AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Keith Scribner

Abstract Body

Existing mythologies that depict female sexuality, too often, portray females as passive objects who either accept sexual advances or resist sexual advances. This thesis attempts to create an alternative mythology where females are active participants in their sexual experiences. I portray four females in four different stories. In two stories the females are typical protagonists. In the remaining two stories the females are protagonists of the action but are not the main characters in the stories. Regardless of their role in the story structure, all the females depicted maintain active roles in their sexual relationships.

Key Words: Fiction, Gender, Mythology, Sexuality, Power

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The Dream of the Fisherman’s Wife

by

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I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of my project to any reader upon request.

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Emily S. Barton, Author
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For PS
THE DREAM OF THE FISHERMAN’S WIFE

OCTOPUSSY

She pulled her gelatinous form across the floor by attaching and dislodging her deep red tentacles in fluid rotation, pouring her flesh in tidal thrusts toward the glass doors that led to the ocean. Carefully avoiding her beak, Raymond scooped up the animal from the tile, surprised by the creature's muscular, sinewy grasp. He had seen Olga, the octopus, billowing in the tank when she first arrived. She had given him the impression of being light, soft, and graceful in the water, but what was wrestling in his arms was a creature from the depths of science fiction. She was fierce and canny; she knowingly eyed him from both sides of her enormous hood, sizing Raymond up as her adversary, calculating his intentions.

Raymond had heard about the wanderings of captive octopuses, but this was the first time he had witnessed one. Escapes took place on the night shift. Raymond was usually on the day shift, but last night he filled in for a friend. He put the wily creature back in the tank and returned the weights that were supposed to keep the lid closed.

Raymond looked down and discovered a large ink stain where his blue button-up shirt met his black pants. He walked around to the front of the tank where she was waiting for him. She scrutinized him. Raymond was surprised and disconcerted. He was glad to get out of there and to get back to his station.
He was relieved by the morning security guard but waited around for the aquarist who came in at nine. After relating the story of Olga's escape, Raymond was regaled with exciting fun facts about octopuses. They're knowledgeable and crafty. (This he already knew.) They can break out of any enclosure because of their invertebrate structure. They crawl between tide pools and into fishing boats for hunting purposes. The males leave behind a special tentacle in the orifice of the females then, shortly thereafter, die. Raymond instinctively buckled, guarding his crotch that was now covered with ink spreading from his midsection. He felt his underwear sticking to his skin and couldn't wait to shower.

Later that week, back on his regular shift, Raymond watched Lonely Red on the monitor. He called her Lonely Red because she wandered the aquarium eating granola bars and carrot sticks, her high heels clicking down the corridors filled with families, strollers, and elementary school groups. Her favorite stop was Olga. They had a friendly relationship. Olga billowed and swam in circles, playing in the currents of her tank when Red was near. Red watched her and pressed her nose to the tank like a two-year-old when no one was looking.

"Are you ever going to ask her out or are you just going to watch her on the monitor?" It was Raymond's partner, Marvin. He was right. Raymond dreamed of taking her to the beach on their lunch break. He dreamed of buying her ice cream and walking hand-in-hand with her on the boardwalk.

Every day she showed up at lunch, stayed for an hour, then took off walking down the sidewalk. He assumed that she worked in the high rise at the south end of the
bay, the tall one with the mirrored glass that housed the insurance company, the law firms and the mortgage brokerage. He wasn't sure what it was about her that he liked so much. It was hard to distinguish her features from those of other women walking through the aquarium on the monitor. He knew her by her routine. It was something about the way she slyly watched the other patrons, cooing at their babies, watching their interactions while appearing not to watch their interactions.

"If you don't ask her out, I will," Marvin said.

Raymond didn't take the bait. He wasn't sure he was ready for his fantasy to move into the realms of reality, but Olga had other ideas. The scream was piercing. It echoed down the hallways of the aquarium. Raymond and Marvin jumped up from their seats and scanned the monitors.

They located a crowd gathering around Olga's tank and rushed to the scene. Screams continued to issue forth from the mouth of a frightened mother. She held her stroller with white knuckles and, staring straight at Olga's tank, screamed short sirens while her toddler and baby reacted by joining in. Red was trying to soothe her. Raymond and Marvin attended to Olga, pushing her back into the water and closing the lid that she had somehow managed to pry open again.

Marvin escorted the distraught woman to the employees' lounge while Raymond dispersed the crowd. Red eyed him the entire time. Never had Raymond felt more conscious of his beer belly and receding hairline. He was thirty-five but felt like he looked at least a dozen years older, though friends told him he was as cute as ever. He couldn't meet Red's gaze. He succeeded in sending the crowd away, but then he had to
spend a few awkward moments with Red watching to see if Olga was through with excitement for the afternoon.

"She enjoyed that."

Raymond looked all around before turning to face Red. "What?" he asked.

"She enjoyed scaring that woman--and all the attention that followed."

"How do you know?"

"Well, look at her." Red was right. Olga was swimming in triumphant bursts of aquatic propulsion. She was dancing back and forth in her tank glorying in her ability to affect the world that believed her to be merely a spectacle.

"I'm Jess," she said and held out her hand. Raymond took it and thought that he should say something but nothing came out. Everything that came to mind concerned ice cream and boardwalks.

"Raymond?" she asked, reading his badge.

"Yes," he said, "I'm Raymond."

"Were you scared?"

"No, I've seen it all before." He looked at her. "You weren't scared."

"No, I almost wanted her to succeed, get to the ocean and be free...but I would miss her."

"You come here a lot," he blurted, intending it to sound like a question but instead revealing that he knew her habits.

She jerked her head in his direction and regarded him seriously. "I guess it's your job to know things like that."
"It is," he said. They stood there for a few minutes then Raymond finally said that it had been nice to meet her and escaped to the refuge of his voyeuristic post.

They passed each other a few times in the aquarium throughout the weeks that followed, shyly smiling at one another. Raymond could never work up the nerve to say anything. Finally, a situation presented itself that wasn't so easy to avoid. Raymond decided to get some ice cream after his shift one day. He walked into the shop, got in line, and realized Red was standing right in front of him contemplating flavors in the glass display. He thought about what to say, discarded the first few things that popped into his head, something about the weather, and something else about the shortness of her skirt and finally settled on something simple.

"They all look so good. Don't they?" It came out a little louder than he had intended and her reaction was a startled turn. She recognized him and her smile was immediate.

"Yes, they do, but I think I've made my choice." She turned and said to the server, "Chocolate Exponential." He picked out a double scoop of Bubble Gum Blast.

It was just as he'd imagined in his fantasies. They walked along the boardwalk as the sun set over the balmy ocean. She took off her jacket and he got a glimpse of the freckles on her shoulder, the only freckles she wasn't trying to hide with makeup. Raymond wanted to kiss them. Her heel got stuck in a knot on the boardwalk and she laid her hand on his forearm for balance to bend over and pull her shoe loose. The conversation was easy—as long as they weren't looking at each other. They finished their ice cream cones and then had dinner together. She had asked him if he was hungry
when they got to the restaurant at the end of the pier. He said that he was and she responded, “Well, what are we waiting for?”

Their conversation progressed quickly to include more intimate details at dinner. Jess confessed that she had been alone for the past five years. Raymond confessed that he had never been in love. He'd had one near miss. He told the story like it had been a wild fishing trip. "I was reeling her in and then, all of a sudden, the line went slack."

Jess laughed. She told him about her mother who still treats her like a child and about the concerns she had been having about her boss, who was acting strangely. "I don't recall him ever asking me to do anything against company policy before."

“Who do you work for?” he asked.

She handed him her business card. It read, Jessica Anderson, Accountant, Stanley Insurance. He smiled and put the card in his pocket.

After dinner, they lingered in the parking garage near Jess' Toyota Camry, saying very little. Raymond noticed that the dimple in her left cheek showed when she was nervous. He had the sense that she didn't want the evening to end. The feeling was mutual. She took a step toward her driver's-side door, then hesitated and pivoted on her foot.

"Would you like to come up and see my apartment? It's just a few miles away. I'd love for you to meet my fish. I have my own private aquarium." She smiled charmingly.

He did want to meet her fish. He did want to see her apartment. He did want to do other things with her in her apartment. His stomach fell at the thought of what her
expectations might be. He was so nervous just looking at her, but he found himself saying "yes" anyway.

They decided to take Jess’s car together and rode the two miles in a tense silence, except for one moment at a stop light when Jess caught him staring at her.

“What?” she asked with a smile.

“You look nice...in color,” he stumbled

She laughed, “I don’t recall being anything but ‘in color.’”

“I mean the monitors,” Raymond muttered.

“You look nice too,” she said, “outside of your enclosure.” She laid her hand gently on his forearm for just one moment sending pleasant chills up Raymond’s arm and down the center of his back. Then the light turned green and her hands were back on the wheel. They rode up a steep incline to a small, secluded apartment building. Raymond held the elevator door for her and they stood unnecessarily close. She let him in to her simple, spare apartment and immediately drew him to her fish tank.

"His partner died last fall." She knelt down in front of the tank to get a better view of the interior of the castle. "Ever since then he's been hiding in the castle. I don't know if he's sad or if he's scared."

"How did his partner die?" Raymond asked. He felt the urge to lay his hand comfortably on her shoulder, but he couldn’t bring himself to do it.

"She jumped out of the tank and I didn't see her in time. She died right in front of him. He was hovering next to her in the corner of the tank when I found her."
Raymond could see the tears falling down her cheek. Without thinking about it any further, he placed his hand on her shoulder. Once it was there it felt natural to give her a comforting caress with his thumb and forefinger. She stood and turned into him, and Raymond found himself in an embrace. He pulled her close and enjoyed the sensation of her arms around him and her body sheltered by his broad shoulders. He kissed her forehead. Then he followed the impulse to kiss her ear which seemed to him a little strange, but she didn’t seem to mind. Next, he kissed her softly on the cheek and pulled back. He found himself looking down at her and wanting to kiss her lips. She lifted herself on her toes and kissed him.

From there, they were like one creature with several arms completing the same task. She took off her camisole. He threw his shirt on the couch. They slipped out of their shoes and Raymond caught a glimpse of her pink toenails. They pressed their skin together with nothing but underwear between them. Jess pulled away and looked at him still breathing heavily. She grabbed the sides of her underpants and rolled them down over her hips, never taking her eyes from his. Raymond looked down at her underpants like cuffs around her ankles.

He stared at the small red streak on the cotton crotch. Jess looked down at her ankles too.

"Oh my God," she looked surprised. "Oh, I'm sorry. It's just a little spotting. The flow hasn't actually started." She studied his features and stepping out of her panties then hesitantly went on, "I hope you don't mind. We can still enjoy ourselves...if you want to."
Raymond took her word for it and followed her into the bedroom. He learned that Jess liked to be on top. He learned a lot of things. After they were both satisfied, Raymond wrapped his arms around her for what seemed an appropriate amount of time before answering the call of nature.

He flipped on the bathroom light, lifted up the toilet seat, and grasped his penis in his hand, which felt stickier than he expected it to feel. He looked down and was shocked to see his penis covered in bright, red, sticky, blood. The bloodstain extended to his thighs in blotches and across his lower abdomen. He held up his right hand as if to ward off an evil spirit or an approaching train wreck. From somewhere in the distance he was aware that Jess was speaking to him, but he couldn't hear her over the drumming in his ears. Images of female octopuses and dismembered tentacles flashed before his eyes. He thought of his precious member and covered it protectively. He thought of Jess's orifice. He thought of the blood and the ink and feared for his life.

Frantically, he grabbed wads of toilet paper and tried to clean the mess but only succeeded in making it worse. He tried to play it cool when she came in. She apologized for the mess, and stepped into the shower, inviting him to join her, but he made an excuse about having to get home to feed his cat.

"Wait, don't go. I could..." she said peeking out of the shower curtain, but Raymond grabbed his clothes from the couch, threw them on, and stumbled out of her apartment and into the misty night air. He walked two miles back to his car.

When he was home safe, he thought of Jess. He imagined her crawling into bed alone. He wanted to call her to tell her he was an idiot, but he was scared. He took out
her card and flipped it over. Her cell was written on the back, but he couldn’t bring
himself to call.

She didn’t show up at the aquarium the following week. Raymond watched for
her. With each passing day, Raymond knew he was not likely to make it up to her. He
found himself drawn to Olga. He watched her during the lonely lunch hour, when he
looked for Jess and she never showed. He found himself removing the weights on the
hidden panel that held Olga’s enclosure sealed. He opened the lid. The water rippled on
the surface and softly tinkled throughout the pump system. Raymond couldn’t see Olga.
She was hiding under the rocks. He put his hand out and just broke the surface of the
water. He waited.

The sand stirred under the rocks. Then he saw her. One unfurling tentacle at a
time, she emerged from her lair. Raymond didn’t move. She skittered along the bottom of
her tank, appearing to “walk” with her tentacles. She approached Raymond and looked
up at him from under the surface of the water. Her bulbous, grey eyes made Raymond
want to slam the cover down and run out of there as fast as he could, but he stayed. He
held his breath and kept as still as possible, though he knew he was trembling. The
water vibrated near his hands. After what seemed like an endless pause, Olga lifted one
oily dark tentacle above the surface in a loop. She laid it lazily on his finger. From
underneath the loop rose a curious tip that began to explore Raymond’s hand. She
gently wrapped her suction cupped limb around Raymond. It rose and pulled further
and further up his hand until it was covered. Raymond’s hand, now covered in Olga,
seemed a blossom of spreading color bleeding out from the water. He fought the urge
to run. He resisted the temptation to shake the animal from his skin like he would shake a spider. He stayed still and watched the creature explore him with her touch. Then like the tide on the shore, her exploration receded and Olga slipped beneath the water.

Raymond ran out of the aquarium. He loosened his collar and struggled to breathe in the humid, close air. Stumbling out on the boardwalk, he bumped into a woman at the railing. She jumped and turned defensively. It was Jess. Raymond grasped her shoulders.

“I’m sorry,” he said passionately, “I shouldn’t have left like that.”

“Yes,” Jess agreed, blinking at him.

“Seeing blood on myself...it was a bit of a shock. Images of Olga running through my head”

"Olga?"

"The octopus."

"Why would you think of her?" Jess asked.

"It's a long story."

"I don't understand. It's just a little blood. It's perfectly natural and harmless."

"Come with me" Raymond said. “There’s something I want to show you.”

Raymond pulled Jess inside the aquarium doors and over to Olga’s tank. He lifted the lid of her escape hatch and stretched Jess’s hand over the water.

“What are you doing?” she asked, then giggled with glee as Olga’s limbs rose from the tank and grasped Jess lovingly, Olga caressing Jess’s forearms. Jess cooed in
admiration and touched the octopus’ flesh with her fingertips. When Olga seemed to have had enough stimulation, she withdrew and swam away.

Jess stood over the tank for a few seconds dripping and awed. Then she turned to Raymond and threw her wet limbs around him in a sloppy embrace. “Thank you,” she whispered in his ear, then shyly kissed him. She pulled away and noticed a large wet spot had transferred from her shirt to his. She must have been leaning into Olga’s tank when they were getting acquainted.

Raymond grabbed Jess’s hands. “Let’s go get some fish-shaped pizza at the cafeteria.”

Jess smiled and followed.
IN THE REALM OF THE SENSES

“Is that all you've got?” he said.

Tasha stared at him, dumbfounded. She watched her hand mechanically grasp her shirt's small, lustrous green button. Fumbling, she attempted to slip it into the buttonhole. Did he mean that the anatomy of her breasts was inadequate or her strategy deficient?

He sounded bored. “Listen, I've seen it all before.” His voice trailed off to the left, dragging his face with it as his eyes dimmed and wearied. “You got an A.”

She snorted. “Of course I got an A.” Now her buttons met one-by-one with their holes in a flurry of fury. “What I didn't expect was an A-minus.” She leaned past him to retrieve the film poster that he had possessively stood beside his own bookshelf. Riley quickly slipped his hand up the back of her skirt and grabbed a handful of her ass.

She turned sharply, taking one long stride toward the door she had closed, but her retreat returned her to his desk upon a pivot of her toe on the wood floor. All the disappointments of the previous week—the stinging razor nick on her knee, a dent in her driver-side door, her roommate screwing again at 2 am, a financial-aid reduction, her TA's indifference, the empty bag of potato chips, a package of law-school applications from her father —came ricocheting out of her left arm. They exploded onto Professor Riley's face with a force that made her wrist ache and sent his glasses flying to the corner where a dusty stack of magazines began to fume.

They stared at each other for a moment with faces blank as river stones. Then
slowly, Professor Riley reached his hand out, grasped the untucked tail of her blouse, and gently tugged her toward him. Then slapped her on the mouth.

Riley looked up at Tasha. He sank from his slippery leather seat in sweet gratitude, and opened his arms wide with welcoming acceptance as her blows, like fluttering angle's wings, landed in a blur upon his transfixed face.
Trevor stared up at mottled acoustic ceiling tiles. His body sank evenly into the foam. Supported at the neck on a contoured pillow, he wondered if he would ever stop sinking. The salesman promised a night of cradled bliss while adjusting Trevor’s head and feet higher via a motor buried like a pea deep within the mattress, a remote control in the Night Country salesman’s hand. The motor hummed like an amber streetlight under Trevor’s body.

“There’s even a massage feature,” the salesman said. “It’s no she-hat-zu, but it tricks the muscles into relaxing, so your body can produce more melatonin.” His red, white, and blue tie flapped forward as he leaned in with eager intensity. “That’s the sleep chemical.”

Trevor closed his eyes and tried to imagine this bed back in his apartment, but all he could conjure was an image of an elderly couple in slippers and robes watching T.V., Barcalounger-style, before using a Clapper to turn off the lights.

His eyes popped open and he sat up quickly.

The salesman continued, “That was one of the softest of the firm, this one is more of a softest of the soft variety in the Ortho-tempic line.” He led Trevor to a bed on the opposite side of the display aisle. “This one is called the ’Ah-zure.’” Sure enough right at that moment, Trevor heard through the storeroom speakers *Believe it or not,* *I’m walking on air. I never thought I could feel so free-ee-EE.*
He sank softly into the Azure’s embrace, trying not to think about the lice that may have lurked on the display pillow. Sound seemed more distant on the Azure; everything did. The sleigh bells on the door handle clanged through a muffled cushion, and the salesman excused himself for a moment. Trevor heard disjointed phrases floating from the front of the store: pressure points, heat sensitive, hypoallergenic.

He let his mind wander to a distant memory--his very first mattress. His mother, balancing on one leg, the other ballerina style in the air behind her. Her pink polyester pants zinging as one ample thigh scissored past the other. She snapped the tight, white, cotton fitted-sheet over the corners of his new mattress by slicing her flat hand across the surface and punching the pockets over the hard edge of the crisp plastic. She patted the bed, after she had finished, for Trevor to sit next to her. He had looked up at her serious expression, at the way she shrugged her face to keep her glasses from sliding down her nose. “This mattress is for accidents, but we both know you’re not going to have any more of those.” She paused and looked intensely at him, “Are you?” Trevor blinked in confusion but finally decided that “no” was the best answer. He looked down at his toes, then past them at the cars strewn around the room on the orange shag carpet.

Trevor remembered urinating in the bed that night. He recalled the warm, yellow liquid had pooling around his midsection, where his body had made a depression in the cheap foam, soaking him from his neck to his knees.
Trevor caught himself almost dozing in the mattress store. He opened his eyes. The salesman was talking to the other customers with eyes on Trevor. He used the opening to walk over with a satisfied smile. “It looks like you may have found the one.”

“Actually,” Trevor responded as he rolled onto his feet and rubbed his eyes, “I'm almost afraid that it would swallow me up one night.”

The salesman's face fell. “Oh no,” he responded. “It's just a mattress. Swallow you up? Whatever could that mean? Mattresses. They're just mattresses; you know.” His smile retreated beneath his damp, blond mustache while he tugged at his tie nervously. “Well, I'll let you look around.” He made his way back to the couple at the front of the store.

Trevor wandered through the Atlantic series, the Euro plush sets, and the Platinum Elites. He straightened some of the foot guard sashes and pressed firmly on the pillow tops in a series of mattresses with female names: The Jacqueline, The Annabelle.

Finding himself at the back of the store, yesterday’s models, the clearance beds, hid vertically in shame behind a partition. Trevor spotted The Camellia. It was a king size. He'd never slept in a bed so large. The Camellia had a thin, non-threatening pillow top. It was stitched with an intricate pattern of flowers that bloomed over the surface of the shiny purple fabric. Trevor pulled and tugged at the plastic, weaving his hand in through a large flap and over the edge of the inner plastic pocket; he yearned to feel the fabric with his fingers. It was warmer than he expected, warmer than the others had been. A radiant warmth, subtle and inviting. It reminded Trevor of the time he'd put his
hand on the body of his very first car. Must have been out in the sun for a bit, he thought.

“You're gonna feel like a better man.” The salesman said as he rang up the Camellia.

I already feel like a better man, Trevor thought, walking out into the setting sun, the jingle bells on the glass door bouncing behind him, his hand on the yellow sales slip, payment contract and delivery date included. Trevor felt almost sentimental about his purchase. The last song he had heard in the store was still ringing softly in his head, *Just let your love flow, like a mountain stream*...

His bed was due the next day. That night, Trevor slept on the lumpy futon that doubled as his couch. After Jill left, after she took the mattress they had purchased “together” one year ago, Trevor had slept on the futon. He still paid for Jill’s mattress every month when his credit card statement appeared. It had been the type of mattress that was programmed on each side with a different firmness. It never mattered what Trevor had programmed into his side, soft at 35 or hard at 99, Jill had programmed the opposite. And between them an impassible ridge had formed in the middle of the bed that kept him from reaching for her in the night.

The day she left, he sat in the dim blue ambiance of a fast-food parking lot in the middle of the night, after the dramatic and inexplicable blow-up that had led to suitcases and slamming doors. He relished every morsel of his celebratory milkshake and sloppy burger. For some reason, the meal tasted as fresh and real to him as the first time he’d ever eaten junk food, a guilty pleasure against his mother's rules.
Why had he spent most of his college years and seven years beyond with someone who came to bed every night and said something like, “You smell bad,” or, “Don't touch me with your clammy hands”? He had always thought Jill was just tired and needed some rest. Mornings were better for her when they each headed their separate ways.

Jill was his first and only lover. And she had never bothered faking it. He always blamed himself that he couldn’t bring her to climax, but he was too ashamed to ask for help and he didn’t know how he would begin to seek knowledge on a subject that was so taboo.

For some reason, his new mattress felt like it might be the start of a new life. Mattress delivery was scheduled for 3 pm the following day. Trevor left work early. He almost skipped to his car. It felt like Christmas. He shopped at a warehouse bedding store and surprised himself by buying lacy white sheets and a new floor lamp.

When the bed finally arrived, he set it up, tugging gently but firmly at the fitted sheets and executing his finest hospital corners with the flat. He turned in early that night, quietly read a book in his comfortable new bed, and fell asleep without the aid of the television's white noise. All night, he dreamed about a large blooming flower, midnight in color. He saw it through the fog as it swiveled and shifted shades in the moonlight.

One night, he woke from his dark dreams thinking he felt a tickling sensation in his lower extremities. He pulled off the covers quickly expecting to see a spider, but there was nothing, just bare legs against the sheets. Trevor Googled “strange leg
sensations” and found a link to diabetes. He had himself tested. Even after the tests came back negative, his dreams of large flowers and tickling leg sensations continued.

The minor disturbances began to increase in frequency and Trevor began to notice other strange occurrences. One morning in the shower, he washed a slippery film from his lower extremities. He checked to see if his apartment manager had installed a water softening system. He hadn’t. Trevor began to think he might be going a little crazy.

Just when he was about to make an appointment with a psychiatrist, he had an alarming experience that he could not chalk up to dreams or illnesses. He was sleeping soundly when he thought he felt a tickle on his face, interrupting his dreams. He opened his eyes and saw something hovering over him in the dark, reflecting the moonlight. He knew he was awake. He pinched himself to be sure. And then he saw it move, in shades of midnight, to the foot of the bed. By the time he retrieved the lamp after knocking it over and turned it on, the image was gone. He looked under the bed, in the closet, and behind the dresser, but the room was empty.

Trevor began to sleep with the bedside light on. One night, he woke up to the sensation of his covers sliding down past his thighs. The sheets tickled his legs. He reached for them just as they inched beyond his grasp. His breathing quickened. He lay on his belly paralyzed with fear in his briefs and white socks. Intending to crawl to safety, suddenly he felt a tickling on his foot. Not the sheets again. He could see them in a pile on the floor. He turned his head slowly just in time to see the body of a large flower emerge from the foot of his bed. In one swift maneuver, Trevor shoved himself
backward against the headboard and faced the flower, now nodding and swiveling on a long green stem. It regarded him. The whole head swiveled to evaluate Trevor the way a sunflower turns to the sun.

Trevor had heard of some tropical flowers in the Amazon that were as large as a man, but he had never heard of one appearing in his downtown apartment, or emerging from the foot of a bed. The flower had soft pink petals that framed what seemed like a solid bulbous fleshy center. The petals arranged about the head floated fluidly in the still bedroom, like the fins of a cuttlefish Trevor had seen once in a T.V. documentary. The bulbous center of the flower was pink and fleshy with red in the deeper folds and crevices Trevor realized they were additional petals. When they began to unfurl in deeper and deeper hues of red until they were all floating, on currents of invisible air around the inner center of the flower.

Deep inside the concentric veils of petals now open to him, he saw a soft dark mat of hair in the shape of an inverted “V” where the stamen should have been. The flower sank slowly as it revealed itself until it was just barely visible at the foot of Trevor’s bed. Then it crept up from the edge. Trevor could see when the light hit the flower just right, that underneath the mysterious shadows of the hair, lay flesh in delicate elongated folds, like lips under a quaint mustache. They knotted and parted to form an inviting pout.

Trevor didn’t move. Half his brain was hearing horror-style horns straight from the score of Clash of the Titans while the other half wondered what the creature felt like. He didn’t have to wait long. Like lips that pucker and pinch to grab a piece of food,
the creature bowed its lips and grasped the edge of his sock. Trevor retracted in a reflexive tuck and the sock slipped off, dropped on the floor by the sheets. Trevor had never seen a pussy smile. In fact, he hadn't seen much real, in-the-flesh pussy at all; Jill had always insisted on sex in the dark. The creature seemed to smile, just a slight upturning of the labia at the south and north ends. It reached its long peduncle forward, stretching the stem, first upward so Trevor could see the length of it, then downward in the direction of Trevor's second sock. Like the shutter of a camera closing to cover the lens, Trevor's eyelids closed and awareness began to give way to a soothing blackness.

He woke to the creature fucking him. His underwear were off. The flower thrust forward with plunging gulps. It had already swallowed his toes and feet and was now well beyond his knees. Trevor watched in terror as the flower-petal skin stretched over his limbs and slid up and down his legs leaving a wet slime behind. The flesh tugged like a tongue on his legs, pulling the hair horizontal and encapsulating each hair in an airless tomb of slick slime. He pulled his legs toward his belly and tried to remove them from the creature’s maw. His movement brought the creature’s attention to Trevor’s face. No eyes, but it looked at him, seemed to blink with its inner, smaller, redder petals. It watched him try to escape. Then with a force that was greater than Trevor’s efforts, the creature sucked him back to his original posture. Trevor grasped the headboard with his arms and held on for dear life, succeeding only in keeping the creature from swallowing him further. He watched helplessly as it bucked and angled, pressing his toes against the firm knot inside her shaft. Trevor could feel it with his feet. It was like the tip of a nose in the interior squish. He wiggled and sent the creature into silent ecstasy.
In the midst of his struggles, while his arms were cramping and his grip was about to give way, while the creature was flexing, pulsing, and constricting Trevor’s legs. He pushed thoughts of Amazonian snakes from his mind. There was another thought he wanted to push from his mind, didn’t even want to go there: this felt good, like a warm, wet massage. It felt better, bigger, wetter than anything he had ever felt before. It was real, pulsing, wanting him more than anything or anyone had ever wanted him before.

The next day, Trevor felt conflicted. He went to work, made numerous coding errors, and succeeded in producing nothing. What troubled him most, what made it hard for him to concentrate was that, sure, a part of him felt deeply violated, like something had been taken from him that he could never get back; but another part of him, deeper than the first, was genuinely satisfied. He would never admit it out loud, but one of his body parts, not the ideal part of course, had made a pussy cum. Granted, he couldn’t really take credit, but nevertheless, a pussy had been satisfied. Trevor wasn’t even sure he could technically call it a pussy, but there was a space inside of him reserved for celebration. Trevor's figurative cherry had finally been popped.

That was what he felt underneath all the trauma. Underneath the nausea. The pride in his male accomplishment was what made Trevor push the incident far from his mind because he couldn’t reconcile it with all the fear and self-loathing.

The night after, he didn't sleep in his bed. He lay on the futon, shining a flashlight in the direction of his closed bedroom door. In the other room, somewhere maybe in the floor boards, maybe in the mattress, maybe only in his sick fantasies, a creature
existed, one that wanted to swallow him whole. Morning light was already streaming in through the window when he fell asleep and the flashlight hit the floor with a “wank.”

It was like that for a week. He took a few naps in his car during the workday. He nodded off at his desk. He almost fell asleep at a stop light. At the end of the eighth day, Trevor cornered the salesman in Night Country. It all came out in a string of inexplicable nonsense.

The salesman replied, “You bought a discounted mattress and I’m afraid I can’t give you a refund. The bed is yours to keep. Throw it away for all I care.”

Trevor released his tie. He realized the sleep deprivation was getting to him. He wasn’t an aggressive guy. Never had been anyway. He went home and again questioned his sanity. He opened the door to his bedroom, sat on the neat bed, and picked up the phone. He called a psychiatrist’s office and made an appointment six months out which was the soonest the doctor could see him. And then he crashed harder than he had ever crashed before, clothes on, shoes filting up his quilt. He woke eight hours later to the comforting knowledge that nothing had happened to him in his sleep. He climbed appreciatively into bed.

The weeks progressed and Trevor didn’t see Camellia, though he slept on his mattress every day. It was perfect. Not too soft. Not too firm. Nothing like the confusing mess he had shared with Jill. He felt great every morning. Putting all the trouble and fear of Camellia behind him, he almost believed he had dreamed up the horrific flower. Still, he left the bedside light on. He slept fully dressed for a while. Then he got bold and
took off his clothes, sleeping again in his boxers and socks. Still, she didn’t show. Trevor was surprised to find that he was a little disappointed.

Then his dream returned. This time, very detailed. No more shadows and silhouettes of midnight-colored flowers that hovered over him. Trevor’s dreams were vibrant. He saw Camellia in full color. When he woke from the dream and looked around the room—nothing. He jumped out of bed and looked under the mattress. Still—nothing.

Trevor began to lose hope that Camellia would ever return even though the dream of her was his constant companion. Then one night, Trevor woke feeling a sensation in his lower limbs. He opened his eyes. He heard sounds of wet smacking coming from under the sheets. They were fully untucked at the foot of the bed, so he tugged hand over hand and dropped the sheets on the floor. There she was in all her pillowy glory, fucking his lower limbs again. Trevor didn’t move. He looked down at his naked erection. Camellia had adeptly removed his underwear in his sleep. Trevor grasped the headboard again, this time with a different purpose. He braced himself against the stout wood and carefully inched his limbs further into the flower’s receptacle and down the squeezing shaft of the peduncle. It curved and contorted him. He felt like a dancer arching and reaching with an enviable toe point. The creature seemed to acknowledge his movements without objection. She, blinking her small petals at him, gulped, sucked, and tugged every additional inch he gave her.

Trevor had entered the flower as far as he could with his hands still holding the bedframe. Camellia seemed perfectly happy to remain at the level of his thighs. If he wanted to feel the flower wrap around his mid-section, he would have to let go. She,
oblivious to his dilemma, continued to suck him inches from his erect penis. Trevor couldn’t resist the promise of an orgasm from a flowering vagina that wanted him. Finally, someone, something wanted him. He let go. He used his elbows and inched a bit further into the creature. She continued to suck obligingly. His penis entered her. It wasn’t like Jill. The pressure and sensations were less direct. The action, the way their bodies came together certainly advantaged Camellia in the pleasure department. He had to work to find the right amount of pressure. He had to shift and adjust. And every time he found a sweet spot, Camellia would inch a little higher up his torso and he would have to shift and adjust again. The face of the creature was at his arms when he finally realized it was so close he could touch it.

He wasn’t sure he wanted to touch it. Then he thought Camellia might disappear again and he would never get the chance to feel the flower with his fingers. With one hand, he lifted the upper petals tentatively. Camellia didn’t seem to mind. He parted the bush with his other hand and there it was, the thing Trevor had heard about, but had never been given the opportunity to discover. Camellia had a clitoris. Trevor was sure that Jill had possessed one too, but every time he had asked to explore her with the lights on, she refused. He always just fumbled around in the dark, knowing full well that he was missing the mark. But this! This was large and pink and demanding. Trevor began an inept exploration. He pushed it with a fingertip. The flower pulled away. He pressed it with his palm and Camellia took over. He had never experienced bucking quite like this. The last time she had visited, the bucking and rocking was gentler. This felt more like being ridden by a mechanical bull. She smacked and gulped and sucked him in
deeper. He was up to his neck, one arm out at an odd angle with the palm pressed against her visible knot. Then she was at the level of his mouth and he struggled to maintain his position. He wanted to know that he had done it right. He needed to know that she was satisfied, that he had finally succeeded where he had failed so many times before. The scent of her was almost overpowering. It wasn’t an unpleasant scent, but raw and primal. He didn’t mind it so much even though it filled his nostrils and he felt like he was suffocating in the humid atmosphere.

Trevor felt the creature push hard into him. He held the firm pressure of her clit on his palm. He felt her squeeze the breath out of him and still he held on. She squeezed tighter and tighter, and at that moment, when all thoughts of his own pleasure eroded from his mind and all attention was focused on her, Trevor had the best orgasm of his life.

It was then that the she swallowed him whole. As he sank into blissful oblivion, he thought he heard the muffled sounds of music reaching his ears from outside the womb. The chorus he had heard on the Night Country show room. *Believe it or not, I’m walking on air.*
“Thank you,” Gina said accepting the paper wrapped package. “I don't think I know how to cook an octopus.”

“Marinate it,” he said. “You got any yogurt? Takes a few hours.”

“Oh,” she said. “Well, what if I want to serve it tonight?”

“Aw. You can cut it up and tenderize it with a mallet. Don't want chewy octopus.”

“Is it chewy generally?”

“You never had octopus?”

“Uh, no. But I'd like to—I mean, I like to try new things.” Gina took one step closer to him and inhaled his strange chum scent.

“Well, I can show you if you'd like.”

Her breath came faster. “Sure that would be great.” She laughed, a light girlish laughter that reminded her of summer fields of cut grass and buttercups, of exploration and excitement. It sounded foreign in her ears. It embarrassed her. She opened the front door wider and he entered.

“Cut right here, in this soft hollow between the eyes and legs.” She watched him handle the blade. “Most people cut off the head and toss it, but you can slip the knife in on the inside of the fleshy cup and, with just enough pressure, the membrane will pop. Then just clean it out. Tenderize it. Bread it. Fry it. There you go.” He handed the messy knife to Gina.
She laid it on the counter, wiped her hands on her kitchen towel, and followed him to the door. He let her open it for him. She held it a few inches open and turned to him. A shaft of sunlight spread between them like a blade cutting through the sinewy air.

“Pastor John’s out gatherin’ souls?”

“Yep. He likes to go out Sundays. He says people are more likely to be home.”

“Well, I do appreciate him visiting my mother while she was in the hospital.”

“He was happy to do it.”

“I liked what he said in service today, comparing what he does to what I do...”

Gina didn’t want to miss this moment. She reached out and touched his muscular forearm and ran her fingers across the soft fuzz.

He looked at her, startled. “I better be going. There are fish at home that need cleaning.” He slipped through the shaft of light.

Gina closed the door behind him with a soft click. Her hand was sticky from the dirty blade handle. She lifted her fingers to her mouth and tasted. She chewed a rubbery bit. It tasted like deep ocean hideaways. With her left hand, she pressed the flowered folds of her homespun dress between her legs, a warm and humid valley. She knew what she had done was abominable. What she was doing now was forbidden; pleasure corrupted her soul. But she leaned against the front door, warm from the radiant sun behind it and massaged herself to ecstasy. Her eyes, when they were open, were on the octopus’ carcass, strewn haphazardly, with remembered violence, on her kitchen counter.