

*"I'm so sorry, Billy," he will say. "I thought you were a ghost. I had no idea that all this time . . ."*

*By the hearth, he will not remember the cold or his father's words.*

*"Stay put," his father will tell the boy. "Be with your dog. I need to put Billy to bed."*

*He will follow his father farther into the cavernous house. He relies heavily on the stiffness of the gun to guide the shuffle of his limp.*

*"When was the last time you slept in a warm bed?" his father will ask. He won't know.*

*In the room, his father will shed him of his wet clothes and he will realize for maybe the first time that he is completely wrapped. He will put on the pajamas his father gives him and climb beneath the blankets on the bed. He will know this is it. Home.*

*His father will extinguish the lights and sit at the edge of the bed.*

*"You are home now, Billy," he will say. "I'm so sorry I avoided you all these years. I love you, son."*

*His father will gently wipe his hand across his soaked, bandaged brow before replacing the hand with the cool barrel of the shotgun.*

*He will try to speak, but will not know if the words emerge. His father will hush him with soft coos. He will not remember the discharge of the round, or even the boy, if only to wonder if the boy's back will snap tight at the recoil.*

*What he had wanted to say was thank you. Thank you, Daddy.*

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Ben Driscoll woke up to a real discomfort for the second time that day. Splayed across the carpet, he opened his eyes to discover a cantaloupe growing on his forehead. Sniffing the lingering rotten scent in the air first tugged Sam back to his foggy mind. *Sam!* There were new signs of a struggle in the basement and after checking all of the rooms and closets he burst out through the broken window into the storm, wondering what to do besides get wet.

There was not a light pitched at the other Sloane place. He started towards it anyway, but then stopped and spun, searching the inky darkness for any signs of life, but found only fake phantoms evaporating as soon as his eyes adjusted. He could not lose Sam, too, not like this. In his rush, he hadn't even grabbed his jacket. Already bone-soaked in a flannel shirt and jeans, how long could he really expect to make it out here concussing, a fruit blistering on his brow?

He knew two places that thing liked

to frequent and he was standing in one of them alone. So he got in the Satellite and began to slowly orbit the washed-out roads, ready to pick up a few hitchhikers.

Maybe it was the petulant rain, or the fact that he didn't know the area, or the dull wonk increasingly enflaming upon his brain, but he couldn't find the highway before he ran out of gas. He could see the headlights about half a klick to his right, through about 1,000 pounds of rain and a nebulous squiggle of forest. Ben tossed on the emergency lights, closed his eyes and smacked his head against the horn, letting it blast, muted, into the storm, till the battery died alongside most of him.

"I'm sorry," he told the steering wheel, but it couldn't answer. "Jessica," he said. "We're lost."

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She was parked in a truck with a boy as the rain trotted against the roof with enough force to imagine they were being socked by a trillion dollars worth of pennies. Jessie and Audrey sat at opposite sides of the cab, perforated by the knob of the manual transmission, but the Suzy A. in her felt as though they might as well have been on opposite sides of a middle school gym. They were parked miles north of Hug Point, even farther away from Tongue Point. She wondered when he would make a move, and if he did, would Suzy A. dig it like a grave?

Outside the cab, the darkness glossed like onyx as they listened to a Top 40 station. She could see headlights blinking on the highway through a grove of trees behind them, and heard a horn roll long off in the distance.

"So, is this pretty much what you do around here for fun?" she asked.

"Yeah," Jessie said, his tone less excited than rain. "Pretty much. I was supposed to take Kevin up to Seaside tonight to see this girl he knows and drag the gut, but I wanted to hang out with you instead. He's kind of pissed."

"What's dragging a gut?"

"You know," he said, "like cruising around."

"Cool," she said.

"What do you for fun in Spokane?" he asked.

"Same," she lied.

"Cool," he said.

"So. Where are we exactly?"

"You mean, like, in our relationship?"

"No!" Audrey laughed. "No! I mean, like, are we still in Cannon Beach?"

"Oh," Jessie said, flipping the bulk of his sandy hair so that it smothered the left hemisphere of his brain. "Yeah. Still Cannon Beach. You know, they call this Bandage Man Road. So there's like this

dead logger all wrapped up like a mummy who jumps into the back of kids' trucks when they're making out—"

"I've seen him," Audrey said flatly, buckling her own knees as Suzy A. sailed away and Audrey remembered the monster's toxic spark, the eek of its palm as it smeared the window. "Why would you bring me here?"

Somewhere beyond the heavy rain, the continuing drone of the car horn wailed like a cosmic moan.

"You've seen him? Like the real Bandage Man?" Jessie said skeptically. "It's like everybody knows about him, but nobody's seen him. He's just a story, babe. Something parents came up with to stop kids necking out here."

"I think I need to go home," Audrey said, switching the radio from FM to AM.

*"Archibald Cox, the special prosecutor looking into the burglary at the Democratic National Committee's offices at the Watergate Hotel, has been fired. President Nixon accepted the resignation of his attorney general and . . ."*

"You're, like, following this stuff?" Jessie said.

"I find it soothing," Audrey said, looking out the window. "You hear that, right?"

As soon as she spoke, the car horn vanished and every decibel it released filled with rain. Jessie shrugged, switching the radio back to FM to find Springsteen Dylan-ing through a verse of "Blinded by the Light."

As Jessie faced Audrey, the weight of the cab slunk to the rear and Audrey could hear boots in the bed of the pickup truck. Then one bandaged palm clapped against the rear window of the cab.

"Holy," was all Jessie could say as he spun into the empty road in reverse.

There are many different dimensions of chaos. With the rain slapping against the windshield, the road curved and slick, Jessie puffing a cloud of curses as he slammed the gas, jittering the creature in the bed of the truck, Audrey felt as if they were traveling through each of them.

She had to snuff a breath for 30 seconds to realize it was the creature screaming in the bed of the truck and not her. It didn't fume rotten like a carcass; it hadn't even given ink to the window. Instead, it swam through the Chevy's bed, trying desperately to fix its gauzy grip to the side of the truck. Its eyes were blue, not rimmed with red. It called Jessie by name.

This was not the thing she had faced before.

Looking closer, she recognized the pack-aged boy.

"Jessie?" she asked. "Is that Kevin?"

Jessie snaked his eye to the rear window as they sluiced through the darkness. When

his foot gave off the gas as he nodded to his old friend playing a practical joke, Audrey screamed at the dead station wagon in the road.

"Hold on, Suzy!" Jessie said, flooring the break, as Kevin launched out of the bed of the truck directly towards the station wagon ahead of them.

She grasped at her name, seeing her father rise up above the steering wheel of the stalled station wagon while an airborne teenage mummy approached his windshield like a one-hundred-and-sixty-pound mosquito.

The bumpers of the cars kissed before each vehicle flailed backwards on impact, shooting human shrapnel into the air.

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*He will not understand why they are wrapping his face even as the bandages soak through. When he tries to speak, the paramedics will look at him cross-eyed.*

*"Just calm down, buddy," one of them will say, patting his chest, enlivening a wound.*

*He will fury at them, unsure of the collision that splattered his mind. Who will he be? He will yank the IV from his arm and strike one of them across the face before tumbling out of the ambulance into the cold rain. The rain will wake him like it is morning. He will remember Audrey and Sam and Jessica as the light approaches. An orange light will sit bulbous in the sky. He will run at it, thinking he can launch into a harvest moon, and see her again, and again, and again, forever.*

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That rainy evening would splash infamous as "The Saturday Night Massacre," not because of what happened to Audrey, Ben and Kevin on a lonely road nicknamed after a monster in Cannon Beach, Oregon, but because nearly 3,000 miles away, in Washington, D.C., President Richard Nixon accepted the resignations of his attorney general and deputy attorney general just to find a guy who goes by Bob Bork, who would lob off a special prosecutor named Archie Cox.

The girl — who the only survivor of the crash, the driver, Jessie Travers, would mark as Suzy A., of Spokane — was stacked in the morgue as a Jane Doe, having no fingerprints or dental records on file. There was no money found in the well of the Satellite. Yet, a few months later, residents would begin to notice massive repairs to the house at the end of Carronade Lane. Contractors, who worked the job, will still tell you stories about the boy with the eye-patch holding the dog, who would stare out the upstairs window every foggy evening as if he was waiting for someone. *cw*