Gallery

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Sexual politics, mythology and obsession with the female rear collide in this pornographic fable.

http://www.lushstories.com/stories/supernatural/gallery.aspx

I slept fitfully, mind full of images, half-formed dreams mixed with memories. I knew nothing of what lay beneath the city streets, so I tried not to fear it. But the faces stalked the bulkheads of my mind, harshly exposed and fuzzy, interspersed with abrupt stabs of static, as they had appeared on the television screen.

My watch read just before seven when Alison gently stirred me. I came to and looked into her soft features, her chocolate-drop eyes and skin the colour of lightly caramelised sugar. It registered as strange that at this early hour she looked spring-fresh and meticulously groomed, as though she had already been awake for a time. I saw she had teased out her thick, black mane and tied it up, applied her makeup in the way that I liked best and she smelled of lilies and expensive, hard to come-by shampoo rather than coal tar.

She slunk, on all fours, cat-like up the bed and sat astride me. I gathered her up in my hands, running my fingers over her warm, yielding flesh. She wore a sheer black negligée, fastened with a single button beneath her breasts, advertising the womanly swell of her belly. Below her, I felt the clingy, hot nylon of her knicker gusset as it pressed against my abdomen. She moved in little circling motions, making her intentions unmistakable.

“You look beautiful,” I said, still fuzzy from sleep, blindsided by being woken in this way, “truly amazing.”

She shrugged, girlishly deflecting the comment, “I wanted to look my best for you; wanted you to remember this.”

Her words hung in the air momentarily until she chased them away, slipping the light cotton sheet off me so that the cool, clay-smelling air caressed my naked body. I liked the morning the best, before the street noise escalated, before the sun’s inevitable rise over the rotting masonry sent the temperature soaring and drove us into the shadows.

She wrapped her palm around the shaft of my cock, never taking her placid, gaze off me, watching and smiling primly as the blood began to flow, stiffening it beneath her grasp. I drank in her pretty, gentle features, the upturn of her nose, her heart-shaped face, down over her heavy, full tits and voluptuous curves. My mind was already filling with recollections of the base sexual acts that she would enthusiastically indulge me in. Most of all, I just wanted to experience her physically, one last time.

My fingers sought out the warm, damp material between her thighs and peeled it slowly to one side as she stuck her bum out and upwards, presenting her exposed crotch to the morning. I paused, enjoying the anticipation, before allowing the index and middle finger of my left hand to slip into her wet pussy, my right, locating her ass and fingering its tight rim. I worked on her acceptance, slipping into her bum hole, discovering her already lubricated and ready to play.

“You were expecting to do dirty things this morning?” I asked her quietly as the world dropped away leaving us in our own glorious microcosm.

She nodded, long dark eyelashes fluttering sensually closed, “do anything,” she murmured, “anything you want with me.”

“I need to fuck you,” I told her amid the hypnotic rhythm of her tugging at my cock, afraid of the moment evaporating into my climax, before I had even been inside her.

“I think, today, I really deserve it in the ass,” she purred, her prim, little voice managing to make the statement sound romantic.

“You sure you want to go straight to that?”

She nodded, biting her lip, “come on, you’re deep in there already. I’m sure I could stretch a little more for you.”

I had not expected her to demand to go on top. Her eyes never left mine as she squatted in beautifully slow time, center-stage and vulnerable as the first hazy rays of the sun cut through the open window, setting her skin aflame with a golden hue. I kneaded the heavy flesh of her tits as she coyly attempted to align the head of my cock with her back door, marveling at how much she seemed to draw from the act of submission. It was a willing relinquishment of her feminine power, the degrading of herself both as a gesture of love and an expression of lust.

As the act drew tantalizingly close. I held still, my rock hard cock supported in my fist, watching her guide its blood-darkened, tip between her buttocks, locating me. Her thighs trembling as she lowered

herself down, knowing that in moments her muscles would falter and gravity would usher in her sodomy.

Then it was happening. The burning, maddening euphoria of penetration dawned, wide and bright like the new morning as she opened around me. In its grip, I resisted the urge to push upwards, driving myself into her before she was ready. She tugged at her hair, ran her shapely hands with their aubergine painted nails across her belly leaving darkened scratches, her breathing fast and shallow as she took me inside. She began to fuck; slowly at first as gasps of pain, tossed high on waves of intense sensation escaped her lips. Her tits heaved appealingly as she struggled to control me. The pace, quickened, most of my length now sliding greasily, into her ass before it's taught and slippery flesh was vulgarly extruded back out of her.

"Fuck!" I exclaimed, consideration for my Wife jostling with the animalistic urge to simply possess her, "go easy, you don't have to take it that hard."

"No," she breathed, reclining, bracing her arms against the bed and tilting her head back so I could watch each thrust in graphic detail "I do. I'm yours. Just fuck the shit out of me."

Alison didn't ask me if I was going to cum. She saw it burst in my eyes as my back arched and an animalistic growl escaped my clenched teeth. She pushed down onto me and stayed down as I shot my load inside her.

When she was sure it was over; sure she had performed her Wifely duties, slowly, tenderly she got off me, breathless and smarting from her sexual martyrdom. She smiled sweetly at me, the side of her face pressed against the sheets, bottom raised once again, ever willing to please, "want to see what you've done to me, dirty boy?"

I knew what she meant. We had been here before on rare occasions past, out of control, drunk on each other's bodies, depraved with desire.

I ran my tongue up over the contours of her pussy, between her buttocks and around the engorged, splayed O of her bum hole, tasting my sweat and my ejaculation on her skin, enjoying her scent. She was already beginning to swallow closed, my load threatening to spill back out.

"Don't think I can hold onto this much longer," she teased, knowing the spectacle that I was hoping for.

I suddenly became aware that our time having sex in our meager apartment, on this bed were drawing to a close. At least our last act together would be marked by its carnality.

A succession of obscene squelches marked her relinquishment of the cum I had squirted deep into her. Hungrily, I ran my tongue around her gaping hole, lapping the cocktail of our juices, dipping inside and tenderly fucking her with my tongue as she closed back up around me.

“You’re such a slut,” I told her affectionately, slapping her glistening rump, placing my hands around her slim waist in a lovingly possessive gesture.

“Something nasty to remember me by,” she said and then stopped dead, realising how the statement might have sounded and how I might have taken it.

Silence descended awkwardly on the room.

“Alison,” I began, “after I go, there may come a time when you want to…”

“No,” she cut me off, “I know what you’re going to say and I’m not going to listen to it.”

I persisted, “you’re young. You can’t throw the rest of your life away on a memory.”

“*We’re* young. I’m not throwing anything away. Let’s get dressed. They’ll be here soon.”

The streets were humid and unpleasant, sweltering amid a moist, grey shroud that clung to everything. Roiling banks of fog enrobed the lower reaches of the crooked buildings and cleaved skyscrapers with their steel bones showing beneath concrete skin. High in the sky, the sun rode towards the apex of its climb.

I felt the crowd before I saw it, bristling with excitement, their voices ascending in the stifling air. As I emerged, the noise crested, broke and engulfed me. By my right side a stony-faced Officer tightened his grip on my bicep. To my left, another pressed the muzzle of his firearm gently against my ribs, reminding that, while I was a free man, that status came with certain provisos.

I walked stiffly through the throng, eyes front, refusing to turn my head and engage with the baying apparitions in my peripheral vision with their wide, staring eyes and gaping mouths. All round me they cheered, cried, cursed and shouted but mostly, they probably just thanked the heavens that it was me and not them.

Beyond the thronging bodies was a clearing and then the imposing mountain of rock, beneath which the station was buried. I saw Alison, her eyes pregnant with tears, her face a mask of hopelessness. Beside her stood The Preacher with his dirty white tunic and wild, unkempt hair.

“These are the days of our very nightmares,” he bellowed at the thronging bodies, clutching a sheaf of yellowed papers to his chest “when we are close to the abyss, we see nightmares made flesh. We see and we believe!” His glassy, mad stare descended upon me and he jabbed a ragged fingernail in my direction, “you too will believe,” he hissed.

His words with their empty threats and flimsy, half-baked rituals of sacrifice and redemption recessed and became nothing more than a distant, indistinct noise amid a million others, just as insignificant. After all, what did his rants mean, really? What help had they been to the souls who had gone before me?

The city’s largest railway station had, I had read, once been a grand affair; lined with heavy pillars and floored with granite and marble. It had long since collapsed beneath the deluge of stone and the once imposing entrance was now no more than a jagged, ominous gash. It loomed to greet me now as the crowd, The Preacher and the vast crags of the buildings fell away. As I crossed the threshold, the last thing I saw was Alison, her clenched fist clamped against her lips, brow creased. In a pained, mournful gesture, she reached out towards me as if trying to draw me back into her bosom.

Then, she too was gone.

Inside, the once imposing foyer opened up before my straining eyes as I moved across it, the footfalls of my boots echoing off the distant walls and high, domed ceiling. I made my way down a long-dormant escalator, choked by fallen masonry and other debris. One level down the air was musty and cooler and I passed ghost-like through a tiled tunnel pocked with crumbling pillars and faded advertisements for products that no longer existed. To my intense relief, there was still light, courtesy of a smattering of bulbs that had been strung on cables from the roof. Many of them had blown, but there were enough to bathe the place in a low orange glow.

Another, smaller flight of steps took me further downward onto an open plan concourse that extended up to one of the old platforms. With the exception of the tube-like tunnel, through which the trains once passed, all the exits from the place had been blocked by masonry or welded shut. I looked down, following the rusty metal tracks into the gaping black maw of the tunnel. Slowly, horribly, the realisation dawned that it was my only way of progressing. That’s where I was expected to go.

I dropped down and walked towards my fate. As I passed into the darkness, the security of the platform recessed behind me with terrifying speed, becoming no more than a surreal rectangle of light in the distance.

Utter blackness dropped like a shroud. My ears strained against the deafening silence, eyes searching, clinging onto the fantasy that they might at any minute lock onto a point of reference. I shuffled forward, losing count of how much ground I had covered and in which direction. Navigation was via the toe of my boot, crying out in frustration as I stumbled across a diverging track, sending me spilling head first into the musty gravel.

I lay panting in the stifling darkness, cursing my stupidity and listening for the sound of anyone who might have been alerted to my presence. But the place was silent; still and tomblike.

By the time I had composed myself, I found I had lost my bearings to the point where it was difficult to even distinguish forward from backward, up from down. I had expected to die down here, but I had not expected to run out of options so fast.

My little knife, secreted at the rear of my belt flashed into my mind for a moment and I imagined myself crouched in the dark tunnel, opening up an artery and bleeding out onto the gravel, weak, afraid and defeated. Then, in the lightless, choking void, I saw Alison wearing her handmade ivory wedding gown, her face locked in a frown of concern. She shook her head.

“Keep alive” she said, “just keep alive,” her voice resonated in the air before fading into nothing, leaving me alone once again.

Pushing such thoughts from my mind, suppressing the crippling dread of what lay in wait out there in the darkness. I rolled silently onto my feet and continued what I hoped was forwards.

From somewhere far down the tunnel, came the merest ghost of a breeze. It cooled the sweat that coated my skin and dripped down my face, reinvigorating my senses. I focused on it, closed my useless eyes and allowed my body to divine its direction.

I was rewarded for my endeavour, as in the distance I caught sight of a faint orange glow. When I moved closer I saw that it was illuminating another platform with an archway beyond. Silent and alert, I made for it.

Something wasn’t right. Slowing up, I crouched low, flanking the platform from the safety of the dark, trying to get a look at what lay beyond the archway. The sporadic, flickering lighting threw bizarre, claw-like shadows along the arched ceiling, playing tricks with my imagination. The feeling of impending danger coiled round me, compressing my ribcage. Then, in an instant, I saw him.

He stood motionless beneath an opaque, fluttering strip light, most likely listening, watching, just like me.

“Hey,” I tried to sound as neutral and non-threatening as possible.

So, there were others still alive down here. I had always believed as much. The television didn’t broadcast every time a Sacrifice was bundled into the undisclosed horrors of the station, but twice in the last fortnight, it had.

I edged closer to him, beginning to pick out more detail. He was heavily built and imposing, dressed from head to foot in grey fatigues that glinted oddly in the queasily pulsing light.

“Hey, are you a Sacrifice?” My voice sounded dumb and scared as it cut through the white noise of silence, reverberating off the stone walls and dissipating down the tunnel.

He didn’t respond to my voice, didn’t move a muscle. I crept closer still and then, suddenly, I recognised him.

Three weeks ago Alison and I had sat in the canteen on our block, watching the little black and white television as a tough, hardened-looking man in combat fatigues had been bundled into the station. He had had no tearful loved ones, had said nothing to the crowds, nothing to the wild eyed Preacher as he ranted and raved. He had merely eyed him with icy contempt then stepped into the dark tomb beyond.

“If anyone is going to survive The Sacrifice, it’ll be him,” Alison had said.

“Surely someone has to make it eventually,” I had concurred grimly.

Now, as I drew to within a few meters, here he was standing cold and motionless, his blank eyes staring at nothing, his entire body, from top to toe bathed in a glistening grey hue.

“Hey,” I tried once more, waving a hand in front of his face.

Nothing. He was completely inert.

I reached out and gently touched the side of his lined, hawkish features and recoiled in surprise.

Stone. It was no man, but a statue, made of smooth grey stone, flecked with a quartz-like material that glinted in the light.

I looked beyond the eerie, lifelike carving. What I had initially taken as rubble was more than that. I

identified a stone arm, sheared off at the elbow. Nearby, several of its fingers still stuck forlornly to the stone machine pistol it had been holding. Beyond that, a head, its one intact eye staring sightlessly into nothing, then another with part of its torso still intact, all carved from the same grey rock.

The noise behind me caused my heart to leap into my throat. Far too close for comfort, something had stirred in the darkness. There came a metallic clank, then a sound like a heavy sack being dragged across the ground. Someone was closing in behind me.

Instinct taking over, I darted past the statue, dodging its shattered companions, hurling myself blindly down a side tunnel before promptly slamming against a rusty steel door with a loud crash. Desperately, I groped for the handle and turned it, sure that it would be locked. As I brought my shoulder to bear, it haltingly ground open, just enough to allow a body to slip through. Behind me spectral, indistinct sounds played on the periphery of my hearing. Whoever it was would have no doubt as to my direction of travel.

I found myself in a rough-hewn, dimly lit chamber, passable via a wooden gantry. The sound of dripping water emanated from below. I darted forwards, foolishly unprepared for how slippery it would be. In an instant, my feet went out from under me and I was slammed against the wet surface, bolts of pain exploding up through my arms. I lay there in agonized silence, unsure of how badly I was hurt.

Across the wooden gantry I could see a way out of the chamber. It was another steel door cut into the rock, lying ajar. Painfully I began to drag myself towards it, terrified to look behind. Beneath me the wooden boards felt soft and malleable; rotten from years of being soaked. No sooner had I appraised just what a poor state they were in then there came a low, elemental crack followed by the sound of wood splintering. I braced myself, trying to splay my limbs, best I could. Time slowed sickeningly, underscored by an abrupt bang.

Then, I was falling. The sucking blackness beneath spread its arms and reached up to pull me down.

The grip around my wrist was sudden and vice-like; fingers that dug hard into my flesh and held on tight.

A voice hissed out of the gloom, “pull yourself up, I can’t hold onto you for long.”

My boot found a rocky outcrop in the void beneath. I kicked off it, grabbing at the splintered walkway and hauled myself up and out, collapsing in a heap beside my rescuer.

Painfully, I rolled over and found myself looking into the face of a waifish, elfin woman, about my age. She drank in my features fleetingly, then quickly looked away.

“We won’t have long,” she said, “follow me.”

“Where to?” I called after her.

She looked over her shoulder, “my place,” she said without further explanation.

I watched her go, following at a cautious distance. She was dressed like a woman from the street: leopard print leggings, tight enough to show the outline of her knickers, her midriff exposed by a light blue crop top. Her hair, highlighted with brassy shades of blonde and stark streaks of auburn, was gathered at her crown in a clip, save for a few tumbling tresses that fell about her face. She looked grubby and, like me, she was bathed in perspiration.

I followed her into a succession of dark tunnels and finally a narrow, stifling crawlspace. I tried to ignore the smell of her body in the confined space, tried not to look at the neat, petite curve of her bum, squeezed into the sweat-moistened nylon as she hauled herself through the stainless steel tube and dropped down into the room beyond.

“My place,” she announced finally, throwing herself down on a rickety wooden chair, gesturing to the disparate items in the room, “you like?” she quipped without looking at me.

The place had been some kind of office once. Among the assorted detritus was a rusty filing cabinet, a desk, even a grimy-looking mattress in the corner of the room. The one entrance had, long ago, been welded shut with plate steel. She had amassed water too and I drank until I could hold no more.

“How long have you been down here,” I said finally, looking round at her make shift living arrangements.

“It’s getting hard to say.”

“What happens to all the Sacrifices, where are they?” I pressed.

“They die,” her answers were clipped, slightly evasive.

“How?”

“Well, I have a theory, but I don’t know exactly how it happens,” she said shifting her weight awkwardly from foot to foot, “I just stay hidden.”

“Come on,” I said, “everyone knows the game. You get selected, you get thrown down here and you never come out. We are sacrificed. You must know what to?”

Her face hardened at this as if the memories were causing her physical discomfort, “it’s… a thing, I don’t know; I haven’t seen it up close.” she said, “but no one that does lives.”

I dismissed the chill that her words sent through me. I had seen enough of the world to fear men and not myths and monsters. I had heard the speculation, the tall tales, the hysteria on the streets but I resolutely refused to entertain concepts beyond what I could see and touch. For all I knew, this was some kind of elaborate game of which she was a part.

“Where did you get all this junk?” I asked; changing tack and indicating to the collection of scrap and forage piled around the room in an attempt to lighten the tone.

“It’s not junk,” she said testily and fished something from the corner of the room, holding it up.

“What the hell is that for?” I asked, looking at the dustbin-sized disk of reflective convex material.

“I pulled it off one of the walls near the entrance. I use it to see round corners,” she said briefly flashing a wry, appealing smile that showed the merest edges of her sense of humour, “could double as a fancy shield, I guess.”

“You’re not exactly dressed for The Sacrifice,” I said, unable to stop myself from eyeing her provocative attire as she bent over to replace the mirrored disk safely behind her chair.

“Well, I’m sorry, I don’t have much in the way of combat gear at home,” she said tartly, “not much call for that in my line of work.”

“What line are you in?” I pried, intrigued by her, manner, her incongruous appearance and her apparent ability to survive where many, many others could not.

“I was a dancer,” she said.

I looked her over. She had the petite, firm physique to bear out that claim but her lower back, inner forearms and cleavage were marked with the kind of sexually explicit tattoos favoured by performers, escorts, gang-bangers and girls who appeared on grainy fuck-reels for a living.

I became conscious that it was my turn to feel her eyes wander over my body. The little room suddenly seemed, hotter and more humid than ever.

“You, on the other hand look like the kind of guy, who may have the odd item of combat clothing in his wardrobe.”

I tried to overlook the fact that her fingers brushed along my forearm as she spoke.

“There’s not much flab on you, is there? Were you a soldier?” She asked fixing her gaze on a spot in the center of my chest.

I laughed, “if you’re hoping I’m some commando who is going to get you out of this place, then you saved the wrong guy. I was a conscript. I did two tours as a bullet catcher on the Eastern Approaches. That was more than enough. They gave me a one bedroomed apartment in a crumbling high rise and let me keep the clothes on my back. I’m a no one.”

She smiled at my outburst, her fingertips tracing a gentle, meandering line from my throat to the point where my chest was covered by the black canvas shirt I had donned that morning, “I’m not looking for anything like that.”

“Then what are you looking for?”

“Just this: we’re both dead anyway,” she said quietly, “if you had the choice, wouldn’t you choose to die having recently been… intimate with someone?”

My mind turned to Alison, searching the recesses of my consciousness for her. She seemed further away from me now; little more than an indistinct figure in the middle distance.

“I did,” I said defensively, “my Wife.”

“Hey, it’s okay. I left someone up there too,” her voice was low, honeyed, persuasive, “but these are our last hours. Why waste them?”

Her hand was inside my shirt now, fingering my ribs and the scar tissue just above my right nipple, “unless that is, you don’t want me that way?”

Internally, I weakened, lost ground and allowed myself to touch the side of her face. For the first time she looked directly into my eyes; her gaze emerald green, pointed, intense. She was beautiful. Her trappings; the tattoos, the piercings and cheap, trashy attire had her tarred, feathered and chained to our regressing, decaying civilisation, but she was beautiful none the less. Something unspoken passed between us causing a cacophony of graphic images to flash before my eyes. I saw our

desperate, filthy fucking, right there amid the grime and dereliction of this two-hundred mile mausoleum.

I clutched for memories of my Wife, desperate to stop whatever was happening. But when I searched for her face, I found I could no longer see it. Perhaps she had abandoned me to my fate. A moment later, I sought her name and found that it too had left me.

“My name is Cara,” she whispered, her fingers deftly unzipped my jeans and sliding my belt buckle free of its keeper.

“What are you doing, Cara?”

“What does it look like?” Her breath was warm against the side of my face, “I’ve felt your eyes on me, more than once” she whispered, “tell me, did you enjoy looking at my ass in the crawlspace?”

“Yes,” I was reciprocating now, my hands on her hips, drawing her body against mine.

“I bet you’d like to know what it tastes like.”

I felt her cool, slender hand around my dick as she uncoiled it from my shorts and slowly began to massage it out, “you know it.”

“Uh-huh,” she cooed softly, tracing my jawline with the fingertips of her free hand, “so, we’re going to have sex, right here in this dirty little room. You’re going to treat me like the slut I am and we’re just going to fuck all the fear away, okay?”

“Yeah,” I said, dumbly, resting my forehead against hers, staring rapt into the emerald kaleidoscope of her eyes, falling down the glinting mineral tunnel into her soul.

She went down on me then, her smooth lips suckling softly at the head of my cock, mouth gradually opening around it, using her tongue to cup its underside, allowing me to slowly fill her up.

“You’re good,” I said, tilting my head back and closing my eyes.

“Not exactly my first time,” she said smiling up at me.

“There was me, thinking you were a virgin,” I said as the room began to spin.

She laughed. Then, I was back in her mouth as she hungrily jerked me off, her grip wandering

downwards, closing around my balls, insinuating herself between my thighs. I leaned into her, aiding her access, steadying myself against the table as her finger pried insistently between my buttocks, gradually pushing into my ass hole.

“Thought you might like to get fucked a little bit too,” she said wickedly as she found acceptance, slid knuckle deep, fucking me with one hand, masturbating me expertly with the other.

“Suck it,” I said, manhandling my length back into her willing mouth; harder this time, fucking her, encouraging her submission until, unable to manage more, she pushed back against me.

“Spit on me,” she said once I let her up for air, her voice breathless, desperate.

I obliged, in her open mouth, then again on her exposed tit as she tore down the front of her top, exposing herself, massaging my saliva into her nipple, giggling crazily at the charade.

“I need to fuck you,” I gasped, pushing her off me, bundling her onto the dirty, stained mattress.

Roughly, I wrapped a handful of her top around my fist, the cheap material splitting and ripping beneath my grip, haltering her in place. With my other hand I yanked the tight, garishly printed leggings down over her butt, exposing her lithe flanks. She responded, sliding her knees as far apart as her bunched garments would allow.

“Do you see my cunt?” She teased, pressing the tips of her fingers between her thighs, making it pout, smacking at it.

“You mean this little thing here?”

She swallowed my fingers easily; first two, then three. I began to work her over, coating myself in her thick, strong-smelling cream, occasionally stopping to lap the stuff off my hands then smear the resulting cocktail into her skin.

“More,” she goaded.

I offered four fingers, which she swallowed obligingly, her fuck tunnel, engorged, flowering and receptive even when I folded my thumb behind the rest of my digits and pushed hard against her, knuckle deep.

I withdrew, keeping hold of her torn top and wrapped my other forearm around her slim, tight abdomen, jerking her slender body off the ground, bringing her to bear, so her vacant, gaping cunt

was lined up with my cock.

She screamed defiantly as I rammed myself home, her interior easy, yielding, ready for sex after having had my fist inside her.

I fucked her as hard as I was physically able, barriers crashing down, everything hanging out. She farted shamelessly as I did her, unable to retain control of herself; writhing, spitting, swearing beneath my grasp. The ceremony of human nature dropped away and presently we were little more than two beasts, rutting uncontrollably in our own filth.

Before I could finish it, before I could impregnate her, she freed herself from her impalement and slammed her body against mine, knocking me backwards onto the mattress. She climbed astride, eyes wild, roughly shoving the swollen, hard flesh of my dick back inside her gushing hole, where she bucked and writhed, riding my crude, hard strokes.

Out of this broiling intensity, a strange calm breached and suddenly I found myself looking up at Cara, the hairs on the back of my neck rising and a chill settling over my chest. She looked down, darkly intense, skin slick, nipples erect as her pupils recessed into tiny pin pricks then appeared to invert, rematerialising as fiery coronas. Her hair looked wild and unkempt and as she tossed it. The more I looked, the more her locks appeared to undulate and move of their own whim, as if alive.

Time slowed and I drifted out of my body, out of the room, looking down on the dark, brick tunnels and the bizarrely accurate stone sculpture of my fellow Sacrifice. His blank, staring eyes gazed into me as if trying to impart something. Then, crashing through the walls of my rational, stubborn mind, it finally made sense. It wasn’t merely a statue. It was him. Something had turned him to stone.

In mute, disembodied horror, I retraced my steps; revisited the trail of errors that had led me to this place. The faces of my fellow Sacrifices; tough hardened men and women who had died irrespective of their skill and determination, my clumsy flight into the waiting arms of a street-girl who seemed able to survive against all reasonable odds. Even now, she was in sufficiently sure of herself to be having frivolous sex with a stranger on the floor, while nameless death allegedly lurked around every corner.

Of course she didn’t fear the death. She was the death.

In a split second I was back in the room, pinned beneath Cara. Her eyes were two burning voids now and her fingernails on my skin felt more like talons. She tilted her head back and emitted the harsh primal roar of some carnivorous beast that chilled the blood in my veins. Then, I glanced down at my hand and, in rising terror, saw that my skin was changing, a strange grey pallor welling up from within; turning me into stone, just like she had the others.

Mindless fear, took control of me. I heaved against her, sending her sprawling on the filthy mattress, rolling to my feet and crashing across the room, obliterating a chair and falling heavily against the table as I did so.

The air was pierced by an angered, shrill sound and I heard her limbs thrashing against the walls. They sounded heavy and leathery, no longer like human appendages but the slender darting bodies of serpents.

I launched at the hatch to the crawlspace, tearing it clean off the wall, throwing myself inside in a desperate bid to propel my body out before she could grab me.

Slithering through it like greased lightning I fell heavily onto the floor beyond. Then I ran, mercifully swallowed by the darkness, as the inhuman shrieks and flailing, scrabbling sounds faded behind me. Chest heaving, fighting back great bitter, horrified sobs, I kept pushing, fast as I dared, trying to get as far away from Cara as I could.

Sure I was far enough clear, I allowed myself to slow and catch my breath. Beneath my feet, the rail tracks gave way to a concrete ramp leading onto yet another platform. I followed it. Ahead, in the ominous, glowing light was another statue, his cold eyes staring right at me. I scanned the shadows and picked out another, then another. I counted ten in all. Men and women locked in final desperate poses as they had attempted, too late, to avert their eyes from Cara’s gaze. Some were sprawled out on the ground, arms raised in a vain attempt to shield their eyes, others held bludgeons aloft, or pointed firearms, one even kneeled, head bowed as though praying to some ambivalent god.

At the head of the platform I could see brighter light spilling out of a stairwell leading upwards. What I didn’t see was the strange, elongated figure gliding through the shadows among the statues, picking its way towards me. Over my guttural, rasping breaths, neither did I hear the sound of something dense and leathery being dragged along the concrete, flexing, coiling lovingly around the cold, hard bodies of its victims.

The hand which shot out and grabbed me round the throat was barely that. It was sinewy, cold and impossibly strong, its skin almost white and marbled by distended veins of blue and green. In an instant it compressed my windpipe and, as my vision faded, I caught a fleeting glimpse of its face. The set of its features were cruel and angular, its jaw, vaguely human in form but freakishly extended so as to give the appearance of mandibles. Beneath the deeply lined, evilly slanted brow were piercing eyes that tracked and darted with crazed intensity, seeking to lock onto me. It emitted a harsh hiss of frustration as my lids lolled closed, unconsciousness momentarily engulfing me and denying it another figurine in its gallery.

In the velvet recesses of oblivion, I was distantly aware of my skull slamming against the concrete, faintly disturbed by the warm blood soaking into my hair and the jolt as my shirt was torn clean from my body.

Consciousness drew woozily closer and confused pictures danced through my mind. I saw Alison and Cara sitting side by side, their faces mutely regarding me with enigmatic, mysterious smiles. They approached until I could hear the rhythmic, steady sound of their breathing next to my ear. Gradually, it heightened, took on a harsh metallic edge and then, as my eyes slowly opened onto the world, I realised that the breath I could feel belonged to neither Alison nor Cara.

Its face was next to my ear. The serpentine rattle reverberating off the walls and the musty, dank odor of its body filling my senses. It had a head full of thick, dark protrusions almost like dreadlocks and as it drew back from me, I watched them undulate and twist of their own accord. One of the larger protrusions disgorged itself from the heaving mass and lifted its dart-like head to regard me through tiny black eyes. I could see now that the creature itself was some perversion of the female species. It sat, bare-breasted atop me, it’s fat, scaly tail folded across my legs and its cold, gelatinous flesh pressed against my belly, anchoring me in place. It was smiling, a cruel, thin grimace of jubilation as its gaze skirted around mine, teasing. Then, when it was sure I was fully conscious, I felt its stare began to intensify, tugging at my soul, willing me to look directly into its eyes, willing me to condemn myself to an eternity in stone. As I began to lose the fight, a heavy, bone deep pain began to well up from inside. I felt my head turn of its own volition; turning to face my death.

“Hey!” the shrill, harsh yell reverberated down the tunnel.

The monster’s eyes widened, its attention momentarily drawn from me, causing the rising ache within to drop off immediately.

“Got something to show you, ugly fuck!”

Its head jerked round, a primal shriek of excitement emanating from its dark red lips at the sudden appearance of the one who had, until now, eluded it.

It was Cara standing defiant, holding something aloft. Dull light glinted off its surface and suddenly I recognised the big convex mirror she had shown me in her hideout.

“Do you see?” she screamed, eyes clamped tightly shut, offering up its own hideous reflection.

The thing shrieked again, but this time it sounded different; its gloating cry replaced by something

hesitant.

Then for a fleeting moment, I saw what it saw as its twisted, part-human, part-insect face was reflected in the disk. Its eyes widened in an almost pitiable look of realisation, just a moment too late.

The vice-like grip on my chest wavered and then released, its pallid skin and sickly veins hardened over, turning a lifeless, grey from the inside out. The malevolent, recessed eyes became opaque and the sinister hiss that emanated from its throat, strangulated, evaporating into the air.

Then, it was nothing more than another statue, hewn from shimmering grey stone.

Painfully, I climbed out from under the grotesque thing, edging round it, still too terrified to look into its face and walked over to where Cara stood trembling, the mirror still held aloft in her pale, slender arms.

“You saved us,” I told her.

For a full twenty seconds she just stared at the hellish creature, its mane of snakes frozen about its enraged, disbelieving face. Finally, her breathing evened out and she looked directly at me: neither a temptress, nor a monster.

“What happened back there?” I asked her, “I thought you were…” my voice trailed off.

“You freaked out,” she said, “it does that to you. You get close to it, it messes with your mind, makes you go crazy. Before I grabbed you, it must have been stalking you pretty close.”

“Maybe it was using me to draw you out?” I speculated before my brutally thumping head and the coagulating blood running down my back and sides curtailed further analysis.

We embraced, warily at first before joy and relief swamped us in an awesome wave.

“So, how do we get out of here,” I said eventually.

“I don’t think anyone gets out.”

“Bullshit,” I said, “we won, they have to.”

“We?” She asked raising an eyebrow.

“Okay,” I conceded, “you won. But as live bait goes, I’m the best in the town.”

We walked aimlessly, through tunnels and corridors propping one another up, talking when we had the energy. Time fell away. It may have been an hour or perhaps a week, but, eventually there came the merest whisper of a breeze from far ahead of us. We followed it. Finally, in the distance there appeared a rectangle of pale light floating, ethereally before us, guiding our way.

It was the sky.

They had cut through a thick steel panel to let us out. The grey, dank streets looked bright and vibrant when compared with the station and they were lined with awed faces. Children screamed in excitement, women cried, stony faced men applauded and nodded their heads sagely. The Preacher was conspicuous by his absence. No doubt he had others to answer to. Surrounding us, the Officers stared, slack jawed, weapons ported in deference and allowed us to walk through them; to walk free.

Alison slid open the rusty corrugated iron door to our apartment. She was dressed in shapeless grey sweats and a t shirt and had been crying. When our eyes met, she welled up anew and threw herself silently against me, face pressed into my neck.

I lifted her over the threshold, peeled her off me and made her look into my eyes, “I had to do things in there. I’ve been unfaithful; I’m so sorry,” I began.

She pressed her fingers against my lips, “Quiet. I don’t care,” she sobbed, “whatever it was, I don’t care. You came back out.”