

Micah Huang

The Goblin Bee

She sat in a coffee shop downtown, with Marianne. Marianne was small and pointy, with golden hair and black eyes. It was hot that day, and everybody was wearing jeans and T-shirts, except for Marianne, who was wearing a scarf and a sweater. Tracy sat with her back to the wall, and tipped her chair up on its back legs.

Marianne stared out the window, and said, “What is it that you’re looking for, really?” Tracy stuck out her jaw and blew out air, so that it made her bangs stand straight up for a second. “I want somebody who makes my life more... Exciting? But that’s not even it. I’m so sick of just doing the same shit every day, you know? Thinking the same shit every day, and doing the same shit at work, and then what? Put on my plastic bar face? Or sit at home, watching myself get old.” She sighed, and glanced over at the counter. There was no customer, and the barista was standing completely still, with her mouth slightly open, staring at nothing.

Marianne picked up her mug and looked in it. She asked, “Is that related?” She put her mug down, and looked up. Her gaze could sometimes be a little intense. Tracy said, “I mean...”

The barista snapped out of it and gave her a quizzical look. “Yeah, I think so. I mean, what else is there, really? You go about your day, and get your money so you can survive, and while you do it you have these thoughts and feelings that color your whole perception of the world, and your experience, but that stuff only matters if you have someone to share it with, you know? Cause otherwise, its just in your head, and doesn’t mean anything. Its like you’re singing in the shower; it doesn’t matter how well you sing unless you have somebody in there with you.” She paused, and finished her coffee. A little bit escaped from the side of her mouth, and she wiped it with her sleeve. A tall, handsome white guy walked in and ordered a double espresso.

“And what about the stories? Every great story is either a Love story or has a Love story close to the center of it. And what are our lives but stories? I want a good fucking story Marianne. I want passion and intensity, and beauty and

tenderness and anger... That's all I want out of life, really. And I want someone to be there, making it real! I'd rather have that, and die this time next year, than live for five hundred years just puttering along on my own, singing in the shower, maybe hooking up with some lawyer here, some financier there... It's just not worth it. I take Juliet over Emily Dickinson, any day of the week. And I mean, if we're being really real, if you live forever on the margins, it says something about what you're really worth, on the human level. When you cut through the bullshit and get to the cold, hard fact of the matter, it comes down to a question of whether you were worth it to anyone. Worth them taking the time out of their day, out of their *life* for you. If you are, if you have that knowledge, then you have the only thing that really matters. Then if you die, that's fine. But on the flipside, if you don't then it doesn't fucking matter what else has gone on in your life, cause the only thing that matters is absent."

She tipped her chair back, and rested her head against the wall. Marianne said, "If you were coming in the fall, I'd brush the summer by..." There was a bus stop outside the window, and a crowd of people had gathered there. There was a group of college girls talking animatedly, and gesticulating with big glossy paper bags. They looked like a TV commercial with the volume all the way down. Everybody else was just standing there, staring at their shoes or craning their neck down the street. Marianne picked up her mug and looked in it again. She sighed deeply and said, "This coffee sucks."

Tracy was irritated. "You know what I'm saying, though?" Marianne bit her lip. "I think so. I don't know whether I fully agree though. But then again..." She smiled in a way that looked more like a grimace. The college girls outside had stopped talking, and were stone-facing a black homeless guy.

"Even Jesus had Mary Magdalene." Said Tracy. "And all those nuns." She smiled. Marianne smiled too. "Yeah, I guess so. I don't deny the importance of what you're worried about. But it'll happen. And in the meantime, there's other aspects of life to be enjoyed. When's the last time you went to the beach?"

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As a rule, Tracy did not sleep. Instead, she made art. Her sitting room was full of half-completed projects. There was a cycle of clay statues in which a goblin climbed out of a fat woman's chest and devoured her. She had placed them in strategic locations so that the average newcomer's natural path through the apartment would follow the cycle. The first one was on the little table under which you were supposed to leave your shoes, the last on top of the toilet. On the wall over the

couch there was a painting in which tall, slender women made of yellowed newspaper stood in attitudes of dance on a plateau, over a valley that burned.

The night after she talked to Marianne for the last time, she started a new project. She took the sheet off her bed and shined a blacklight on it, so that all the stains of the past five years in the city glowed. Then she took gray and black and dark brown, and pale greenish-brown, and dark yellow and sticky, arterial purple paint, and colored in the stains. When she was done, it was 5 and she went out onto the balcony for a cigarette.

The sky was slowly brightening from light-pollution lavender to smoked-salmon. She lived in a tall building and could see an old man doing tai chi on the roof opposite. The rooms with lighted windows were the same ones that always had lights on at 5. She inhaled and the smoke tasted good. She could feel the nicotine in the pockets of sensitivity behind her eyes.

She felt innerved, and powerful, and utterly alone, looking down at the abandoned streets, with smoke coiling up from her mouth to the sky, and paint all over her hands and face. “This is my time,” she thought. Then she went in and passed out. She was awakened two hours later, by the ringing of the phone.

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Marianne was found in Chinatown, with her feet sticking out of a dumpster. She had been hit really, really hard with something really, really heavy. The side of her head was completely smashed. Tracy walked in, said, “That’s her,” and fainted.

Upon investigation, it was found that Marianne had been a member of christianmingle.com for the last 3 months. Christianmingle is a dating website for committed Christians. Their slogan is “find God’s match for you. TM” During her membership, she had used the service to connect with at least 7 males between the ages of 18 and 28. After her conversation with Tracy in the Coffee shop, she had an appointment to meet up with username *jesusFreak69* in an Italian place on Broadway. The waiter there remembered them because they kept on ordering more wine. He said the guy was tall, handsome and white, and that they left together. The last call received on Marianne’s phone was from a pre-pay, which had since been used up.

There was a big story about it in the Times. They used Marianne’s profile picture from the website. Tracy cut out

the article, and put it on her desk.

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Scott was so ridiculously good-looking.

,Sorry,

Its funny, you know, how when you stop hooking up with someone you start talking about them like they're dead. He still is, to my knowledge, ridiculously good looking. He's tall and white, with hair and eyes and all that jazz. He used to stand looking out the big window at his apartment late at night, wearing just his towel, and the light from the street would come up and set him in a kind of backlit relief. He was really built, you know what I'm saying? He would stand there looking out at the city, like he was its guardian angel or something.

I called that window his batman window in my head. I guess that tells you a thing or two about me...

That physical attraction is the first thing I think about... He was just so there, like bam, here I am. I don't even know how much more there was, its impossible to tell. I have a problem where I conflate sexual attraction with actual interest. He was into Bukowski and Oscar Wilde. And Stevie Ray Vaughan, he thought Stevie ray Vaughan was the shit. He had a signed sunburst guitar that he never really played cause it was mounted in a glass case on top of his fake fireplace. Ridiculous.

The first time he kissed me was in front of the batman window, listening to Stevie Ray Vaughan's version of Little Wing. We had sex in front of that window eight and a half times.

Yeah I kept track.

Don't judge me.

And he was sooooo Hot. I know that's bad

I hate that word. Hot? It reminds me of porn, which is gross. It reminds me of greasy teenage boys, masturbating.

Sometimes at bars Drunk guidos will come up and hit on you, and they'll drop the word "hot" like it's the sum of all things good in the universe, and its such a ridiculous turn-off. It's so callous, you know? It's like they've taken everything good and

beautiful and secret in the world, photoshopped it to comic-book proportions and plastered it on a forty-foot-high wall in the middle of union square.

It's stupid because all my girlfriends are like, "congrats, you got a hot lay. Be grateful, cause that's what everybody's looking for, and not everyone gets it."

But what the fuck are you really looking for?

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They were looking for a place in Chinatown called "Luna Park," and not finding it at all. Scott swung his Acura around corner after corner, cut through grungy alleys, and turned the wrong way up a one-way street, all in vain. "God damn it, he would say every couple minutes, as if on a timer. "God damn it."

Tracy was doing her makeup in the little mirror on the back of passenger-side sun-shield. The makeup was oily and gave her zits, and she hated it. Scott liked it. On their second date, he asked her why she wasn't wearing more makeup.

There was no Luna Park. They drove down literally every street in Chinatown, and then Scott had to check out a couple streets in the no-man's land between Chinatown and not-Chinatown before he would admit defeat. They passed ragged men pushing shopping carts full of trash. Metallica came on the radio, and Tracy changed it.

"God damn it," said Scott.

"Let's just go back to that first place," Tracy said. "That looked good." She shut her makeup case and shoved it in the glove compartment.

The place was packed with Chinese. They milled around on the sidewalk outside, smoking cigarettes and spitting in the street. Scott and Tracy walked in and were immediately shown to a table. The waiter brought them appetizers and tea, and Scott ordered a Heineken. "This place is loud," he observed. Tracy nodded. "These places are always so loud. You have to yell if you want to be heard."

"What?" said Scott. "huh?"

He winked. "It's kind of like in bars. In Bars, it's kind of like survival of the fittest. And by fittest, I mean loudest. It's a certain type of guy who's able to make conversation over a live band, and if you're not that type, you might as well go

home, you know?”

“Yeah,” said Tracy.

The waiter materialized and asked if they were ready to order. Scott told him yes, and ordered Beef Chow Mein. Tracy ordered Ma Po Tofu and asked for a bowl of white rice. The waiter made a really minimal scribble on his pad, and asked if there was anything else. Scott said “Yeah, where’s my Heineken?”

Tracy took off her coat, smoothed the front of her dress, and looked around. They were sitting next to a slightly foggy window, past which a line of misty headlights floated like will-o the wisps. All the surrounding tables were occupied by yelling Chinese except for one, where white men in suits were drinking and looking at their iPhones. The Chinese kept their dishes in the center of the table, and shared. Tracy thought about pointing that out, but decided it would be banal. Instead, she asked about Scott’s day. “It was good,” he said. He leaned back in his chair and put his hands behind his head. There were sweat-stains in his lavender-silk pits. “Closed some deals. Went to the gym. I read this really ridiculous article about robots. Do you know they make robots that can *feel*?”

The waiter came with their food and immediately disappeared again. “God damn it,” said Scott. “Yeah,” said Tracy. She ruefully eyed her huge plate of Tofu. “I forgot to ask them not to put MSG.” Scott furrowed his brow. “Send it back then.” He made as if to stand up. “I want my god damn beer.”

There was a tremendous crash, and a table in the middle of the room turned over. “Holy Shit,” breathed Scott. “Kung Fu!” Two young Chinese men were responsible for the disturbance. One was tall and dapper, with a feathered Anime` Haircut and high-tops. The other was fat and ugly with a stained T-shirt that said *Blood Sugar Sex Magick*. The latter had turned the table over in order to put his colleague in a guillotine headlock. They struggled and grunted and staggered around, knocking shit over.

Tracy was unimpressed. “That’s not Kung Fu,” she said. Scott didn’t respond, because he was so immersed in the action. His muscles twitched visibly whenever something particularly interesting or brutal happened. The fat guy was stronger, and clearly in control. He was also pretty clearly holding back, which Tracy thought was rather decent of him.

Scott muttered something that sounded like “smash his brain.”

“What are they fighting about?” Tracy wondered aloud. Scott ignored her.

“Scott?”

The thin man’s struggles became less spirited and eventually stopped completely. When the fat man was sure he was out, he dropped him. Then he bent down and pried a crumpled piece of paper out of the lifeless, bony hand. After squinting at it for a moment, he reached into his pocket and pulled out a badly smushed pair of wire-rimmed glasses. He put them on and looked again. With a grunt, he reached into his other pocket and pulled out a wad of bills.

“Scott,” said Tracy. “Hey Scott.”

The fat man counted out the sum, threw the money on the ground, picked up his companion and walked out. Scott stared out after them into the gathering dark.

“SCOTT!”

Scott turned his head slowly, as though in a dream. He looked distant and utterly disinterested. Tracy wilted under his gaze.

“What.” He said.

Tracy didn’t speak a word as they got into the car and drove away. It was getting late, and the city was coming alive. They drove under neon signboards that colored the sky, past bars and clubs where lines were beginning to form, and cars prowling the back streets, ready to pounce on any remotely parkable stretch of exposed curb they could find. “I need a drink,” said Scott. He looked strange, as though his mind were elsewhere. “Lets go home, have a nice drink or two and—“

“What the fuck was that that just happened?” Tracy interrupted. Scott was taken aback. “Pardon?”

“You just totally ignored me the whole time we were at dinner cause you were busy watching some fat Asian choke his dumbass friend out. Am I insufficiently interesting and important for you to tear your attention away from such a spectacle for even a second? Apparently, yes. Tonight my brother invited me out to celebrate his promotion, and I told him I couldn’t because I was going out with you, cause I never get to see you anymore. If only I had known that you would spend the entire time hypnotized by sweaty men, I would at this moment be rubbing shoulders with some of the most influential people in the City, but instead, I get to spend my evening being ignored and neglected, as per usual. And here I was, thinking we would have a nice night out, maybe actually talk for once, getting all excited like a fucking sixteen-year-old, dressing up, and for what? I feel so fucking stupid. Next time you want to watch some idiots fight, do it on pay-per-view, and save me the trouble.”

There was a pause. “Are you done?” He asked. She nodded. They drove past a crazy guy who was screaming and

waving a sign that said Wake Up.

Scott laughed softly. He reached over, and squeezed her leg, right above the knee.

“You’re so fucking sexy when you’re pissed off,” he said.

Later that night, she sat on Scott’s queen-sized bed, with the silk sheets, and listened to the cars hiss by on the street far below. “What are you thinking about?” asked Scott. He was sprawled out naked on his back next to her, tracing little circles on her thigh with his finger.

“I’m thinking about Marianne,” said Tracy.

Scott snorted.

“Who the hell is Marianne?”

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You have One unheard message!

First unheard message:

Um, Hi Tracy its Scott

I don't think I'm gonna be able to make it over for dinner tonight, something came up.

Um

Yeab.

Sorry

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She took the painted bottom-sheet and carried it up to the rooftop, with newspaper clippings and a big, sticky bottle of Mod Podge. The staircase looked and smelled like a public restroom. Up on the roof, there was nothing but AC vents and fake gravel. It was cold, with a bitter east wind. The sky overhead was pink and glowing, but it was smoky black out over the ocean. She sat on the sheet and began to plaster articles on top of a big vomit-green stain in the middle. She

plastered Hero-Dog Lost in Central Park over Celebrity Domestic Abuse Revealed and The Presidential Election. When her hands got too sticky to work, she spat on them and wiped them on her jeans.

She saved Marianne's article for last. Graduate Student Murdered in Internet Dating Scandal. She tucked it under the Mod Podge so it wouldn't blow away.

But it did anyway.

She lay on the sheet and tried to vomit, but she hadn't had anything but cigarettes. She tried to cry, more out of the aesthetic of the thing than anything else, but all she could do was lay there and shiver. Despair washed over her in waves. Oh Marianne, she thought.

If only I could see you one more time, if only to say goodbye. If only I had known that you were the one truly special person in my life, chosen by God to have your head bashed in during a sex-capade.

God damn it.

If only you had meant just a little bit more to me, then I might be able to make something great and true not just self-indulgent out of this horrible empty feeling inside of me.

If only.

Eventually, she wrapped herself up in the sheet, and fell asleep.

She dreamed that she was marooned on a tropical island with Scott. There were palm trees waving under an indigo sky, and a balmy breeze. They fucked in the sand for what felt like hours, but he kept on turning into her father, which filled her with despair. She left, and walked down the beach. There were footprints in the wet sand, and she followed them. The beach became rocky, and began to rise, until she was standing on the tallest sea-cliff she had ever seen. The sun was going down, and the stars were beginning to show. They looked close enough to touch, if only she were a little, tiny bit taller.

Marianne was standing on the cliff, watching the sun sink into the ocean. Tracy walked up and stood beside her. She did not speak, or turn her head. In the dying light, she looked sad and beautiful. Her hair was blowing in the wind; for some reason it was dark and curly. Tracy reached out, and stroked it. Her fingers came back bloody.

She jolted awake, and saw that she had drooled all over a big brown paint-stain, and a corner of newspaper.

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When I was a little girl, I was really into Star Wars. The re-issue came out when I was in third grade, and all of my friends were boys...

I used to make them say 'I love you' to me all the time so I could say 'I know.'

We used to play Death Star in the Junkyard by my house. The boys had to rotate being Han and Luke, but since I was the only Girl, I always had to be Leia.

That was ok.

The boys always wanted to save me from my prison cell. Little kids don't sweat originality, I guess. I remember one time, we found an old refrigerator in the junkyard, and I climbed in there with the spiders...yeah. I ran out of air pretty quick. And I couldn't get out, you know, cause it was sealed? I freaked the FUCK out.

Fortunately, Luke came quickly. I think some of the stormtroopers convinced him to hurry on up, so that they would get a turn to be heroes.

They cracked the fridge right as I was just passing out. I have this memory of the light pouring into my oxygen-starved brain, and the hero of the moment's big gap-toothed grin...materializing... I guess I should have been pissed, but I was more just scared and relieved. I felt like I had really been rescued.

They made me promise not to tell, and I totally did anyway. Not that it mattered.

I can't remember if I was claustrophobic before that. That kid, though? The one who was Luke? First guy I *dated* dated in high school. Guess I thought he could save me from my life. I didn't have a really happy home, you know?

Turns out he was a total dick.

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She sat on top of her comforter and stared at website after website, absorbing nothing. The computer resting on her thighs got so hot that she probably lost a goodly number of ova to radiation, but she didn't care. Her brain was eroded from

repetitive motion. Her hands were like giant white spiders, playing dance-dance revolution on the keyboard.

She rolled a cigarette without looking and lit up. Her bed was right next to the window, which was open. Outside was damp; the sky was gray and her smoke was gray, and the concrete underlying all things in her world was saturated with gray moisture that stained it slightly darker gray than its usual gray. People walking on the street below wore hats and overcoats, and did no look up.

She threw her butt out the window and looked back at her computer screen. It said

Find local singles looking for SEX tonight!

She shut it, and stood up. Her head ached from staring at the screen, and her back hurt for no reason.

She opened her closet. Here were dresses, useless in the cold. Here were sweaters. She pulled one on. Herringbone overcoat, knee length. Sock hat, gray. She owned many scarves, which she kept in a pile on the floor. She grabbed a handful, and wrapped it around her neck.

Once she was finished dressing, she began to search for her keys, then her wallet. She was not a purse girl. She called her phone from Skype and it rang from under a pile of newspaper clippings on her desk. She picked it up, and her heart skipped a beat at the sight of a missed call. She jammed the phone into her neck and called voicemail.

It was her mother.

She heaved a great sigh, and went to find her shoes.

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She walked down the street and played out scenarios in her head. They went like this:

1: She arrives at his uptown flat and finds the door unlocked. Instinctively, she creeps up the entry stairs in silence. She peeks through the parlor door. He is naked on the floor, with his back to her and his front immersed in a strange, beautiful woman. The place smells of flowers and damp decay. For a moment the stranger meets Her gaze over His sweaty, oblivious shoulder. Then the dark lashes close, tangled limbs tighten, and She backs away backs away silently, into emptiness.

2: She arrives at his uptown flat and he is sitting on the porch, blowing smoke rings through his new ray-bans. The two face each other in a wash of slanty gold sunbeams from the landward skyline. He cocks his head and says

“I didn’t think you were coming”

She makes duck face.

“Today? Or ever?”

He shrugs, and blows a ring.

She says, “you would make a liar of me, who said I could not stay away.”

She says, “I have always relied on the kindness of others to validate my existence”

Their shadows lengthen into slanted giants on the pavement. They tear at each other with shadow-talons when nobody is looking.

She says, “you have become more than just another hot body, to me.”

He blows a smoke ring, and says

“I have always relied on the blindness of others to make me a leader”

They burst out laughing, and in the city a chorus of sirens burst into song.

3: They sit together on a California pier, looking out at the ocean. The sun rides low and lazy, heavy with fire. She nestles her head in the crook of his neck, and trade winds blow scents down from the waterfront: frying oil from pizza joints,

reefer from nearby knots of nubile youngsters. Salt-offal from leathery old men, still fishin'.

Beneath their feet, waves spend themselves against concrete pylons. They make a rhythm, like breathing.

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The Subway was packed with hot bodies, and the windows were all steamed up. She stood with her back to the wall and an old Greek lady crammed into her chest. The lady talked a lot. She had seen American Idol. Her husband was in the Veteran's Hospital, dying of cancer.

It was raining uptown, and She was soaked and shivering by the time she arrived at His building. She rang three times before there was an answer.

"Hello?"

"Hello!"

"What?"

"HELLO!"

She had to yell to distinguish herself from the rain.

"IT'S TRACY!!"

"Hi Tracy"

"CAN I COME UP?"

The speaker was silent. Car horns honked like wild geese, and the rain made a sound like chains being dragged through the streets.

“This is over, isn’t it?”