

Your return to the Waking World is messy. The Dream births you from the Blackavar shaped hole, squirting you out onto a motel carpet tacky with amniotic fluid and dead moths. Strings of gunk cling to your back as you force your new body up into a sitting position. You rock forward, your belly heavy, your head heavy, and clear your mouth of mucus.

Disgusting as it all is, you smile. You giggle. You're back. You could be covered in shit and you would still have cause to celebrate. You're alive and you're Awake, and that fucker, Robert Hedgenettle, Ol' Bobby Hedgenettle, Woundwort, is gone.

You won.

You throw your head back, cackling. You won!

"I won, Robert!" You thrust a fist up in the air, flinging about droplets of slime. "I won! You're dead, you dickless pedo-fuck!"

You crow and kick out your new legs.

"I fucking won!"

Something pops in your nose, the pain acute, startling, and you scream. Fresh blood bubbles forth, the taste strange, less metallic and more...purple. You can taste purple. What is with this body?

"Of course I had to bodyjack the weird one," you grumble, sniffing. You wipe the blood away with the hem of your shirt. "At least you're cute, Quintana. Unlike that flat bitch, Hazel."

You palm your new breasts, cute, perky things. Tender, too, thanks to the beast incubating inside your womb. You stroke the curve of your round belly, trace the stretch marks, the linea nigra. The time spent in the Dream put a rush order on the Rabbit, you realize, gnawing your cheek. Quintana was only a month along before leaving the Clinic. Now she must be at least six months? Seven?

"Son of a bitch bastard." Using the bed for leverage, you climb up onto your feet. You wobble. Different height, different weight, your sense of balance is thrown. You pick your way out of the motel room, going slow to keep from falling and crushing your fragile cargo.

She must be worth a fortune, you think. She feels big, might be what, 2lbs already? Quintana is a short girl, and short girls always seem to have huge babies. Which is good; at a quarter-million per pound, the bigger the baby Rabbit, the bigger the sale.

Then there are all the Rabbits at Woundwort's dairy. With him gone, his operation is easy pickings, you need only to go up and take control. No more poaching from his cheap mills. No more making due with Blackavar's vapid fangirls. You will have access to the whole shebang!

And best of all, you don't have to share the cash with anyone! Adams is dead, Blackavar is off chasing pussy, and Cody, well, you never split it with him anyway. You paid him in bullets.

Poor Cody, you're going to miss killing him. You're going to miss fucking him, too. The way he always cried after, the way he curled in on himself, you get wet from the memory of his anguish.

Outside in the parking lot, moths flutter in spinning swarms. Hundreds of motes of brown, white, pink, and lunar green swirl about in great devils. You watch them, the night air chilling the slime coating your skin, and listen to the susurrations of their wings.

*Get out! That isn't yours! That isn't yours!* The moths shout at you. *That isn't your body, Lucy! Back to the Deep with you! Back to the dead!*

You flip them off, both hands, middle fingers extended, and head for the nearest vehicle. They continue with their demands, *listen to us, listen! We will tell the butterflies, Lucy Driscoll. We will tell the Dogs. We will tell Rabbit, Lucy Driscoll! We will tell Hazel-rah!*

They ping off your face. You net large handfuls of moths and crush them. "You can go snitch to God himself, I don't care. Tell Mary and that whoreson Jesus, too."

The moths scatter, fleeing your grasping hands. What you catch, you kill, squishing their small, papery bodies in your fists. Guts and wings and twitching legs squeeze and ooze out between your fingers. You massacre them, laughing: "Go tell

everyone that the bitch is back and that I'm here to fuck up their useless little lives! Go on, tell them! Tell them!"

"Mom?"

Clover stands in the door to the motel office, naked save for Inlé's biker dyke jacket. The tips of her antlers scratch the lintel. Your Rabbit child, Clover. You hate the Rabbits, hate their heart-shaped asses, trim waists, and thick thighs. Perfect pears with teardrop tits. Even the weird parts of them are endearing.

"Mom, is that you?" Clover asks, her pale throat flashing.

Still to this day, you don't know why you kept Clover. You carried her, the slack, sagging breasts and the loose-skinned belly of your old body can attest to that. But you never loved her. Maybe it was her rarity, her milk-white skin and cornflower blue eyes, that made you decide to spare her from the butcher's knife. Or maybe it was that every slaughterhouse needs a Judas pig, and why not use the priceless albino?

"What are you doing, Mom?"

"Whatever the fuck I want," you say.

She makes a fist. She isn't a trained fighter like Inlé, but right now, you're no in condition to battle. An overdetermined toddler with a Nerf bat could take you. "That isn't your body."

You inch towards the door of a beat-up old Subaru Sedan.

"That's Quintana's body, Mom - get out of it. Get out of it now!"

"You care about this hot little Mamacita, too? More than me?" You rattle at the door handle. Come on, open. Open, damn it. "Clover, I'm hurt."

"I'm remembering things," she says, drawing Inlé's jacket tight around her. "I'm remembering everything you've ever made me do, and everything you made Cody do. I'm Awake now, and I *remember*."

The door is locked. You curse and, tasting purple, press your thumb to the keyhole. Bone juts from the pad, hard as steel, and thrusts inside the hole. As you told Quintana in the Dream, meat is malleable. You torque your bone auto jumbler to the left, jiggle it. Torque and jiggle, torque and jiggle, your building panic fueling you.

"You're dead, Mom."

Spasms take your body and your hand slips. The bone pick snaps off inside the lock, the pain acute. Like breaking a tooth. You gape at Clover, mouth open. "You ungrateful bitch, what did you do? That hurt!"

Clover drops her head then, and you regret wasting your time talking. She breaks into a run, the points of her golden antlers streaks of light, eyes luminous. *She's going to ram me, you call to your bone pick, compel it to keep working. My own fucking daughter is going to gore me minutes after my resurrection, that's not fair!*

You fall back in time to miss being dashed to pieces. Clover slams into the Sedan head first, rocking it, antlers shattering the window. Safety glass explodes. The airbag pops like biscuits from a tin. The alarm blares. She stumbles backward, hand to her forehead. Urine trickles down your borrowed legs, your thighs coated in goose flesh.

Inlé held back with you; Clover isn't kind enough to give you the same courtesy.

*Clover is kind.*

"Shut up, Quintana," you hiss.

*You can be kind, too. Please leave my body, and leave my baby alone. Please, I know deep down you're not completely terrible.*

"Shut the fuck up, Quintana!"

You dodge a sloppy hook from Clover. She swings wide, fingers hooked like a cat's claws. "You made me hurt my sisters!" she screams, "You made me hurt Cody! You made me hurt Blackavar! You made me hurt so many people! I hate you, Mommy! I hate you, I hate you, I hate you!"

Maybe you have a better chance of surviving this than you thought. You slap her. She falters, Bambi eyes sparkling with tears. Back when she was little, you had to do this a lot - smack her out of her tantrums. And like back then, she bawls, her face flushing red.

"You're such a dramatic cunt." And to drive the point home, you punt her between the legs. Yelping, she drops to her knees, cupping her injured vulva. Her face a red knot of tears and snot, she looks up at you.

Even when Rabbits cry, they're beautiful.

How repulsive.

When Clover opens her mouth to speak, you slug her. "You hate me? Fine, go ahead, hate me now. Come tomorrow, you'll regret it and you'll forgive me. You always do."

"No," she says, "Not this time, Mommy. Not this time."

You run a knuckle along one of Clover's antlers and then grasp it, down by the root, close to the cuticle. As she begs Mommy no, you snap it clean off. It cracks like greenwood.

Shrieking surrounds you, Clover, the moths, and inside you, Quintana wails. "Oh, shut up," you shove Clover onto her side, reach inside the broken car window, and pop the lock. "It's not *that* bad."

Through the din comes a shout of "hey!" One of the other motel guests has crawled out of hiding from the office, a redheaded woman. Some tall butch in jeans and a leather jacket. "Leave that girl alone!"

Only a human. You can take her.

"This your car?" You hike your thumb at the Sedan. "I'm just asking because only lesbians drive Subarus and you definitely look like you go muff diving on weekends."

*Don't hurt her,* begs Quintana.

"The fuck you say?" A petite blonde steps out of the office to hold back the redhead. She's cute, not pretty, but cute. Her hair a mop of pin curls and her lips painted pink. Her jacket is pink satin.

You like pink.

"I said: Is this your car?"

"No!" the blonde answers, "It's not! We don't know who owns it."

"Okay, whoever owns this car needs to come out and hand me the keys, or I'm going to slit this girl's throat." You yank Clover up by the hair and press the point of her antler to her neck, pricking her scar. "Then I'm going to slit your throat, your girlfriend's throat, and so on, and so forth until someone gives me the keys. Or you're all dead. Whichever comes first."

The blonde digs a set of car keys from the redhead's jacket. "Lori, what the fuck are you doing?" the redhead blurts.

"I'm not letting her kill that girl." Lori scampers across the lot, jacket pulled up over her head to avoid the moths. "Here." She drops the keys into your waiting hand, her flat chest hitching as she catches her breath. "Take our car."

"Which one is it?" you ask.

"The Chevy, with the Vermont plates."

You laugh. "Vermont, huh? Okay."

"Chinga tu madre."

"Fuck you, too." Smiling, you grab her by the wrist. The satin of her jacket feels cool to the touch and clean. "This is nice."

Her breathing speeds up. "Tha-tha-thanks."

"I want it."

"Sure, fine." Once you have released her, she struggles out of her jacket, balls it up, and throws it at you. "Take it! Take the jacket, take the car, just don't hurt anyone else."

You consider ripping off her arm. Pop it out by the shoulder like you would a Barbie doll. Maybe reach inside the hole and shred through tendons, muscle, and bone, stopping once you reach her beating heart. Finger fuck the chambers. Then boredom sets in, and you remember that the longer you hang around, the more likely the chance Inlé will catch you.

"Here," you pass Lori Clover's antler, "for the trouble."

Giving Clover a quick kick, you leave to go in search of Lori's Chevy. Finding it proves easy - it's the only car in the lot with Vermont plates. You slip on the jacket - such a gorgeous shade of pink, you love it - and sit behind the wheel. The car reeks of fast food, burgers, fries, cheap meat, fried fat, and salt. You inhale it all in, content with being able to smell, being able to feel.

You start the engine.

"Do me a favor," you shout out the window at Lori, "make sure that when Inlé crawls out of the Dream - short brown bitch, dresses a lot like your girlfriend. Make sure to tell her to not bother following me. It's no use, Quintana's gone. This body's mine now."

"Fuck you," is all Lori says. Her girlfriend helps her lift Clover to her feet and together they check her bloody cuticle. They fawn over her, cooing and wiping tears from her face. They have no clue what has happened or what Clover is and yet, and yet, they comfort her.

*What kind people, you hear Quintana whisper. You could be kind, too.*

"Naw," you shake your head. "Only losers are kind, Quinnie. And I'm a winner."

You pull out of the parking lot.

Time to go collect your spoils.