

A Problem of Emptiness

I haven't put any kind of content filter on anything I've written. I like that you find out what you're reading as you go. I'm not doing that this time. The contents of this story were written for spooky season explicitly, and is an effort by me to pay homage to horror writing and film. Body horror, insanity, loss, and death resides in these pages. Characters are 18.

Four of them walked towards the end of King's Street. Five, if you counted the great dane in their company. Every kid in school knew this walk. Almost all of them were dared to do it in one time or another, just as their parents had, and unless the old eyesore was torn down in the name of progress, so would their children. Childhood legend argued about its proper name or origins, even among those who now looked at it from where the asphalt ended, and tall grass remained as the only obstacle. They lingered, the foreboding darkness warning them from that next step.

Fran lead the way. She was the largest, and the bravest of the group. Standing an easy six feet, she was still waiting for the rest of puberty to show up, and was coming increasingly resigned to the idea it wasn't coming. Her shoulders were broader than half the boys in her class, and she tried to dress away from it by choosing flattering prep attire. But when push came to shove, she was the most physically capable among them.

Darnell followed after. A receiver for the football team, Darnell's slim build was known for speed. He wore his letter jacket with only a touch of pride, but was secretly far more proud of the outfit underneath it, a product of his secret passion for thrift store and vintage clothing. His eyes followed Fran's movements in the growing dark that surrounded them, hoping to catch her attention, to find the opportunity he was waiting for.

Vick took middle. His body was heavy, as he often found more time to sit with a good book than go running, and often turned to an easy snack simple to extend his opportunity for the consumption of knowledge. His bulky, prescription eyewear constantly needed attention, and had a bad habit of sliding down his nose, or falling from his face if he rushed.

Navs took up the rear with her dog, Dude. Nav's parents named her Navielle, which she got pretty tired of correcting people about, so just became Navs. Her build was lank, but shorter than Fran. Famously, her metabolism was a legend in the school, able to eat an increasing number of dare-worthy foods and convert seemingly none of it to fat. Her latest indulgence was a series of Vapes, which she merely pretended were not cannabis affiliated when anyone in authority asked.

Dude was a great dane, with a short grey coat. A massive puppy in so many ways, aggression wasn't common to him, and he much preferred to sit in Navs' lap and eat whatever she happened to be eating. Still, his size made him a bulwark for any trouble the kids happened to wander into. His tail started to flick to and fro with excitement. A new place meant new smells.

"It's so cliché."

"A critic's way of referring to something iconic."

"We could still turn back."

"And be cowards? No way. Not a chance."

"Who the fuck cares? I haven't sparked since we left, and we're almost there."

Glasses were pushed up. Vick sighed. "It's just an abandoned Victorian home. The most we have to fear is dry rot, mold, or a squatter. People will live anywhere these days."

Darnell peered sideways towards Vick. "I was told my clothes weren't going to get messed up. These are thrift shop gold. If I knew they were going to get dirty, I would have dressed down."

Fran huffed with growing impatience. "Those are excuses. We all agreed. We want to look brave, it just takes a night in there. I'm done with the shit talk. One night in Empty House, and we're good."

Navs sighed louder. "Who cares. Every second we're not there, I'm not hitting my vape, and I'm not getting into the picnic I brought. Let's fucking go. Vick, tell the tale. It's part of this."

The great dane sniffed the air once, twice, his senses piercing the night. Grass. Animal smells. Nothing of alarm.

The group proceeded into the tall grass. Vick spoke, as asked, rattling off facts, which he found comforting. You could trust facts. They were there when you needed them. "Originally constructed for Richard Thomas Howard in the 19th century, the Howard House has stood since, a fascinating remnant of bygone architecture. It was architected by Asa Daribondi, as part of their series of 'Dream Homes'. Since Howard vanished just before the turn of the century, it's largely sat idle. Of course, long periods of time with it sitting shut give it something of a reputation, and it's frequently referred to as the Empty House, or Howards Folly."

They were half way through the field when they got a good look at their goal, and paused. Aided by a full moon and strong stars overhead, it shone for them. Dilapidated, abandoned, by some miracle of the craftsmen, it was still standing. Two stories, almost every entrance boarded to prevent entry. Too many accidents in the past. A covered porch, a spanish window. Spires at the top still reached for the sky, waiting for answer to questions not posed. The dog huffed.

Navs rolled her eyes, and took another step forward, deciding that she'd gone far enough, and took another hit. She roiled the cannabis laden, fruity scented smoke to waft over her partners in this endeavor. They picked up the pace. "Any idea what happened to the Howard guy?"

Vick waved his hand in front of his face. "Shockingly little. Police at the time lacked the forensic scrutiny of today's detective. There's some belief he skipped the county, looking to escape a debt. Rumor is happy to say more, though."

Fran eyed the place. "And we've all heard a version, right? Howard killed himself. Hanged himself after a bad investment. But his ghost still haunts the room under the beam in his bedroom where he did it."

Darnell wrapped his arms closer to his sides. It was already too cold out here for this, even through his jacket. "Heard he found a woman, and she clapped him and stacked him for his wealth. He goes from room to room, looking for his money, and kills anybody who looks him in the eyes."

Navs looked over. "I heard he went crazy, and nobody knows why. And it can happen to anybody else who stays here too long." The group stopped walking as the great dane growled at something. They waited, holding their breath. A night bird took flight, disappearing in the dark. They jumped at the sudden movement, before reassuring themselves.

Vick broke the silence for his own comfort. "And I don't like to engage in speculation based on hearsay. We're here. Fran?"

Fran stepped forward, digging into the duffel bag of supplies she'd brought, and bringing forth the crowbar. She moved to the side of the door, set the pry in place, and Darnell begrudgingly followed up to help her work it. Between the two of them, the boards covering the door, and then the door, fell

aside in turn. Darkness filled the space beyond, littered with dust. 10 eyes peered through, the great dane sniffing. When he gave no alarm, Navs nodded. "Golden, bros. We're in."

Fran took lead, trading her crowbar for an oil lantern. Shielding the light from the street, she got it lit. Vick rolled his eyes. "Oil? I've got this. Here." Vick brought his own pack around, and revealed his trusty flashlight. "Sure, it takes D-Cells, but you can't argue with the output." He shone it in the entry way.

The floor was intact. A long forgotten rug lay, practically a part of the entry floor. A quick turn gave access to the stair well, and the front rooms. Aside from shifting dust and the door, nothing moved beyond the perimeter. With their surroundings confirmed, Vick switched his flashlight over to lantern mode, letting it cast an easy blue light over their surroundings, and proceeded to pass out flash lights to the others.

Fran shook her head. "This is what I had. So I'm going to use it."

Darnell shook his head. "Careful with the fire, huh? This place looks like it could burn down if we think about it too hard."

Vick raised a cautioning hand. "We don't know that we're alone here. Couldn't hurt to look around before we get settled."

Fran nodded in agreement. "We can make it work faster if we split up."

Navs rolled her eyes, lungs taking another deep draw, and emitting another cloud. "No shit. Let me guess. You and Darnell, and me and Vick go with Dude? Let's get this done. Try not to hold hands too hard. This ain't the buddy system."

Vick didn't want to linger in the conflict. It didn't seem advisable to split up in case they weren't alone... but Darnell and Fran did need a chance to speak. Maybe this would be the best time. "Right, Navs. We can check out the second floor." The two broke off and went up as Fran started to complain, but even the dog wasn't waiting around to watch this play out.

Fran made sure the front door was shut, looked to Darnell, and then promptly walked into what was once the living room. A series of break ins left the space in shambles. Tags hung in some places. The abandoned furniture was either reduced to wooden splinters, or rotted near through. Darnell hurried to keep up, not wanting to leave Fran's light, despite his own flash light. "Hey, look, I know you're pissed, but I came all the way out here so we could talk."

Fran stopped, looking back. "And you've been complaining ever since. You can do this with us, or you can complain. But I'm getting tired of the going-both-ways thing." She looked through into the dining room, letting the lantern's warmth reveal more of the peeling wall paper, and bare boards. "If you came to say something, you can get to it already."

Darnell sighed. He knew it was going to be rough. "No, you're right. I'm not happy to be out here. This place is," His eyes caught on a cockroach scurrying under an old bookcase built into the wall, "It's disgusting, and I won't pretend it isn't. But we don't need to be here. You know I--"

Fran spun, holding the lantern out. Her face, lit in the flickering flames, frightened Darnell. "I heard you. With your friends from the team. Them making fun of me and the rest of the group, that's not news." Darnell shrunk back slowly. She knew. Fuck. He braced himself. "No mystery there. You going along with it, laughing, joining in... I thought we meant more to you than that."

Darnell opened his mouth to speak. He'd come up with a dozen excuses, just in case. But looking in her

eyes, here, so many of them fell away, useless. The way she was looking at him, there wasn't coming back from this. The answer was to make it like it didn't happen. "I don't know what you thought you heard. But I'd never. I couldn't do that to us. Not you, and not Vick and not Navs." He wanted to say especially not you... When something creaked. Their eyes shifted together into the dining room, lights searching. Whatever made the noise, nothing was moving now.

Fran peered back to him. "I know what I heard, Darnell. But you did, and now, you're trying to make me sound crazy. After tonight? You can fuck off." She moved into the dining room, Darnell tried to fight the tears that wanted to escape. In the dark, he could just pretend they weren't there.

Vick and Navs walked into the first door from the landing, and found themselves in an elaborate library. Cobwebs littered the space, but the walls were lined with books. It must have doubled as an office space, a desk and the late Howard's blotter still in place. Dude took a lap around the room, sniffing, slowly wagging his tail side to side. Windows at the back gave peaks into the dark night beyond the shutters and boards. "This is quite the discovery. Howard had something of a reputation as a collector in his time. The edge of science... a hundred and some odd years ago."

Navs picked up the first dusty tome she came across. Not finding anything to read on the cover, she popped it open. "Dude was also a creep. This says it's a practical study in ether. That's that knock out rag stuff, right?"

Vick looked over the faded, moldering cover. "Unlikely to be the same ether you're thinking of. Before we went to space, people theorized it was like an ocean. They thought it was filled with something you could see through that took up the space. They called it ether."

Navs was getting listless as she stared on, continuing to flick through the handwritten pages. She slowed as she hit diagrams of the stars. "Incredibly boring thing to be wrong about. How can you have practical experience in a thing that doesn't even exist, though?" The next few pages, and she hits hand sketched images of figures bound in black latex. "That's two points for freak, though. Old man Howard designing his own custom BDSM gear."

Vick stared at the pages. His eyes caught at snippets of the writing. Navs wasn't usually right. But the pages were hard to argue with. The need to close the incongruity was weighing on him. "You don't mind if I read that, do you?"

Navs looked back at Vick, her eyes gauging over the book with new amusement. She held it over her chest, crossing her arms and hugging it in. "Vick, you think Darnell and Fran are gonna work it out?"

Vick pushed his glasses up, frowning lightly at Navs. "I don't know. I haven't seen them get into it like this before. And, I've never seen Fran this mad."

Navs danced a little bit away, still smirking. "Okay. You're the smart guy. We got together to do little trips like this. Figure out what was real or not. And if we hadn't been called out as fakers, we wouldn't be here right now. And if Fran or Darnell aren't hanging out anymore, it's just gonna be you, me and Dude." Dude barked idly.

Vick corrected automatically. "You, Dude, and I."

Navs rolled her eyes. "And if that's what we're doing, you should be way more excited to try and get this book from me."

Vick looked confused in the soft blue light of his lantern. "I don't... if you're not done with it, I can wait, it just seems very interesting."

Vans watched his eyes. He wasn't looking at her. It was just... the book. "You're pretty quick to insert yourself in some boring shit, Vick." She took the book away from her own chest, and pushed it into his. His arms reflexively closed over it. "I hope you figure out how to stick yourself into something fun soon. Time's running out." She turned and walked back out of the library, getting the flashlight going again. Dude considered Vick with a look, before snorting, swishing his head side to side, and following Vans.

Vick looked down at the book, and back after Navs. "I -- what--?" He stammered in brief confusion before his head. "I don't understand her." He pulled up a chair, which thankfully stood up to him sitting in it, and started poring over the notes.

Fran easily made it through the dining room, and into the kitchen, cheeks still hot. Why did Darnell make her so fucking mad? Her eyes searched for anything to take her fury out on, sizing up the splintered cabinet wood, and cracked, gross surfaces. The room was tight, and disgusting. It made her feel uncomfortably big, just standing in the room like she was filling it up. One more thing she didn't want to feel emotional about. Would Darnell feel differently if...?

The thought didn't have time to complete. The lamp's flickering light revealed something. A black figure that barely reflected light. Where it did, it looked like it was made of something like shined rubber, or latex. She barely had time to gasp at it before it was out of the light again. Priorities rapidly reordered in her mind. Fuck the beef. Fuck what anybody said. This was no longer safe. She turned quickly on her heel, ready to head straight back to where she last saw Darnell, starting to call loudly. "Hey! We've got to go! It's not--"

When she opened the dining room door, two more of the things were there. Her eyes widened. This time, they didn't fall back. One surged forwards, filling her eyes with its presence, and details. It had no face. A blank slate where one should be stared at her. Horns curled inwards at the top of its head. She barely saw the wings behind it. It didn't make a sound. And when the light in her lantern went out, she couldn't even scream, the sound failing to escape her mouth.

Darnell was still wiping his eyes when he heard something move. He spun towards the stairs in the entry hall, and spotted Navs coming down, Dude in her wake. She briefly lifted her chin at him in acknowledgement. "Sup?"

Darnell mustered himself. There was no point in being vulnerable here. "Not much. Place sucks. And it's filthy. Haven't seen anybody, though. What about you?"

Navs shrugged lightly. "Quit looking after the first room. There's cobwebs everywhere. Ain't no way there's somebody who isn't us. Plus, Dude would lose his shit if there was. But c'mon. I left Vick with a book, so he'll be busy for hours. Plus? Secret downstairs brewery. We can go down there and get loaded."

Darnell doubted that Empty House had a decent craft beer, but getting away from everything else for a while sounded good. "I'm in. How the hell did you find out about that?"

Navs shook her head, as if tired of being dismissed. "I can read. C'mon. It's under the stairs." She circled around to the door behind the stairs, opening it. A burst of dust and destroyed clothes jostled with the

movement. She pushed it all to the side. "Get the light on this."

Darnell complied, and between the two of them, they bumped the door open, revealing a second staircase from the closet. After a moment, waiting for Dude's approval, the pair went down.

The cellar was largely unfinished. Growth emanated from most of the dirt walls, and the beams down here looked bad. One of the areas already collapsed, a layer of earth long ago rushed in from the wall. The rest of the information was correct, however, and casks and brewing equipment long abandoned sat about on tables.

Vans fist pumped. "Fuck yes dude, we are set." She immediately headed over to the casks, and started tapping her knuckles on them. Some were plainly hollow. Others gave off a satisfying thud of content. "Score."

Darnell looked doubtful. "Even if there's liquid in there, there is no way we should be drinking it. If it's not spoiled, it's going to be warm. And flat."

Vans quickly announced, "Your mom is flat," almost before Darnell could finish saying it. She grabbed up a couple mugs, rinsed them out with water from a bottle, and tried the tap. She honestly expected something foul, but bright, amber, fizzing liquid came from the spout. Her eyes widened in delight, and she turned to Darnell, offering him the cup. "In your face, bitch. Bottom's up."

Vick was worried. Beyond worried, really. The words in this diary were clear, concise, handily written, easy to follow. But their content, and what they alluded to, was impossible. He began chattering at himself for comfort. He didn't think there was any danger. Nothing in here could be real. "Other worlds, visits in his dreams, creatures, space travel... No wonder the rumors persisted Howard was insane. This is either a very convincing work of fiction, or he was suffering from persistent hallucination. Invisible creatures that only show in flame, secrets about the origins of the universe, dangerous knowledge."

The back pages of the journal were written with greater haste in hand, and it took Vick longer to tease the words from the text. "Before Azatoth filled the universe with music, making reality dance eternal at the sound of his horn, there was a vast emptiness, a darkness that conjoined all that existed. But that darkness had a name. Inthulya." Vick did not expect the name to sound thick in his mouth. He leaned back abruptly, brushing his tongue, as if there was something on it. He dropped the book back on the desk. Cold rationality didn't have answers for what was happening.

The room wasn't as dark as it once was. The stars and the moon's light seemed to better pierce the window's coverings. And wound through the room, through seemingly everything, were outlines. Something like blue, that outlined the edges, that suggested shapes where there was nothing. He found, with alarm, those curves and lights passed through his own skin. And though there was clearly nothing there, now that he saw it, his flesh wanted to tell him he felt something. Though most of the shapes were innocuous at best, growing from the center of the desk was something that was definitively a stalk. And in the middle of that spire, an eye, sitting about six feet in the air, the size of his head. Some small, animal part of his brain insisted that this was dangerous. That being watched, being noticed by a hidden predator, was a most unwelcome turn. But what he actually said was "Fuck."

The book was dangerous? But perhaps, that knowledge could be dangerous to things other than himself. He snatched it back from the desk, and moved, trying to escape its glare, back out into the upstairs hallway.

Fran was still trying to scream. Her throat hurt. Her eyes ran with tears. But she couldn't make a sound. She'd long hated her body. Her innate strength and size. She felt it repulsed others, kept her from femininity, and by extension, love she so desired. But her strength was nothing in the face of these creatures. They'd moved her to the center of the dining table, and flattened her out, moving as if they were conversing with each other. She'd struck them several times, landing blows that would have left a high school lineman dumbstruck, but it was as if the latex shells of their bodies were too thick for harm to befall them.

Stranger, in between holding her, they used their long, clawed hands... to tickle. She hated it. She'd always been ticklish. She didn't like that something else could make her feel anything. She resisted. She yelled. They didn't care. They tickled each other, though, and that's when something happened. In the empty space of one's face, a hole opened. She could have fit a fist inside, and she stared, body suddenly frozen at this change in physiology. As the second tickled the first, a black ichor was expelled from the orifice, coating Fran's chest. Her attempts to scream redoubled, trying to free her limbs from the creature's embrace.

To her surprise, they let her go, empty faces still watching, tails flicking behind them. Fran wanted it to stop. She brought her hands up to get the feel of warmth and wet off of her, but brushing it only blackened her hands, coating them in rubbery sheen. She started trying to curse, to beg. Her legs went to motion. The warmth moved over her chest, right through her clothing. It clung to her skin, and started to brace against her. It oozed over her arms. It didn't hurt. It simply invaded, leaving her feeling cold and trapped within a spreading vice. She felt it encircle her torso as she ran for the front door. She couldn't make her hands grasp the knob, no matter how she tried to grip. Her blackened arms would not cooperate in the task.

Her torso was pulling tight, compressing. It was getting hard to draw breath. She looked down at herself, making sure where her legs still were, getting ready to throw a kick into what kept her from freedom. Her chest surprised her. She could no longer see any sign of her clothes over her chest. The surface of her was glistening, wet. Her chest heaved. Her waist was drawn tighter, shrinking. She could feel it over her hips, rising over her shoulders. The other things weren't like this. Did it know what she wanted?

There was no time to find out. She kicked the door, shaking it. Her adrenaline was pumping like mad, and she could feel her heart pounding. Her chest lifted, fuller. Her waist slimmed, more dainty. Her waist, her hips, drug themselves into desirable, curving, feminine forms. Her thighs were full, shaking still with the impact. Blackness found her lips, and poured into her mouth. She feared, for a moment, she might drown. It pressed up over her nostrils, the dark taking these cavities. The world went to silence as it covered her ears. Her eyes went dark.

She tried to use her hands to pull it from her face, but she could no longer feel it. Her legs collapsed under her, and she fell to the ground. She struggled for breath, but there was no longer a burning in her lungs. Tentative touches to her own form revealed she was solidifying in her new shape. The fear faded, or perhaps, she was no longer capable of properly feeling it. Things that felt so important before these last few moments were more and more difficult to grasp, like a dream she'd awoken from. There was noise. Her new senses felt life in the house, and places beyond. A new world was opening to her.

Vick was looking down the stairs, frozen. He'd watched her kick the door, but hadn't heard it, and now, Fran was sinking down to her knees, hands clawing briefly at her cheeks, and then her face. Slowly, she went from fighting, to holding. The shapes that made her hair and her face's identifiable features smoothed over. She was not unlike the creatures diagramed in the book he held. Real. It was real.

The thing that was Fran rose to its feet. Its hands wandered its new, rubbery form, sinking into its assets, and wondering at its own hands. And then, it looked up and saw him. It was between him and the door.

Nick threw himself over the railing, and went to flee out the back. His glasses landed on the ground, and were promptly abandoned.

Dude got a noseful of dirt, and sneezed. Darnell and Vans almost fell out laughing. Their mugs were only scarcely drunk, and Van's personal picnic was well broken into. The drink was decidedly alcoholic, impossibly fresh, and the two found themselves in the midst of the king of all belching competitions.

Navs peered at Darnell, smirking. "You know, I don't get you, man. You walk with the cool kids, you walk with us. Why bother? You could be at a kegger at a QB's swank house, convincing a cheerleader to learn to deep throat instead of hanging with us, eating my mustard and gorgonzola sandwiches, getting wasted on space beer."

Darnell, with power born from drink, felt confident enough. "Okay, I know, I know I'm a poser. Everything around that game feels so fake. I like to put on my nice clothes, and you guys never say shit about it. But I think I fucked up, you know?"

Navs nodded over the rim of her mug, taking down another gulp. "Oh, I know. You fucked up. You talked shit on us." She mock narrowed her eyes and shook her head. "Totally considered making Dude take you out." Dude peered over from where he was digging.

Darnell sighed. "I'd have deserved it. You think if I tell football to go fuck itself, it'll make things up to Fran?"

Navs shrugged openly. "You know what? Couldn't hurt. And maybe run a few miles, build up a good stink, show up shredded. Win her over. Didn't realize you'd started to get pudgy."

Darnell took this personally. "Pudgy? Navs, I know you can eat Snickers on graham cracker and not gain weight, but my body is immaculate. It's almost as nice as my clothes. I'm..." He raised the bottom of his shirt to prove it, and there was a bulge. His brow furrowed in confusion. He tore his eyes up off of himself, and pointed at her. "You, too!"

Navs pulled up the bottom hem of her own, finding herself in a similar predicament. There was too much middle she wasn't used to, riding there, now exposed. She stared accusingly at her own picnic. "Junk food never made me fat! It's..." Her eyes landed on her mug about the same time Darnell's did.

They jointly exclaimed, "The beer!" In unison, they started pouring it out, before getting up to their feet. Their exuberant conversation fallen silent in shock, their ears now opened to the world around them. There, waiting for them, was a sinister hissing that pervaded the air, and an unsubtle slosh of their sudden movement. The hissing got louder, and their hands shot to their middles in sudden discomfort.

Darnell's mind raced faster. "We got to throw it up."

Nav's face scrunched up. "I've never thrown up food in my life."

"Not even when you were sick?"

"I told you, never!"

Darnell started to try and force himself, a pair of fingers thrown down to try and bring the stuff up, and spare himself. He only sloshed harder with the bodily movement, and this effect was building up. There

was a lot more Darnell under his vintage clothing. Navs tried to stay still, and wait it out, but he was really growing actively now. His chest was entirely subsumed in a visible curve, that rose from the base of his abdomen, up through his pecs. Were he not so round, it might have appeared as muscle, but now, he was giving the appearance of stuffing his shirt.

Navs groaned slowly, rubbing her middle, trying to calm it down. The pressure under her skin was building slow. Maybe she could just ride it out. She looked like she'd finished off her picnic herself, starting to hang over the top of her skirt, the top of her gut pushing back beneath her bust. A sensation of weakness shuddered through her, and she held onto one of the basement beams to steady herself.

Darnell couldn't make it come up. He forced out a powerful belch, but it didn't seem to do anything to alleviate the pressure he was under. His chest was pushing on his arms, forcing them back, and he could feel the air ignoring the shape of him, powering through his shoulders and hips alike. He was sure his cheeks were poofing out. It was getting hard to breath, his ability to fill his lungs reduced to low, light wheezes.

Navs grimaced. "Darnell, you're blowing up too fast. Stop moving. Let the pressure off..." She had no idea how he'd do that. But it was definitely the problem.

Darnell was sweating bullets. His limbs were being forced into starfish position, and he was freezing up. He couldn't force his muscles to overcome the tightness, much less his clothing. They were starting to rip here and there, acting like a vice on his swelling form before relenting with any tear. He lamented. "Why'd I have to pick such good clothes...?" Buttons started to give up the ghost, launching themselves determinedly through the cellar.

Navs did her best to duck, not trusting any kind of impact with her body right now. There were precious few cards to play. "Dude, go get help." The dog understood at least most of that command, and took off to the stairs like a bolt. Navs looked back to Darnell. Her condition was stabilized for the moment, so long as she kept still. "Just hold on man, stop moving, stay still, Dude will get somebody, and we'll get out of this."

Darnell felt pale. His flesh was on display, and becoming increasingly taut. Beyond the powerful hiss that vibrated through him, he could hear his flesh squeaking, creaking, threatening that there was only so long he could do this. He was beyond discomfort, though. His skin was locked, nerves pulled right to the surface, every movement and contact arcing through him, beyond pleasure and pain. He could barely keep his eyes open, his cheeks shoving at them.

"Navs....tell Fran..."

It was quiet. His skin was vibrating. He knew that one more slosh would be his last. But it wasn't here now. He focused on keeping his breaths low, thin. Even a gasp of relief would be too much. He stayed upright, sphered body stuck, arms out.

Navs shushed him softly. "Wait it out. Belch if you can. Tell her yourself. Let's not go bad balloon down here..." Navs tested walking, but the slight movement of a step made her slosh just enough for a brief rush of hissing, making her middle stuff itself a little more. She held herself, tenderly. And then, her eyes caught the staircase. "Oh. Oh. We're not alone."

Darnell couldn't really look, but the black-skinned thing entered the crossing lights of their flashlight beams. The faceless body, ballooned curves drifted its head from one of them, then to the other. He nearly gulped too hard, but started muttering just above a whisper. "Oh, fuck, no, no... What is that..."

Navs shook her head slowly, matching his tone. "I don't know, dude. But it's into you."

It walked to Darnell, bouncing itself. Its breasts didn't act quite like breasts. They shifted loosely, fully, as if the rules of this world didn't grasp them as strongly. It looked over Darnell, appraising, before reaching out to touch him. Darnell shook with fear at the strange contact, and the way its touch spread through his drawn nerves. Torture. Pleasure. He couldn't settle on which it was.

It seemed to delight in the visible response, and stepped back from the full curve of his chest. There was a sound of air moving, and Darnell was convinced this was the end, when he saw the figure before him... changing. Dare he say, enhancing. As if mimicking his current state, the latex-flesh bowed outwards, bust curving, rounding, inflating like a pair of trapped balloons in a dress. It bounced itself, before repeating its unusual trick on his hips and thighs, turning in a little circle to show him the new shelf forming, creaking from its lower curves.

Navs gave calming words. "Whatever is up with that thing, don't piss it off."

Darnell couldn't bring himself to nod, or look away. "Noted." The figure moved back up to him, pressing its newly swollen chest softly to him. They squeaked off of each other. He tried to keep focused. To keep still. Its hands rose up, wrapping to his sides, softly embracing him. He was too tight. His eyes rolled up. He tried his best to hold together. And then, its delicate fingers started dragging over his skin, tickling.

He fought it. "No. Don't. Stop. It--" The low rumbles, the unplanned movements, the guffaws, waiting with each twitch. He tried to keep them from bubbling up through him, tried to keep a lid on it. But no sooner did one catch in his throat, he felt himself meet his limits. A yell came out of his mouth, and his frame burst, blasting the sound off of the earthen walls of the cellar. Scraps of skin suddenly filled the space, but no physical remains of Darnell's were present in the wake of the blast.

Navs was knocked off her feet, and landed on the ground. Her insides immediately hissed violently. "No, no, Darnell, you killed him, I..." The thing did not look happy, and started digging through the space where he was, picking at shreds of clothing, and scraps of rubberized skin, as if confused at the sudden change. Navs wasn't terribly concerned about that, however, as her body was starting to billow aggressively.

Her belly was already full to term, and the aggressive gas was spreading. Her bust lifted, rounding. Her hips found feminine curve. Before her eyes, her frame was being traded for that of an ancient fertility idol. She grasped herself in terror, trying to push her skin in, trying to belch, anything to stop herself from experiencing the same fate. "Just my luck. I finally get tits, and they're gonna be the last thing I see." Her belly was no longer concerned with being stuck at her waist, and began filling around her sides, and down, pressing between her legs. She groaned loudly her the previous stick like features of her body turned to an oops, all curves edition.

Her new breasts were rising in the v-neck of her shirt, shoving at her collar bones, lifted by her middle towards her chin. Their insistent swells formed a horizon that blocked the latex creature from her sight. She swept back her brunette hair. "C'mon, burp, stop, anything... I don't want to die like that..." The sensations were already overwhelming her, and twitches born of the immensity of the feelings from within were taking forefront in her mind. She was already swelling through her clothes, whimpering as she begged for it to stop, and her body delighted and dreaded in its continuance.

The latex thing peered over her into her view, cocking its head to one side curiously at her. Navs groaned. "Don't... fucking... tickle me..." It made no effort to, but leaned closer, petting its sticky hand along her forehead, before disappearing from her sight again. Navs breathed a low sigh of relief, her body slowly hissing to a stop. She was far too large to move herself, and her brain told her that even if she could, the stairs were too small for her chest, much less her middle. Red cheeked, she muttered. "Not fair... that this feels good..."

She struggled in the dirt next to her, trying to at least find a position to wait this out. Her grasping hand found something in the loose dirt. In the half-light the abandoned flashlights granted, she pulled it to get a better look. A skeletal hand came with it, the dirt pile shifting where Dude, and now Navs disturbed it. A rotting skull stared up at her. "Last thing I fucking need..." She wheezed, trying to keep herself still and put as much distance between herself and the corpse as possible.

The skull shifted slowly in the dirt, facing her better. Its jaw began to whisper its unearthly secrets to its captive audience.

Vick ran out the back of the house. He didn't know if those things were in pursuit, and he didn't care. He just knew that if he kept running, he could get away from all of this. He promptly tripped over his feet, landing face first in the dirt behind the house. The starlight was here, however, illuminating everything. Stalks with eyes were everywhere. Larger, blue-outlined masses formed tentacles that writhed, moved, took up space the size of city busses, and larger. He followed their endless, massive angles upwards. There were larger eyes in the sky, endless expanses peering through what he knew to be empty cosmos. Where they crossed him now, he was sure he could feel their touch, as if the writhing, everywhere tentacles were both outside him and within him. Vick shut his own eyes. He couldn't stand those things looking at him. Watching him. He curled down into a ball, trying to touch as little of this new, now visible world as he could.

The others were waiting for her in the field behind the house. Comfort. Acceptance. A time to come, and a time to go. Fran looked to Vick, the house, and spread her wings slowly. She took up his wailing, insensate form, and took to the skies. The others did the same, sailing through the mysteries of this world, and passing not just through its physical space, but the realms of thought, and the etheric breezes that bridged one place to another. She left her old self behind, and flew after them.

Navs hated not being listened to. The nurses were not receptive to the idea that she wasn't human any longer. That there was a voice speaking to her. The police didn't believe that she didn't know what happened to her friends. And nobody, nobody believed that when she slept, she sometimes heard Vick trying desperately to speak to her, and that her nightly cocktail of depressants made it very difficult to understand him. But Vick was nothing compared to Howard. Howard would not shut up that the time would soon be right. That even now, worshippers of Inthulya worked to bring their god to the forefront of the universe, to topple Azatoth and silence his horn, and that everything would be part of him once more. Of course, she knew better than to mention that.

Sometimes, when there was a storm, she'd think she saw a moving shape outside the high, barred windows, and thought about being free.