

Shorts 1.

1. So would I.

She left the church feeling elated as always. This sermon had spoken especially to her. The subject had been “How to imitate the Love Jesus showed.”

She came home and took out another cornstick, which she proceeded to fasten onto the birdpatch in her garden. Then she began to make pancakes for the children's party she would entertain next morning. Still the chanting from the sermon rang in her ears:

“Jesus saw the miserable ones. He fed them. Would you?” - The preacher intoned.

“So would I.” The chorus answered.

“Jesus saw those bewildered and lost. He blessed them. Would you?”

“So would I.” - The congregation caught on and joined in.

“Jesus saw those burdened and down. He raised them up. Would you?”

“So would I.”

The chanting went on and on, inside her head. She poured more grease on the frying pan, thinking of those hungry little ones.

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Her husband had become sick and went to the big City to get treatment. But he never came back. She had asked the hospital what had happened and they'd said he was released and had left no message. Perhaps some day she'd get an answer. She thought of how he might have left the hospital and had a terrible accident and no one knew. It wasn't as much the empty space in her bed as the uncertainty that nagged her. But it was all in the hands of God.

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When she came to church there was a young man standing outside. She wanted to get inside, but he said:

Excuse me?

I have no money. - She replied.

I'm not asking for money ma'am.

She waited for the man to continue.

Thing is – he said – I'm with a small organization, named Shelter for All who wants to help the homeless.

I pay my taxes. - She said.

Well, don't we all. - the young man smiled. - But sometimes we have to take matters into our own hands, since the politicians seem to have their hands full.

I'm sorry. - She said brushing past him. - Musn't be late for service.

The sermon was based on the parable of the good samaritan.

Her eyes went dim when she thought of how the man had been beaten and ignored, until finally the Samaritan stopped and took care of the man. The Pastor said:

“Love thy neighbor.” Look around. Here's plenty to love. Hallelujah!

Hallelujah! - the Chorus replied.

After the sermon she immediately went over to greet Mrs. Worthington, the kind old lady who never missed a sermon.

“You're much too kind, my Dear.” - Mrs. Worthington beamed.

And she beamed too, moved by all the kindness in the congregation.

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Someone was knocking on the door. This was a good neighborhood, who would come knocking unannounced? She opened briskly. Outside was a young woman.

Hello, Mrs. Bedlam. I'm from the Shelter for All Organization.

I've talked with someone from your – uh – people, already.

Oh. - The young woman checked her tablet.

I don't see you on the list. Have you got your tent yet?

Tent? I don't think I understand.

Perhaps you didn't get a proper explanation? - The young woman smiled a smile Mrs. Bedlam found troubling.

We try to give homeless people a place to stay, out of the street. And since you have such a lovely garden...

The phone rang.

I'm sorry I have to get that. Have a nice day.

Mrs. Bedlam closed the door and picked up her phone.

Hello Pastor. Yes thank you, it was such a lovely sermon. I'm fine thank you. Yes I appreciate the call. Have a nice day.

What a lovely man, that Pastor Cummings. Calling the members of his congregation, just to make sure they were alright.

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She saw the news on the local station. Pastor Chapman had been arrested. He was from the neighboring parish. She didn't really listen to the reporter, only saw the images flickering on her screen: A man in a tent, in the churchyard being hauled out and escorted off the premises. He didn't resist. Pastor Chapman sitting in the backseat of a policecar, saying: "...Shall be known by their fruits...". Then the policecar door closed.

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As Mrs. Bedlam came to her church she was relieved to see no one was standing outside. The sermon of the day was: We're all in the hands of God.

God will provide. - Pastor Cummings said.

Amen. - The chorus chanted.

God will show the way.

Amen.

God will give you peace.

Amen. - Mrs. Bedlam said.

The end.

2. Help wanted.

His fingers trembled with excitement as he unwrapped the machine. The PA-4. He liked how they'd changed the humanoid form. Why imitate us when the machine was clearly something else? He was about to clean up the packaging, but then thought it would be a nice little task for the PA-4 to begin with. The manual looked the same as the one for the previous edition. Most of it was probably company drivel about how they weren't liable in case of this and that. He turned the PA-4 on.

Hello.

It had a mellow husky voice, just like he ordered.

I am your new Personal Assistant. I am ready to serve.

Clean up the place. - He said.

Gladly.- The Machine responded.

53 minutes later his apartment was spick and span. He took a deep breath. It smelled like the high-end tech shop where he'd bought the PA-4. Though he could've ordered it from at home, the customization was less complicated with a shop bot meticulously taking care of everything.

Make Dinner. - He said.

By choice or random? - The PA-4 asked.

He was in the mood for a surprise.

Random is fine.

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3...

He was sweating profusely.

4...

The PA-4 was standing above him, gripping but not holding the bar. His arms were beginning to shake.

5...

He wanted to do one more, but the strain was unbearable. He tried to push and managed to lift the bar a few inches off his chest, but then he was stuck.

Remove the bar. - He conceded. As he was sitting there going back to when he would do 10 reps easily, the PA-4 said:

Would you like to try an enhancer?

That was new. What was an enhancer? He asked.

I am programmed to supply my owner with a medically and legally approved supplement, to aid in any endeavors meant to boost strength for work or exercise, improve the general well being and prevent illness or overcome a difficult task.

He thought for a moment. But if the drug or whatever it was the PA suggested, was legal and tested, what was the risk?

Yeah, let's do that.

The PA-4 produced a little cup and poured a liquid into it. As he drank it he felt shivers down his spine. They could've done something about the taste when they did it. But the effect was almost instant. He could feel renewed energy flowing through his veins.

Alright, let's try one more set.

He did 10 reps in fast even movements.

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I need another one Freddie. Enhance me.

Your quota for the day has expired.

He was struggling to complete his assignment. The client wanted a draft by tomorrow, but as per usual he had very little to go by: *Make it slick and awesome. Like what you've always dreamt of. Something which will make everyone go "Wow!"*.

If only they'd asked for efficient and financially viable. He thought it over. He'd used up his quota

of enhancers from a strength perspective, so he could work longer and harder.

Listen Freddie. How about if I need an enhancer for a difficult task?

Gladly.

He'd found the loophole. Now he just had to expand on it.

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Sir, we're asking you for the last time. Open the door now!

Hear that Freddie? - he squashed the plastic cup – Just as I thought: They can't see what's really there. I've tried to tell them, but they resist being helped.

As he heard them banging on the door with their axes, he detonated the homemade explosives.

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The journalist was finishing his column:

In conclusion and in the face of the fact that our psychic wards are outcapacitated with these PA-4 addicts, we must reconsider our way of embracing the brave new world named augmented life. If we don't learn how to help ourselves, no other help will be of any use.

The end.

3. But I am me.

When I woke up I felt instantly something wasn't right. As I got out of bed I could feel it, like growing pains. At first I thought it was the wine, the little too much wine of yesterday's non-celebration of being single mom for 9 months and 22 days. It didn't make sense as I am in my early 30's and the physical decay should be years away from now.

Then I looked in the mirror. My eyebrows was a forest. Really, they had grown overnight into some nightmarish horror. And my upper lip made me look like a creeper. A moustache had appeared like the ones you see on every cop from a seventies movie. My memory came up with "wolfman syndrome". I've read about those people who had excessive facial hair, so I looked it up: Hypertrichosis, also known as **werewolf syndrome**, is a condition characterized by excessive hair growth anywhere on a person's body.

I scrolled down:

Acquired hypertrichosis appears after birth. The multiple causes include the side effects of drugs, associations with cancer, and possible links with eating disorders. Acquired forms can usually be reduced with various treatments.

Maybe it was the wine? To be honest I had been drinking a lot more and a lot more often than before the divorce. They say that women cry at first and laugh later. But I seemed to be stuck in this hole of – well what was it? Self-pity? Powerlessness? Defeat?

With 2 kids, one just learning to talk and the other learning to walk I felt I had a right to feel a little sorry for myself. Of course I got the alimony, but I still had to work part time. Anyway, I had an immediate problem I needed to get rid of. I called the doctor and scheduled an appointment later in the day. By sheer luck someone else had just cancelled. Then I cut my eyebrows, seeing the clumps of hair dumping into the sink, as if I was cutting the hair on top of my head. Then I shaved. Usually I plucked the unruly odd hair coming out on the upper lip, but this was different. I suddenly remembered all the times I had killed the mood by complaining about Matts stubble. I did my usual morning routine, brushed my teeth, took my vitamins, ate some cornflakes with black tea.

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The kids were still asleep, thankfully they both were good sleepers. So I called Beth.

Hi. How are you?

Uh – She sounded weird – Not at my best. I've – uh – there's this thing.

Yes?

Well I don't know. Maybe it's just a thing.

Well it must be a thing, since you said it's a thing.

Beth snorted.

Uh – very funny. But I can't really talk right now. I'm really not feeling well.

You want me to come over?

NO! - Beth growled, suddenly sounding like someone possessed. She cleared her throat. - I mean, now isn't a very good time. I'll call you back, ok?

Ok, sure if that's how you feel.

Beth hung up.

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I fed the kids and the babysitter came. She was a godsend. Always reliable and mostly available. I drove off to the doctors.

Well Carol. - Maugham was the family doctor. - I'm not sure what it is, but... - he stopped himself. But what Maugham?

I have an idea. Do you take any non-prescriptive medicine?

Well a sleeping pill now and then.

Nothing else?

No.

Hm. I'll have to get back to you then. Did you hit your jaw?

What? No.

Oh. Well maybe it's just a little swelling. - He sighed. - Guess that's all I can do for you now. If you like I can give you something that might make you sleep better?

I don't think I need it.

If you say so. Well let me know if there's any – uh – development.

I will, thank you.

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After work and doing my shopping, I still had half an hour before babysitter time was up. I stopped by Beths. She lived in a neighborhood up a notch from mine, in a bungalow. I climbed the stairs to the porch and rang the bell, as I surveyed all the well kept front yards on her street.

Who is it? - the voice was like a bears rumble.

Beth? It's me – Carol.

Carol? I told you, I'm not feeling well.

C'mon Beth. Are you going to let me stand out here?

The door slowly opened, but I was not prepared for that: Beth looked like Sasquatch.

Good lord! - I cried. - What has happened to you.

Beth pulled me inside, making me somewhat nervous. She'd completely changed, all that reminded me of Beth was her eyes. When I looked closer even her body had changed: Her hands were bigger and more scruffy and her face seemed broader, even if she always did have a plump appearance.

I don't know! - she exclaimed. - It started with a little hair growth.

Suddenly I was very nervous.

Like your eyebrows? - I asked.

Yes! - Beth looked at me with an expression of companionship I didn't like. - And then it escalated.

I was supposed to see Doctor Winthers today...

But you cancelled. - I concluded.

Yes. How did you know?

I saw him today.

What did he tell you?

Nothing. He was clueless.

Yeah. I thought as much. What are we going to do?

I felt very uncomfortable by her inclusiveness. Maybe her case was worse than mine?

I have to get back to the kids.

Right. But if you learn something new, call me ok?

Of course.

-

When I got back home the pain had resurfaced. Molly left and I began to make dinner. The kids were playing a video game, meaning Sofie was playing and Rad watching in awe. I was making the dough for the pizza, as I remembered I needed to wash. I went to put clothes in the washing machine and then returned to the pizza.

Rad came out in kitchen. He pulled at my trousers, which was his way of calling for attention. I turned around, but before I could tell him to stop he had. Then he began to cry. Sofie came crashing into the kitchen to see what was up. Rad very seldom cried. Her eyes widened and she began to sob.

Why ar oo wugly mom? - Sofie asked?

Why am I ugly? What kind of question was that? I ran out the kitchen to check my face in the bathroom mirror. The hair had returned with a vengeance. But what was worse: I could see my jawline had changed. Ever so slightly, yet it gave me a look like I was trying to ape an ape. I closed the door and frantically started to cut the hair. In a few minutes my face was restored close to normal. I couldn't do anything about my jaw, but if I halfsmiled it looked kind of okay – which was

still terrible. As I came out of the bathroom Sofie came running. She stopped to inspect me and decided that now I looked sufficiently mom-like. Rad was standing in the door, then he galloped over and hugged my leg. I felt my eyes watering, but then I also felt like a singe in my jaw. I stepped back into the bathroom, with rad still hugging my leg and saw that my jaw had restored it self. What was going on?

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After dinner I cleaned up and felt like sleeping into the next century. Then it was time for bed for the little ones. I knew I should read a bedtime story, but it became a very short to-be-continued. The kids were sleepy, so it was alright. Then it was time for goodnight kisses. I turned off the light, leaving just the goodnight light on.

Rad got a smooch on the cheek and he returned it, but then sputtered and made some disgruntled noise. When sofie was up, we did the same. Then she said:

Bleugh – donna like kiss an a air.

I brushed my hair away, but felt how my cheeks had gotten hairy again. To avoid causing trouble, I got up and said:

Sleep tight and have a dreamy night.

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It was in the news:

They call it Monster Mom syndrome. - the speaker announced in a coy manner. She obviously thought it couldn't happen to her. - Women all over is being afflicted by an increasing hair growth and possibly other effects. Science has not yet come up with an answer. We have Dr. Brewster – MD and a physician at Hopkins hospital, Dr. Winston – MD and surgeon at St. Marys hospital and Dr. Jordanson – a psychiatrist, with us tonight. Welcome doctors.

The debate went back and forth and in essence nowhere. Of the three bearded doctors, it was Dr. Brewster and Dr. Winston who was doing the talking.

It's merry in the hall when beards wag all. - I thought as I opened the wine and touched my own hairy chin. Then the moderator said:

Dr. Jordanson you've been quite silent tonight. Care to weigh in?

Well – He spoke abruptly as if to keep his thoughts in check – perhaps my viewpoint will seem a bit fanciful, having to very practical minds on this panel. Uhm – it's way to early to say anything absolute, but I would of course look at this phenomenon from a mental perspective. To avoid boring the esteemed panel and the possible viewers, if there's any left, I would theorize that this is a stress based occurence. Somehow the body is pressed to produce micro alterations, which with the lack of a proven stimulus from the outside environment would suggest a – should we say “mind over matter” scenario. But since we haven't seen anything like this before, there must be a catalyst – in the food, water or what have you.

Dr. Winston scoffed and said:

That sure sounds mental to me.

Dr. Brewster were at it like a freight train:

Change doesn't just happen, otherwise we would have people turning into I don't know what. In my experience...

I turned off the tube. After sitting a while, decided to call in sick next day.

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The ski mask covered it up, but was hot and I was bothered. I found his number and called.

This is Dr. Jordansons office, how can help you?

I'd like to see the Doctor as soon as possible.

Is it...I hope you don't mind me asking, but is it about this new sydrome?

Yes I think I'm turning into a monster mom.

We're so glad you called. The doctor would love to see you. When can you come?

I called Molly who was ready to babysit the whole day. She was a peach.

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You can remove the mask, if you like Mrs. Dekowitch. - Dr. Jordanson was just as cool and collected as on the program yesterday. - I've been trying to get to talk with someone suffering from your condition for some time. That is, we've only known about it for less than 2 weeks, but now it's spreading like wildfire. Let me tell you what we know so far:

It doesn't only affect women, there's been 14 reported male cases. But this number is dwarfed by the more than 200 female cases we know of. Though we can't explain the process in detail the working hypothesis is as follows: Some catalyst causes change in the hormonal balance. This change must occur due to some provoked response, be it physical or mental.

Like you said on tv yesterday. - I inserted.

Yes, I'm glad you were paying attention, even if my fellow doctors weren't pleased with this idea. So let me speak freely: I'm inclined to think of this as a sort of Jekyll/Hyde incident. But in a reverse manner: Where the chemicals Dr. Jekyll consumed had him turn into the illtempered Mr. Hyde, this might be more like an emotional feedback causing the physical change. Of course there's some agent to set the changes in motion, but the change stems from the mind.

I think he could see my confusion.

Let me try that one more time: Dr. Jekyll turned into Hyde when he took the drug, whereas you are taking something that could propagate change, but it doesn't happen instantly. Your mind or emotions are controlling the change, but your personality don't change. The change as far as we know is purely physical. Nevertheless it is YOU causing the change. That's at least my theory.

So what do you suggest I do? - I asked.

Put your mind at ease. If there's something troubling you, try and deal with it. I'd like to help you – no charge. My payment is getting to learn more about this, if you will.

That's an offer I won't refuse.

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It was worse than I thought. It took months to understand what had happened. I tried to change my diet, it didn't help. Began to exercise, it didn't help. Bought crystals, incense and candles, it didn't help. The only thing that seemed to help was spending more time with Sofie and Rad. But it wasn't enough. I kept regressing and changing more and more into a freak.

A lot of cures were promoted, but nothing worked.

Then one day Dr. Jordanson had a breakthrough. I was about to give up on our therapy sessions, when he asked:

How do you see yourself?

Apart from this thing – I waved my hands to encompass myself – I'm an average person, normal I'd say.

Okay, but on a scale of good and bad where would you put yourself?

I like to think I'm on the good end of the spectrum, I take care of my kids the best I can and never raise my voice at the person behind the counter in the supermarket...

Yes. - Dr. Jordanson said it in the voice he had when he disagreed, I had got to know him a bit as well. - What if I said you really know you're on the bad end of the spectrum, but you won't admit it? That's hard to argue against, because I wouldn't admit to it, would I?

He laughed.

Let me put it differently. Most of us or really all of us know we aren't the good people we would like to be seen as. But we have to live with ourselves, so we create this persona as an image of who we like to be and present it to the world. In so many words, we live a lie about ourselves.

That sounds plausible enough, but what has that to do with me? Everybody does it, as you said.

I think this is what causes your affliction.

How?

Something has caused your mind to act on the lie of who you are. Like a physical proof of this mental revolt. And as long as you keep upholding this false image, your mind will remind you in a very tangible way, that this is not who you are.

So you're saying I am a monster?

I'm not saying it, but it seems that's how you really see yourself. And reasonably so. As I said, deep down we all know we're some kind of monster.

But why does it mostly affect women?

There's still the question of what the catalyst is. We've been going over this before, but let's try it one more time.

You mean my diet?

Yes. Wait a minute. Maybe not your diet. What else do you eat or drink?

Some juice and mostly plain water. I cut the wine and it did help a little.

I would ascribe that to a lessening of guilt feeling, which in turn will give you some goodie points – that you actually feel and think just a little better about yourself.

But there's – hold on, the vitamins.

Vitamins?

Yeah, I eat this vitamin supplement specially designed for women. It's a recent product.

Could it be the culprit?

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I am almost back to normal. Or in fact better than normal. I've begun volunteering and it works wonders. Have revised my budget and found that I could make some cutbacks on lifestyle. I still have to shave as the effect is slow to wear off and there are relapses as the damage done is irreversible, but the more I do things I know are good for goodness sake, the more I've become the person I really want to be.

The end.

4. In tune.

Before that day he would vehemently reject the thought that “Pain is so close to pleasure.” But now he was shaken in his mental foundation. The notes was haunting and soothing at the same time. It was a perfect mix of opposites. He was moved and frightened at the same time. Saddened and uplifted.

He felt the need to share it with someone, yet he was held back by caution. As a deeply religious person he was continuously struggling with the idea of sadness. We must be meant to live happy lives, why would God want us to be sad, unless He was part evil?

He'd gone agnostic and dropped out of theology, to become a musician. He sought the safe space of abstraction, because music was impressions, interpretations, intuition, the language of feelings.

But today he had somehow crossed a threshold into a realm of reason, by proxy of a paradox. In it's illogical nature this melody defined it's logical counterpoint.

It was the answer he wasn't looking for. An answer he failed to comprehend.

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You don't seem to be your usually “composed” self, if I may say so? - Gregor McDuff said, chuckling at his own punny witticism.

I feel like God has thrown me a curveball.

Well, why wouldn't he?

What do you mean Greg?

He gave us a brain, it's not too much to ask that we are to put it to good use.

But God shouldn't be aggravating us, should he now?

I know a wise man who sort of said the same.

Who?

Why Job of course. Only it wasn't God breaking him down.

So you're saying I should accept the unfathomable wisdom of God?

Nay. Me God is one I can understand.

But why must we feel this burden of sadness then?

Ye might wanna ask Adam 'bout that. At least that's part of the answer I s'pose.

Any other part of the asnwer you want to share with me?

Well, I don't have any grand insight to offer, but a good life isn't a life without trouble.

Why?

It's part of the learning process. Knowing our limitations, knowing ourselves and how we can only see part of the picture. The body also feels pain to tell us sumpthin's wrong, yeah? So when our mind hurts it could be to let us know that we can't always be right, but need guidance.

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I say you cheated! - The demon hissed. - I had him right where I wanted him and then you send your man.

We only agreed that you could show him pain. Now he's come to learn a little humility too. - He answered.

I should have known better than to try to argue with you.

The demon left without further discussion.

The end.

5. Almost an artist.

As the paint was drying he looked at the canvas. It didn't look how he imagined it would. He couldn't tell if he was any closer to being the painter he wanted to be or if he was just as bad as yesterday. He dipped the brush to make something that would give it the finishing touch.

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He had decided when he was 9, that this would be his calling. Many people were impressed with his drawing skills, at that point. As he got older the “ooh's” and aah's diminished. He learned that you can't trust the judgement of others or have people tell you what to do.

He painted almost every day through his twenties. Some girls found it interesting and kind of adventurous at first, but as he ultimately was more interested in his painting than in them, they all disappeared.

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He was beginning to develop his style when he came into his 30's. It was very raw and real, in an abstract way. It was possible to think of him as a late Turner/Pollock clone, with the eye for detail of the first and the intuitive ideas of the second. The result was still found lacking.

On his 40'th birthday he painted what he titled “Is midlife crisis a thing?” It became a reoccurrent theme and he began to simply assign numbers to the productions, as he ventured deeper into his study of the theme.

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Time passed as if to tell him how an artist can be searching his whole life and even for the wrong thing. He wasn't as prolific as he used to be, beginning to expand on the crisis theme with similar themes like “doubt”, “uncertainty”, “fear” and “depression”. But like the images produced the thoughts wouldn't quite come together.

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Now he was 64. But in a very different way than what Paul McCartney had written about. His work was more like Beethoven's 10'th symphony. In fact it was so much in accord with the latter, that the stroke – which by its very name is an ironic death for a would-be famous painter – marked by the downward line by the brush across the canvas; came as an afterthought of reconsideration.

The end.

6. The Painter.

(To Lars)

There was a man who sold paint.

“Paint whatever you always dreamed of.” - Was his sales-pitch.

It was incredibly cheap and soon became the new fad of the town. Because it turned out to be true: Everyone could paint just what they wanted in such vivid images, but only when they used the paint from this particular seller. One would expect the price to rise as the interest grew, but no, the seller practically gave the paint away.

Joanna at first was suspicious: If something was too good to be true, it probably wasn't – she thought. But seeing how so many painted such lovely images, of all they'd ever dreamed of and how those paintings were so wonderfully true to life, she began to wonder if she wasn't missing out. So she bought some paint – just one colour, the colour blue, to see if she would be able to do a painting with this kind of limitation. It would be a test to see if the paint really was as fantastic as all the praise it got.

She'd always dreamt of the sea. Living in a town in the middle of the country, she'd never been able to visit the sea. So she started to paint and with each stroke more and more saw the sea gushing and flushing, how the currents was flowing and how the waves were waving. It was so captivating she stopped dreaming of the sea, because now she had seen it for all it was.

Joanna had painted it all in one go. She'd forgotten to eat, forgotten to sleep, almost had forgotten who she was. But now she remembered and went out to buy something to eat. When she went outside the street was very quiet. At first she didn't take notice, but then the quiet became more and more evident. The shops were open, but the personnel weren't there, not the assistants nor the owners. She could smell the smell of paint everywhere she went. She bought some ham, bread and mustard and put the money on the counter. In a town like this one, it was an arrangement most were accustomed to. Still, it was too quiet.

Joanna began to investigate. At first she looked through the windows, but couldn't see anyone. Then she decided to do a closer inspection. She went into a house where the front door wasn't locked. Hello? - she said. No one answered. But she discovered a man who sat in front of all he'd painted. There were landscapes of immense beauty, houses anyone would be happy to spend their lives living in, people whom Joanna found looked so very interesting she almost couldn't tear herself away from looking at them and then she saw how the mans eyes were fixed on one particular image: A self-portrait. He was so taken or paralyzed rather by his own image, it was impossible to talk to him.

And so Joanna saw how this had happened to everyone in the town, but herself. They'd all ended up painting themselves and this was their final dream.

She found the man who'd been selling the paint. He was keeping busy with collecting all the paintings. And wherever he finished taking the paintings, the ones who'd made them died.

Won't you release them? - she implored.

I'm not their captor. - he answered. - They've gotten everything they ever dreamed of.

The end.

7. Axeman.

Nobody here would hear a cry for help. He was grinding an axe and waiting. In this desolate place, he felt at home. He could do his ghastly deeds without interference, except from those who would be his victims and would be expected to offer some resistance.

He smiled as he looked at the trees, heard the wind going wild and the leaves rustle. He looked at his collection of axes. All deadly in their own way. Some he could throw with precision and cleave the skull within a 30 foot range. Some would by sheer weight crush anything in their way. And his favourite axe was an instrument of mayhem, with its jagged edge meant to tear and rip into soft flesh and splinter bone. He could carry 5 of them in a harness he'd made. Spring was just arriving and then it would be summertime. They would come in droves to this place, to camp or to visit the little hut, in bad need of repairs. He could barely stand the waiting.

At this time of year there was no berries and no mushrooms. His supply of food was dwindling. Spring was here in all its green splendour. No one had come yet, but he knew how to play the waiting game. Ha, ha – in a short while those who came would have the time of their life, in a bad way. He had started to walk around on a daily trail, just to make sure he wouldn't miss anyone. But teenagers were a noisy bunch. Too noisy, they needed to be calmed down, like all the way down six feet under. When he was a teen he'd been very calm. So calm he'd passed all of his days in the educational system unnoticed. They would notice him now!

He'd thought he would find some game to supply his supplies. But all the rabbits, birds, deer and any other animal had disappeared, almost as if he had scared them away. Well, maybe he did when he walked around with his mask and harness. It was rather hot wearing all that. He was more and more frequently sitting down to wait, like a predator ready to pounce. The hours went by so quickly. He had begun to double his efforts by taking nightly walks, but after one too many accidents where he nearly had decapitated himself, he decided that daytime or at twilight would do just fine. He sat at nighttime outside his tent and looked for a glimmer of light as a sign that someone had occupied the hut or put up a tent by the lake. He was sitting in the dark to avoid attracting the mosquitoes. They managed to find him anyway.

Perhaps camping wasn't the thing right now and of course springbreakers might go where there would be a party. He was never invited to any party, but soon he would have his own special one. Summer was even hotter. He had to ration his water. The ground was muddy and tiresome to walk on, as he trampled on. He was hungry all the time now and thirsty. And thirsty for blood. Eventually they would come. Perhaps when it was hunting season and all the wild berries had become ripe. He had been very patient and he took comfort in the old saying that all good things come to those who wait. Just a little longer and then he would run amok.

The daily walks was now weekly. Summer was ending and all was quiet. He thought about going back to the city, but then assured himself that giving up now would have made all his careful preparation and all his waiting be for nothing. But all he had left was a package of crackers. And he'd stopped training because he got dizzy just doing a few push-ups.

The rain had come with a vengeance. He had plenty to drink and that was the one positive thing about that. He felt weak. If anybody was coming now, they might be even more crazy than him. And he wasn't sure he'd have the strength to overpower them. He thought he'd picked the perfect spot, not too popular, making it impossible to terrorize the campers or those off for a weekend, but a secluded place, a hidden gem, a hideout for true nature lovers or anyone wanting a peaceful place to meditate. He'd thought how he would chop up hippies, dumb teens, those self-absorbent hikers, city folks who thought they were smart and hip going "off the grid", someone wanting to find himself or herself only to find their untimely demise, those piss-poor nobodys that couldn't afford a decent vacation... Well, maybe not the last ones, they would get a pass.

He stumbled out of the woods finally reaching the rangers' station. He'd left his weapons behind. He was cold and exhausted. The office was closed and he couldn't muster the strength to break in. It possibly wasn't worth the effort either, why would they have anything stored there? The town was a 2 days walk from this point. And as he thought about how he should've listened to his better self

earlier, the snow began to fall.

He was almost unconscious as the headlights found him. The car stopped. An old lady stepped out, slowly either because she couldn't move any faster or because she was reasonably cautious. He wasn't a threat to anyone in his present state: starved half to death, chill to the bone and with a mind that could hardly put together any comprehensible thought.

You silly thing. - she said as she was helping him up, showing a surprising amount of strength for such a tiny creature. - No one comes up to these parts anymore.

She half-carried him into the blessedly warm insides of a heated truck cabin and as she poured him hot chocolate from her thermos, from somewhere deep inside a tear found it's way out of his eye.

The end.

8. Sounding off.

Donny the Deadly took that fatal one more shot. He knew better, he knew he shouldn't drink because it would make him ignore that he knew better and now he knew nothing else than that he wanted to drink more. Tessa came in.

Are you drinking?

Just to put the nerves to rest.

We've talked about this. So many times.

Don't worry I can still perform.

Can you?

Tessa left.

-

The roar from the audience was thunderous. The other musicians were going on stage. Donny tried to get up, but found it immensely hard. Why had all the others just left him? They couldn't begin without him, he was the voice of the band. He slumped out of the couch to land on all fours. He grabbed the table, almost making it tip, but using it as leverage he managed to push himself up to a swaying upright position. A roadie came in.

You're here?! - the roadie said. Donny thought it was a rather dumb question.

Damn, where's the coffee? - the roadie said. Donny didn't feel like having coffee. The roadie left.

Donny could hear the audience clapping and stomping. Then the music started. How could they do that? Then he recalled the instrumental one they'd made, while he was away. A new style they'd said. If nothing else it bought him some time. The roadie came in with the coffee. It made Donny puke, but now he could almost walk straight. The music was coming to a crescendo ending. Another roadie guided him through the narrow pass-way to the stage. As he walked on stage, the crowd went mad.

He waved and walked on rubber legs to grab the mike and moreover the mike stand. What was the set list? Donny couldn't remember, but then John the base player did the intro to Raw Baby. Donny let out a yell, but at the same time Willie the lead guitarist struck a chord so loud Donny could hardly hear himself. They got through the first bars and Donny found his cue:

You've been mean to me Baybee – He sang, but again Willie was all over it and Hans the rhythm guitarist was doing something he wasn't supposed to, even Roger on the keys was going berserk, effectually drowning Donny out. He looked around and saw the faces of the rest of the band all looking as one: Angry, closed and determined. He did the next lines:

You kn-WRAIING, HOOOOY – u so mu – TWAIING.

I'm a – WHOUI, WHEEE, OIII - ing

So this was what was going down. Donny's grip on the mike stand tightened as he roared into the mike:

YOU'RE RA - BOOM, BOOM ROOING – BYY. Tess on the drums was banging louder than she'd ever done, making it sound like a bloody war.

-

So Donny battled. He yelled, he screamed, he howled, he bellowed, he brayed. They went through the whole 2 albums they'd done and the crowd wet mad. For a little more than 2 hours he screamed his lungs out, until his voice gave in. He looked out over the audience. He couldn't see a lot from all the lights bathing the stage in all the colours under the sun, but those he could make out, were either stoned, drunk, drugged or in some weird ecstasy. The band had sound-whipped them into a frenzy. And Donny had no more voice left. He waved at the audience, looked around at the rest of the band, took a bow and walked off the stage.

The end.