking on a fresh, healthy, lively pink tone. Despite years of neglect and abuse of it, her skin was eager to take its new shape, to grow together as if none of it had been cut away, and the sewn-together patchwork between the puzzle pieces of assembly joined as if newly minted, clean and even expanses of unmarred flesh, with tiny pink lines that, in time, would completely vanish as the naturally decomposing stitches themselves had. The others came out easily and naturally.

I moved Brittany into a tiny room in the guest-house behind the garage, and she did not protest; she *could* not protest. The cutting of her vocal cords made her quite agreeable, and it seemed to have domesticated her. The fight had left her, and even though she could whisper “fuck you” to me as often as she liked, she seemed to have lost the compunction to do so. She was sore, but she was healing in silence, and chose never to look at me. Which didn’t bother me a bit.

When at last she was able to stand, I walked her to the bathroom, lay her in the oversized Jacuzzi tub, and let her marinate for a while in the bubbling restorative Malibu waters, dumping in some bubble bath to get her cleaner than she’d surely ever been in her life. I could see the mother of her grime forming at the top of the foamy water and took the hand shower and cleaned her completely, then washed her hair for what had to have been the first time in weeks. It took three or four shampoos to get it squeaky-clean before I conditioned it.

No longer bound to the operating table, she now recovered in relative freedom. I found that bonds were unnecessary, that she was overwhelmed by passivity. I had broken her as she had tried to break me. But I found that I could leave her locked in her room and her own memory foam bed without binding her hands or feet, and I could return to find everything around her intact. So I was able to continue working in Beverly Hills

without worrying about what I'd return to at Point Dume. I brought her food—usually fruits and vegetables with some whole grain breads and the occasional carbs, and plenty of Vitamin C, zinc, and animal protein to help the healing process—and she slept almost all the time.



After some weeks, I'd had an arduous day at the office. There had been an accident at Sunset and Stone Canyon in Bel-Air in the early morning hours, and the cops managed to pry a certain right-wing talk-radio mogul and the morning-show TV host—both of whom were married to female spouses—out of the wreckage and into my operating room in Beverly Hills without the press finding out. No doubt one of the officers on duty would sell his phone-cam footage to the press for an astronomical amount sometime in the near future, but for now, at least, the secret would be kept.

The radio maven's scalp and one ear had been torn from his face and left dangling, while the TV celebrity had a punctured scrotum and a pierced testicle. The former's wounds would be visible no matter how good a job I performed restoring him, at least for a while; the latter's could be easily hidden from public view, and might not even affect his ability to father children, should he choose to. What they would tell their wives was up to them.

So it was a long day, and I was tired and ready for the solace of Point Dume. The house was quiet when I entered, and I just wanted to shower and go to bed. I figured that Brittany could wait until breakfast to eat. I sat down on the couch to check my messages and emails and Facebook and LinkedIn and all, then opened the security cam link to Brittany's room. It took a while for the connection speed to catch up, and the screen was black for a while as the color wheel rotated frustratingly in the center of the screen. Much longer and I would have just given up and gone to bed.

But the screen finally resolved itself from blocky, blurry, jerky soft focus into a decent-definition overhead shot of the room. It was dark and the image grainy, but I could see that Brittany was sitting up naked on the bed. It was a very wide lens so that it could take in the entire room, and she was tiny in the picture. But she seemed very intent, and her arm seemed to be moving furiously. She was facing the full-length mirror opposite the bed. I switched to the bed cam, which was a full-body shot, facing her. She was oblivious to the hidden cameras, and her eyes were wide and fascinated as she stared directly at her reflection in the mirror, one hand cupping and squeezing a breast and pinching its nipple, and the other rubbing in furious circles between her wide-open legs. Though I could not hear her, I could see that she was huffing wildly. I could not take my eyes

off of the screen; nor could I ignore the insistent erection that suddenly grew in my lap.

She was fucking *hot*.

My face was flushed and my heartbeat heightened as I rushed out of the house and across the back lawn to the guesthouse. It was a brilliant summer moon, three days from full, and there wasn't a cloud in the sky to soften its light. Even here at the beach the air was a balmy breath, warm and seductive. I crept silently to the door and lay my ear against it, just listening. I could hear her inside, panting, huffing, unable to moan. I could not fight the excitement welling within me. I pulled the keys out of my pocket, and unlocked and opened the door, spreading a beam of blue-white moonlight across the bed and her naked body as if in a Weegee crime scene pop-flash photo. As I stepped into the door, my shadow wrapped her up until I slammed the door beside me. We were locked in stillness on opposite sides of the room, eyes glued to one another, unable to even blink, her hand still in place between her legs, but motionless. The only sound was our breathing.

But irresistible force could not be held from immovable object for long; animal magnetism pulled me to her bed, shedding my clothing, led by the divining rod of my desire, and for the second time—which was really the *first* time—I entered her. But this time, I was entering newly constructed perfection... except for those fucking

teeth. But even though kissing was not on the menu, it did not take long for the two of us, so brightly ignited, to explode together.



At first I feared hurting the flesh I had taken such pains to construct, afraid to split her at the seams. But her healing had proceeded so completely, so perfectly, that it became apparent that there was no physical reason to hold back. We coupled violently, ferociously, acrobatically, our sex feral and unlocked, a slippery sheen of sweat between us. She became as aggressive as I, climbing atop me and taking control. I let her get away with that a couple of times before flipping her over and about and piercing her and controlling her as I was made to do.

Dawn rose to wake me, lying in a puddle of my own perspiration, draped across her now-flawless body. She was still asleep, her mouth wide, a soft snore rustling the pillowcase. Not able to bear the look of those teeth, I gently closed her mouth and took my leave. She came to as I was on my way out, but that did not slow my exit.

In the shower I scrubbed myself clean, my body bulging from the brisk aerobic workout of the night before. I looked out of the clear glass windows of the bathroom as I washed my hair, and could see her tiny naked silhouette in the window of the guesthouse across the yard. With-

out willing it so, I became aroused all over again, and sprayed the suds off of my hairless body and down the drain.

I wrapped a towel around my waist and called in to the office to tell them that an emergency had come up, and that I had to go out of town. I wasn't sure when I'd be back. Still in the towel, I grabbed the keys, crossed the garden, and entered the guesthouse. And Brittany.

For two full weeks we explored the limits of physical sexuality, coupling creatively and constantly, her silence prompting my verbal urges, which made her even more eager and adventurous. Every orifice was explored and penetrated in all ways possible—and some that theoretically weren't—and each millimeter of human flesh was tasted and tested and put into play. We sexed until we were sore, then rested up and experimented with body parts other than our sexual organs. The one thing I could not do was kiss her and that jagged-stalagmite-stalactite mouth. She was welcome to use it in any way she liked—and she did—but just not on my mouth.

I thought that I had been a creative and experienced and indefatigable lover, and had been told so on many occasions, but this, this was the *ne plus ultra* of sexual experience. I had never spilled so much seed, and surely she had never attained blast-off as often as she did here. I counted a full dozen of her orgasms in a single two-hour coupling.

And then, it was time to wake up.

The day was in full bloom. Some cottony clouds had been set adrift across a cerulean sky by a gentle whisper of a breeze. Gentle rolling waves crested in the distance with just a trace of white foam, and a lonely barge passed across the horizon. The gardener had just finished feeding and pruning the flowerbeds, and a riot of primary colors shouted for attention. The great outdoors beckoned, and it just seemed wrong to be contained within these walls.

I stood and looked down at Brittany, both of us spent, our flesh and faces aglow from the activity of the past fourteen or fifteen days. She looked up at me, her face a question mark. I had no answer, indeed did not even understand her query. I was finished, sore and spent and raw, and ready to take a long, deep breath. I stepped into my pants and out of the guesthouse, leaving the door open behind me.

Barefoot and shirtless, I walked through the garden to the edge of the cliff and stared down at the waves crashing against the rocks below. I had been operating on a purely intuitive level for the last couple of weeks, led by animal instinct that had wrestled intellect to the ground and beat the shit out of it. As I breathed the breath of God, I felt cleansed, replenished, even reborn. I became... *thoughtful*.

My reverie was broken by the sound of bare feet approaching through the grass. Brittany, still

naked and fully revealed to the world for the first time, approached me and gently laid her hand on my shoulder. I looked up at her, and saw her fully for the first time, outside in nature, fully lit by the sun, her hair a soft corona, her skin flawless, a perfect body topped by a lovely, voluptuous, Hurrell portrait of a face. Perfection. I had had this perfection, tasted it, penetrated it, experienced it fully.

In fact, I had used it up.

She opened her mouth, trying to say something, perhaps something profound. Maybe even something loving. But there would be no words; she was unable to speak, thank Christ.

So I looked at her, saw her immobile, gorgeous, physically perfect, sexually astonishing self laid bare before me, and I felt nothing. I had been drained of all attraction to her, my fire had been doused, Eros abandoned completely. I took in my brilliant creation and realized that I had used it up.

So with a swipe of my arm, I shoved her off the cliff and watched her flawless body tumble through the air and shatter against the jagged rocks below. She could not even scream.

What, did you think this was a fucking love story?



Life goes on. I've returned to the office to spin miracles, to make silk purses out of sows' ears, to take what nature and nurture have fucked up and to set it right. My lot in life is to make the world a more beautiful place, to weave a tapestry of human glory, to make life a little more perfect.

I walk down Rodeo Drive, basking in the wonder of Beverly Hills and its three hundred and fifty days of sunshine a year, surrounded by the finest, most prosperous, most beautiful people on the planet, and I know I'm a part of that. Of course, there is still the occasional nasty-looking specimen trudging through the lightness, something vile and ugly that casts its pall on an otherwise perfect day. But now when I see something horrific like that, I think, *I can do something about that.*

AWARD-WINNING FILMMAKER

Mick Garris is Creator and Executive Producer of Showtime's *Masters of Horror* series, as well as creator of the NBC series, *Fear Itself*, both anthology series of one-hour horror films written and directed by the most famous names in the fear-film genre: John Carpenter, Tobe Hooper, George Romero, John Landis, Dario Argento, and several others. Garris also is a writer and director on both series. Garris was also Executive Producer and Director of Stephen King's *Bag of Bones* miniseries for A&E. He is currently developing three series.

A Life In the Cinema, his first book, was a collection of short stories and a screenplay based on one of the included stories, published by Gauntlet Press. Garris' first novel, *Development Hell*, was published by Cemetery Dance, who are also publishers of his novellas, *Snow Shadows* and *Tyler's Third Act*. He has also had several works of short fiction published in numerous books and magazines.

Garris lives in Los Angeles, with his wife, Cynthia, an actress, musician, composer and muse.

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