

George woke up, frozen with fear. He opened his eyes and was immediately frightened of what was lying next to him. He was unsure of whether to scream or run from the bedroom: *Should I scream or run from the bedroom?* A velociraptor was sleeping in his bed, with closed eyes. Its breaths were sedated and stable; it snorted in through its snout and rasped out through its clenched, dagger-filled mouth.

When he lifted his head, he noticed a thick, green tail spilling out from beneath the covers. It slumped from the side of the bed onto the floor. The beast shifted and groaned. It rolled its head on the pillow, using its razor-sharp claws to pick at the linen.

George shifted onto his back and played dead.

*What the hell is going on?* George thought as he moved his eyes from the ceiling to the wheezing beak beside him. He snapped back into a neutral supine position when the creature stirred again. He squeezed his eyes closed. When he allowed them to open, the sleeping raptor remained. Sleeping. He fought to quell his terror-fueled panting as best he could. *Could raptors sense panic? Could they smell it? Like bees and dogs?* George was too shocked to move, but didn't want to remain so vulnerable and such an easy feast for the monster.

*Very slowly*, George mouthed to himself. He began rolling in the opposite direction with care, as to not disturb the snoring raptor. It was working. He had successfully settled one foot on the hardwood floor. He levered himself with painfully cautious movements until half of his body was off the mattress. He was using every ounce of his strength and concentration to effectuate precise, undetectable movements. He was sweating. He shimmied his lower body and contorted his waist to float his other leg off the bed.

George could've twisted a nosegay of spoons with the focus he had on controlling his breath. Now, with two feet planted on the floorboards, he grabbed the night table and used it to push himself up.

The act of propelling himself into a standing position all at once forced a flimsy grunt out from somewhere in his stomach. George lost his balance. He nearly heaved himself into the wall, and then began to fall back towards the bed while trying to correct his momentum. He managed to balance himself on one foot, hopping on his heel and interrupting the surrounding silence with hollow stomping sounds that echoed throughout the bedroom. He paused on one leg; his arms were splayed out from his sides and his bottom lip was pinched between his teeth. The raptor grumbled, breaking its chain of steady breathing with an abrupt snort.

Following a tense, brief silence, the raptor's throat began to bubble anew as the beast repositioned its head on the pillow. It didn't appear to have been awoken.

George finally lowered his foot and crept nimbly to the door. As he eased it open, the door crooned a prolonged, listless creak. A jolt of panic tightened his whole body. The raptor's breathing never hesitated.

George turned to get a better look at the raptor, from a safer distance. The sun was shining onto the marmalade curtains, giving the white walls of the bedroom a limpid, peach tint. *It must be a pleasant day*, George thought. The raptor lunged its left arm right where George had been lying, in fear, moments prior. Its talon scratched softly against the sheet, making him shiver. The blanket lifted and dropped with each of the beast's composed breaths. Its tail animated with a slight wiggle as George turned the handle and closed the door.

George walked into the kitchen and pulled a mug out from the cupboard. *Empty*, he lamented silently. He lifted the coffeepot with a jerk of overpowered surprise, just as one who expects something to be full of hot liquid is likely to do. He grumbled as he set to preparing the ingredients for the coffee maker. While

he waited, he fetched the paper. It was caught between worlds as it straddled the mail slot, secured by its girth of information.

*Let's see*, he thought as he laid the paper open on the table. War, pollution, more war, the economy, celebrities, election, the war on pollution, sports, terrorism, movies, more good, old-fashioned war, more economy, celebrities again, the war on terrorism, and all of today's most popular hits.

George poured himself a coffee while the machine was still busy, a couple of hissing drops landing against the heating pad. He sipped it and grimaced. He sat down at the table and glazed over the paper, moving his head far too quickly between the articles to get more than a gist of any story. The coffee making machine sputtered as it finished percolating with the gravelly sound of sleeping velociraptor exhalations.

*Oh, right.* He unscrewed a cigarette from his pack and bolted it between his lips. *There's a raptor in the bed. Who do you call to get a dinosaur out of your bed? It was highly unlikely that a contemporary company specializing in that sort of thing existed. A raptor seemed too large to be classified as a pest, like cockroaches or mice. There was unlikely to be any department or institution in any branch of government that had any policy on such a crazy thing. Perhaps the police, or the firemen? Guns and hoses and axes. But, was it really an emergency?* George could get into serious trouble if he ordered a unit to his quarters for something that could be diagnosed as frivolous. He couldn't decide.

George snatched the phone from its receiver and flicked in the number of his friend Vincent. He blew on his sour coffee while he waited.

"Vincent speaking," Vincent said. George exchanged early morning pleasantries with his friend and entered into a conversation about war, pollution, more war, common friends, the election, George's mother, Vincent's relations, war, and the economy.

"Oh!" George alarmed. He'd forgotten the reason he'd called.

"There's a *what?*" Vincent responded quizzically.

A velociraptor in the bed. George was fairly certain that when he'd turned off the light before sleeping, there had more than definitely not been a single velociraptor beside him. He claimed expertise on this subject. It was still fast asleep in the bed with the door closed, but once the creature figured out the door, George didn't know how to proceed.

Vincent responded by asking George if he'd slept alone the previous evening, as in, had he entered the bed as the only person? Or, had there been another person in the bed when George had turned off the light before sleeping?

"Well, yes." There had been another person in the bed, George said to Vincent incredulously. Enid had also been in the bed. Only Enid, not a raptor.

With mockery discreetly weakened into more suitable sarcasm, Vincent asked where Enid was to be found at this moment.

"I guess I failed to look," George admitted frankly. He carried the phone with him as he checked in the fridge, beneath the couch, and in the toilet. He said her name in a voice that would fill the room, but hopefully not penetrate the closed bedroom door. He shrugged and returned the phone to his face.

“I’ll bet that you can’t see her,” Vincent said after being told that Enid wasn’t in any of the appliances, or underneath any of the furniture. George had swatted away the tone Vincent had previously used to seemingly imply something nefarious, like an attention-seeking insect. George was now compelled to close his hands around the bug and shake it for information.

“I have no idea what you mean.” Vincent persisted in using his ingratiating tone, and was therefore still withholding some kind of valuable detail. *He most certainly did*, thought George. *If he was present, he’d have no choice but to tell all of the truths*. But he wasn’t there, so George would have to play along with his friend, by his asinine rules, until he stopped speaking in riddles.

Vincent told George to think about the scenario again. He went to sleep in his room with Enid lying by his side, and at the present moment, George could readily confirm that Enid was neither in the shower, nor hiding in the toaster. George checked the front entrance and found her shoes sitting by the door and her jacket hanging from the hook. *No*, George thought. *It looked lovely outside, but not lovely enough to go out without a jacket, in bare feet*. Not yet at least.

*Was Enid okay?* It dawned on George that Enid could just as easily be dead. She could have been devoured while they’d been sleeping. *Had he left the window open?* The room sometimes got stuffy and gave him nosebleeds. No one had ever worried about raptors climbing up the gutter and through the window, at least not until now. There wasn’t any blood, at least not that he could see, on the bedspread or the floor, though he didn’t look too hard, and that type of thing was easy to miss. Enid could have been swallowed whole, of course, but the raptor’s claws were too sharp to not be used for murder, and its mouth wasn’t significant enough in size. Unless the raptor was partly python, but that was highly dubious. Also, the raptor’s breath didn’t smell like Enid. That should’ve been his first clue.

George told Vincent that this was all very strange, and that it wasn’t like Enid to leave the house without shoes. With all the war and pollution and economy going on out there, however, he probably couldn’t hold it against her. After all, we all do pretty crazy things sometimes. Life pushes you, man.

*George had read about a man one time...*

Mr. B was lying face down while Mr. F stroked his sweat-laden head. Mr. B’s somewhat long hair had been soaked entirely with pain and fear and was glued to his face in heavy strands of auburn. Mr. B was in atrocious discomfort, moaning with sharp recitations that were quickly followed by sobs and moans, vainly censored due to the pains in his rectum. He tried to keep absolutely still; any slight movement was a turn of the torture crank.

Mr. B was sprawled there, on the bathroom floor, with his selvedge jeans around his ankles. Mr. F was doing his best to console his disconsolate partner. F antagonistically admonished those taking too long a view at his injured companion on the floor, but it was a difficult scene to miss, and something that many would never chance to encounter again.

It’s not every day that a man’s prone on the dirty floor of a fetish bar with a pool cue lodged in between his buttocks.

“Did you try to pull it out?” one gentleman joked while his stream of pee-pee collided with the off-white porcelain of the upright urinal.

“Yes, but it hurt him so,” Mr. F said between loving caresses of Mr. B’s sweaty back.

“What about twisting it?” an unseen voice with a pair of dropped trousers echoed from one of the stalls with the door closed.

Mr. F tried. Mr. B howled. Twisting was quickly ruled out as a viable option to free the stubborn stick.

“Try... try chalk,” a third man groaned, also enclosed in a stall where four feet, two set of shoes, and one set of knees were visible.

Mr. B sniveled and Mr. F responded indignantly that unless the man had any lubricants or proctologic experience, that he should remain silent and enjoy his fellatio.

At the proctology comment, everyone but B and F sniggered quietly.

Mr. F darted for the bathroom door to espy the main part of the bar. Strobe lights and dance music became unfiltered and enveloped the senses. F saw no sign of the paramedics that he'd asked the doorman to call. Time, as it tends to do, was progressing without kindness, dissolving moment by agonizing and embarrassing moment.

More gentlemen entered, offered their glib recommendations, and exited.

“I'm very sorry,” Mr. F apologized with utmost sincerity.

Mr. B explained that it was indeed his fault, that it had been a trying time at home with the wife and kids, and that his episodes were becoming more outlandish, brutish, and damaging. No, it was Mr. B's fault for ruining Mr. F's night. He was married and had settled down too young, before he really knew himself. He was in too deep with the family business, his wife's father's business, and had already signed his own death certificate. All he could really do these days was tape together a story, a lie, about going to the cabin to hunt or fish, or another manly activity that manly men do to blow off steam and collect their thoughts. He'd known for a while. He'd fought it, at first. At first, it'd been nothing more than a fantasy that he'd tried to conquer with ignorance. It'd progressed and become something stronger, something more pervasive, and something that he needed to explore. How could he not? The feeling of wearing strict shoes on the wrong foot had always given him a pain that was easy to discount as something medical, something physical. No, Mr. B was feeling the physical effects of something so deeply spiritual, something with its roots planted so deeply in his soul, that it was coming out in the most haunting of ways. He couldn't sleep, he couldn't eat, he couldn't do anything while he was living a life with a purely fraudulent foundation. Who was the coward and who was the phoney? The man who negated his solemn truths, or the man that slaked his misunderstood thirsts to taste the meaning of truth? He was still providing, and he was still physically there. Most of the time. On his excursions, however, he was unfettered. His shoes were on the proper feet. He was alive. He was sorry for the deceit that he'd had to purport himself with, and he was sorry that the charade would possibly have to continue until his death throes. Not like this, please. If he was saved, then he would come clean. He was sorry for the inconvenience to Mr. F and for the position that everyone, including his family and his own self, were forced to occupy. He was sorry that it'd taken him so long for him to discover who he was. He was sorry, he was sorry...

The emergency squad flushed into the room. One younger gent and an older fellow took two steps into the lavatory and stopped firmly upon viewing the spectacle. A look of awkward bewilderment canvassed their faces as they both made a noise. Some kind of inaugural sound that snaked like a question mark would.

“This is what happened.” Mr. F explained what'd happened to the paramedics.

With blue latex gloves snapped at the wrists, the professionals did what professionals do, professionally. They inspected the area of entry. They applied analgesics and lubricants around the crater. They admired

the depth of glossy wooden handle that had buried itself to a stark depth, finally finding a snug cove to obstinately settle in.

“On three,” said the older one. Mr. F held B’s hand and the younger paramedic put pressure on his back with his bird-like knee, also holding his hand with a gloved hand.

“1, 2...”

The liar. He went on two.

With a shlock and a rush of air, the pool stick flew across the little room and landed with a hollow rattle. Upon inspection of the cue, there was no trace of blood, not even on the tip, which had been sharpened to a fine and aggressive point. Still in the paramedic’s hands, he mused: “Why’s it sharpened? This can’t have been for pleasure, can it, lads?”

Mr. B hadn’t moved. He was lying in a slick puddle of sweat on the ceramic-tiled floor. He winced as he shifted, tilting his eyes at the older paramedic.

*“You didn’t get the apple out, did you?”*

Vincent asked George if he was wearing his glasses.

“Of course I’m not wearing any glasses! I’m neither driving nor swimming, and even then, I get along just fine, thank you. It’s not bright in the house. Are you mad? The sun lives outdoors! I haven’t needed glasses for my entire life, though, yes, I wear them on occasion, because they help me see more clearly. I’ve often been given glasses as gifts, and have maybe even stolen a pair or two for fun, because when you’re a kid you do stupid things. But, I’m not, I repeat, NOT, wearing any glasses.”

Vincent apologized for asking such a ludicrous question. He spoke words in his purposefully untrustworthy vocal tones again, and said that the words he used, and words in general, were not such ludicrous objects when they were singular entities. He was not wrong. Combining words creates a whole new calibre of weapon. He then added some new words to the broth and said that George should wear glasses, which was arguable but not wholly offside.

*My poor, precious Enid*, George thought. There was no greater mystery than the unreported disappearance of his beloved Enid. A spiral of a woman made of twists and curlicues and helices. She was as intelligent as she was dexterous, had prodigious spatial awareness, and was also pretty and of a suitable height; a virtuoso woman, though her nose was too cute. She could also be quite imperfect, as George had been told. *Where could she have gone during all this war and movies and economy? Had there been a chance that she’d heard the intruder skulking through the house? Had she been aware that the predator had crept through kitchen, and both the linen and the front closet?*

*No, that was impossible.* George tried to deflect and push the idea away, but it prevailed. *Were Enid and the raptor playing a game on him? Was it possible that Enid had left the door unlocked? No, George locked the door every night. But, Enid could have given the raptor a key. She could have even let the thing in after hearing a secret knock summon her to the door in the middle of the night. Was it a birthday prank?*

George was excited for a moment. He thought that it may have been his birthday today. He was depressed when the paper’s date told him that his birthday was roughly eleven and a half months away, give or take.

In all likelihood, George explained to Vincent, the raptor had used its talons and core strength to scale up to the second-floor bedroom window, probably with the help of its prehensile tail. *But then, had Enid tried to rouse him from his slumber before she'd fled? If she'd made it out alive, that was.* George was constantly offended that he wasn't a heavy sleeper, and that when he snored, he'd either gone to bed drunk, or did it accidentally to ward off home invasions, like the way fish evolved to camouflage themselves in sleep. At any rate, his casual ability to perform sleep combined with Enid's keen sense of the rooms she occupied should have alerted them both to a dinosaur crawling through their window. And the noise. Did he remember hearing any noises in the middle of the night? Noises that sounded like a dinosaur crawling through his window? Was it possible, even likely, that Enid had retreated from their apartment and sought refuge at a friend's place? Could she have taken another lover during her midnight escape, cold and alone without a jacket or shoes? Would she do that to George?

Granted, their relationship had become astringent and had the bitter taste of cheap, overcooked, drip-filtered coffee. Vincent agreed. George hadn't realized that he was talking out loud. That didn't mean that Enid had sought shelter with another man because of a raptor invasion, however. *Unless, the raptor was a ploy; a ploy to wait until George fell sound asleep and replace Enid with a raptor so he wouldn't notice the difference in weight on the mattress. Well, he had. And, she was lucky that it hadn't shredded him into ribbons, whether on purpose or by accident.* George was getting worked up. *How dare Enid hide behind the fangs and claws of an extinct beast? If she wanted to leave him for another man and never see him again, she should tell him like an adult and not risk his life. He would begrudgingly accept her ugly pile of words.* That was a courtesy he could afford, no matter how bad things got.

Sadly, George still loved Enid dearly, and believed that she still loved him as well, even if she fought it. She told him that there was no love left, that the relationship had lost its appeal and incentive. He disagreed, but she disagreed with him again, like they were playing a game of checkers at hyper speed. It wasn't that George wasn't trying to stop loving Enid. He was trying with all of his might. It was difficult, however. He told himself that he should hate her, given that she'd told him that she'd stopped loving him long before the relationship was over. She'd told him that she didn't want to marry him or have his children. Peculiarly, their relationship had never seemed to conclusively end and continued lurching on. Not forward, but in a continuously shrinking, diagonally-backwards-moving circular pattern. She kept coming to him, needing him, wanting to see his emotions and drink them for strength. She always brought her own straw. George felt he had no use for all his other emotions when he had even scant crumbs of love for Enid in his pocket. Other emotions were superfluous jars of preservatives on a shelf that'd grown thick with dust in the cellar. Though Enid visited, she never returned complete. Pieces of her drifted through the door in always-varying fragmented continents made of broken islands. One evening, she might be dexterous and pretty, while the next time, she would be intelligent and of suitable height. She usually came to George looking for affection, but was less than eager to reciprocate, like a well-fed Persian cat owned by a well-fed Persian cat, daddy-o. In his moments of solitude and reflection, this would depress George. He felt her immediate presence and immediate withdrawal as though she were an opioid. His spirit was warmly lifted when Enid announced that she would appear; he would feel a stunning climax, the degree of which depended on which constellation of traits showed up; and finally, a spike of melancholia followed with denouement, as her image squirmed and squelched out of his system. To do it all again, of course, seemed to be his curse.

They had lain together the previous evening, but George wasn't ready to imagine her with another lover, especially when she would've had to leave his house while he was sleeping beside a raptor to do it. The thought was paltry and unappetizing. Vincent assured George that if Enid had done anything, it had been

her choice, and he just had to accept it, as he hadn't before and hadn't yet. George cut a dissonant frown. But, it was *Enid*. She was special.

He felt stupid and powerless. A killing machine of miraculous aptitude and instinct was mere feet away, and he was fretting over trivial, sexual, and emotional matters. *Grow up*, he said to himself. When the older folks had told him to put his mind to something in order to succeed, they must have withheld the reality that most times it wouldn't happen. Wars looked ugliest in a rusty stalemate after a long bout of poorly lubricated attrition, after all. For something to change, one belligerent had to succeed. Simple as Stalin and Solomon.

He opened the door quietly and beheld the sleeping raptor lying on its back. Its tan stomach was fully exposed, its head was rolled back, and its top teeth were exposed like a row of spades. A long, dark tongue hung out from the side of its mouth. Its claws were gnarled into a fist on top of stiffly protracted arms. A tail was snaking out from underneath the creature and poked out at the foot of the bed, swaying back and forth lethargically. It must have been dreaming. It had a sort of noble cuteness.

George asked Vincent how long raptors usually slept for, and whether it was a good idea to make it some breakfast. He'd all but forgotten about Enid possibly leaving him in the middle of the night for another man, and his appetite was now caviling for his attention. Vincent told him that it might be a better idea if he waited for the raptor to leave, and then came to have breakfast with him. Better yet, George could leave the raptor alone in the apartment while he met with Vincent. George was unsure if he'd survive the raptor's awakening, but figured that it'd be awfully rude to leave it alone with no directions of how to get home. It may not remember where it was. If the raptor was a thoughtful one, it might wait to secure the premises until George returned home, unable to lock the door from the outside and cognizant of the war and pollution out there in the world. If the raptor was a spiteful one, it might slice up the furniture and destroy the place.

George had suggested inviting the raptor to breakfast, figuring that the group of them could find a table and kill a plate of pancakes or eggs and toast. Vincent didn't like that idea.

"I don't like that idea," he said.

It was practically Vincent's idea, but George wasn't about to allow his feelings to be hurt.

"I'm beginning to feel the weight of this situation," George confided in Vincent. He was running out of distracting thoughts and felt as though he was delaying some breed of inevitability.

Vincent agreed with a caring and sympathetic "yes."

George wondered if one could plead with a cold-blooded reptile. It would serve him better to offer lines of logic to the raptor, rather than an emotional plea. He wondered whether it could be bargained with, as raptors were well-known as the most astute in the dinosaur kingdom, making the whole proposition inherently dangerous. They were swift and cunning. Gambling was out of the question, because as we all know, Raptors use cocked dice. He would be maimed within a heart's beat if he tried to threaten or use physical intimidation. Another occasion for injury would occur if he employed an underwhelming gambit on the creature and his machinations were deduced by the swiftness or the cunningness of the raptor. Raptors would do whatever they wanted to do. George mentioned that that was an old saying. As old as the Bible or the Talmud, though it was unfavourable that it appeared in either text.

Vincent disagreed again. He was firm on the fact that the only smart option for George was to leave the velociraptor in the apartment and never look back. If anything, he should pepper all of his belongings with gasoline, light them on fire, and run down the stairs.

“Preposterous suggestions, Vincent. Primarily, because I don’t know if the raptor has even wronged me. Secondly, that would be an affront to humankind and good hosts everywhere.”

Thirdly, he was currently without renter’s insurance, and though he possessed few cherished items in his meager abode, he’d be left without clothes to wear because there was a raptor in the room where he kept them, along with his overnight bag.

Again, he spied on the sleeping raptor. It had moved onto its stomach. It was sprawling the length and width of the bed with one arm beneath the pillow and the other extending to the edge of the mattress. Its tail was lifted like a half-salty cobra, slumping slightly in the middle. It was adorable in a way that was symbiotically ineradicable from his burgeoning familiarity with the creature. He ducked away from the door and asked Vincent if it was a good idea to crawl back into bed with the creature.

“No, that would be a terrifically inadvisable idea. It’s a raptor in there after all, is it not?” Vincent said.

George affirmed that it was obviously a raptor, but said that raptors likely have compelling reasons for doing the things they do. It might indeed expect George to be in the bed when it wakes up, and may become cripplingly forlorn if he failed to be present.

Vincent asked why George suddenly cared so much about the raptor’s feelings. George was under the impression that they were misunderstood and actually very sensitive and mercurial beasts with deep minds and swollen hearts.

“Let it,” was all Vincent had to say for George to close the door again.

Vincent proffered to George that he was missing the bigger picture in all this velociraptor rigmarole.

“It’s all much simpler than your ineffective recollections and defective detective efforts,” he said.

George asked him to clarify, and to finally stop speaking in such broad and imposing puzzle segments. Vincent assured him that he wasn’t, and started questioning him about Enid once more.

George said that he missed being with Enid tremendously, and that the current situation was going to kill him. If it wasn’t a claw to the viscera that did him in, it was going to be a long and frustrating contest of how many times his spirit could perish like unfanned coals. Vincent intimated that he’d heard all of this before, countless times in fact, and that it is not what he was asking about and thought that while it was not wasting his time per se, given George’s current situation, it kind of was.

“Then, stop speaking in cryptograms and give it to me straight, you smarmy dog.”

George refrained from lifting his tone, but felt that his words were assembled in a direct and meaningful way. He told Vincent that he’d regret chopping off his arm, but would do it because he’d been a thief at some point, and probably deserved it for past crimes. And, of course, because all the pollution and celebrities going on in the world today drove a man to do crazy things.

*George had read a story one time...*

Fine, Vincent had neither the patience nor the imagination to continue to perpetuate the conversation in this manner.



“Enid’s the velociraptor, George. Enid’s always been a raptor. That is to say, she’s been a raptor for a long time now, George.”

George scoffed with the sound of a thousand unimpressed wives and mothers. He told Vincent that he sounded like a real rascal, a stubbed toe of a man and dishonourable. Vincent laughed. George felt the hot vapours of condescension through the telephone. It was nice with all the windows open, but confounded him nonetheless.

He hung up after telling Vincent to watch out for his arm, but also that he loved him. Vincent suggested that if George was able to free himself from the raptor situation, he’d join him for a late breakfast, or possibly teatime.

George heard the beast roar. It was likely a yawn, but raptors were known to roar like bears when they yawned. He reached into a drawer and retrieved a little photo album that had pictures of his dearest Enid from the four years they’d been together. The album had photographs of the two of them at feasts and festivals, on vacations where they’d paid locals five rupees to hold the camera, and on holidays with both of their families and close friends. He wondered when the raptor was going to wake up. He was growing tired of waiting, hungry, and wishing to get the whole scenario expedited and dealt with.

He considered that he should put the photo album somewhere less accessible. It was no longer on top of the end table; only hidden under the weak aegis of a drawer that might as well have glowed whenever George felt despondent. It was all too easy for him to retrieve the little album and begin stewing in the affected memories of his past. They’d been great times that’d turned into something indescribable; something beautiful that’d been infernally spoiled by its impossibility to be regained, but still produced hope nonetheless. Hope was the vessel that ferried his bullish thoughts. Hope was the monument that needed to be torn down.

There was a statue on the end table where he set the photo album down. Enid had gifted it to him one birthday. It was a little sculpted figure of a little man reading a book. The little man was quaint and inoffensive; a perfect gift if there ever was one, free of scandal and colour. It blended into the room so well that unless you were to focus on it, you could barely tell it was even there.

A warbling bellow leapt George from the couch armrest he’d been perched on. The velociraptor was awake.

He heard the sounds of the creature awakening. Its padded feet thumped against the floor with drowsily uncertain steps. It released another roar; muffled this time. The old wooden bedframe whimpered as the beast pushed itself off the mattress.

*Footsteps towards the door.*

*Doorknob spinning.*

*Door opening.*

“Good morning,” said the raptor.

It rubbed its yellow eyes and long conical snout with the back of its studded hands. It leaned itself on the door frame by its elbow and scratched the inside of its calf with the sickle-shaped claw on its middle toe. It tilted its head back and made the sound of percolated coffee.

“What?” The raptor twisted the already-rigid angularity of its face.

George shook his head candidly and said nothing.

The velociraptor lifted its thick reptilian brow at George, seated again on the arm rest of the couch, this time with his hands folded politely on his lap. With its hands crouched at its sternum, the raptor dragged its tail along the floor. It walked with yoga toes as its tail straightened out and proceeded into the kitchen a few steps away from the bedroom. It opened the cupboard and darted its long face in quick bursts of speculating movement. It sniffed through the two holes at the end of its beak before shutting the cupboard doors.

“Still on the cigarettes, hey George?”

George shrugged, said that he had no reason to quit, and noted that he loved smoking as much as one who'd found their calling in life. The raptor responded by scoffing out of its nostrils and teeth with an obtrusive snort. George added that he had little in the way of breakfast food, unless the raptor wanted some oatmeal with unfortunately nothing to spice it with. The raptor declined in an annoyingly meek way that made George roll his eyes. George offered to make the beast a cup of coffee since he'd gone and drank the whole pot by himself. He returned to the smoking comment, mentioning that it was one of the reasons that he always kept the windows open. He also liked the fresh air. It was a small pittance for the odd velociraptor intrusion.

The raptor turned up its narrow face and squinted at George. It rubbed its shoulders and said that it had time to go for a cup of coffee before it had to start its day. George had so many questions sailing through his head; the most prominent were what a raptor's day consisted of, and, as an apex predator, what did it need to schedule for? He refused to ask these questions, however. They may be seen as rude since he'd just met the creature, and it hadn't even had a cup of coffee. George knew that he himself could be something of an ogre before his first cup of the day. The raptor said that it would also like to have Belgian waffles or French toast. George was forced to bite his tongue once again. He didn't hate the Belges, he just found it laborious to respect them.

As George was brushing his teeth, the raptor suddenly came from behind and wrapped its bony arms around his torso. It laid its head sideways in between George's shoulders and purred. He felt its acute talons rest against the skin of his stomach. He continued brushing his teeth unthreatened, but found the feeling of the raptor's shearing talons against his skin unwelcome.

The raptor apologized for George's back. It winked and walked into to the bedroom on its stiff hind legs. He turned around and saw that his back was lacerated open with nearly a dozen claw marks. He could see white and pink bands of muscle and possibly even some bone beneath the coagulated blood, which seemed to be gelatinous enough to be holding everything together. He checked the shirt that he'd been wearing. No red. It was true that the deepest cuts didn't bleed.

George asked what the raptor had planned for the evening, it being Friday and all. He was sure that the raptor would be engaged in something tremendous. The raptor snapped at him, saying that it had to work and then had tentative plans. Then, the raptor asked why he was looking at it so strangely. How does one tell a raptor that it's a both grotesque and prepossessing sight? George's eyes grew and he shook his head. He didn't have the tact or quick wit to maneuver the required words into necessary groups. The raptor apologized, mentioning that reconnecting with its herd was hard work. George had withdrawn his attention and put sincere emphasis on the shoehorn that he was using to squeak his feet into his shoes.

No one they passed on the street seemed to be alarmed by the beast from prehistoric times. George was anxious, but felt assured that the raptor wouldn't tear his face off in public. They walked in near-silence;

he with his regular stride, and the raptor with its ostrich-like gait. The raptor had to concentrate on moving its tail to avoid striking pedestrians while snaking its head sharply to look in shop windows. The beast never seemed fully balanced, despite its efforts. George's hands were in his pockets with his head pointing down, while the raptor bobbed curiously beside him. The raptor's little arms refused to drop to its side, stiffly bent at the elbows and wrists like dinosaurs are wont to do. That annoyed George.

The waitress brought the coffee. The raptor poked holes in the little milk cups and squeezed two into its mug. It sliced open a sugar packet and flowed a half lump's worth of granules in before stirring a teaspoon clutched in its talons. George sipped on his coffee, black.

The beast ordered a stack of waffles and George ordered a simple breakfast. The raptor clanged its spoon on the rim of the mug three times and set it on the napkin.

"Why do you keep looking at me like that?" it asked.

"Looking at you like what?" George responded.

"You're looking at me like you don't recognize me, or like you think something's wrong with me. It's almost like you don't even know me." The raptor narrowed its eyes as if offended.

"I don't know what you're talking about, and quite frankly, that's no way to act when I've neither said nor done anything wrong." George had entered into a game of light-footed wit, immediately regretting it.

"Listen," the raptor softened its voice, reaching across the table and lightly scratching its claw against the back of George's hand. *Yes, he was listening.* "I know that everything seems so complicated these days. That's mostly on me. I'm just so confused with things. It feels like I know what's right and what's wrong, but I can't ever seem to do what's right. I have these great days and weeks, and then every time I see you... it feels like a setback. I..." it spoke in a very calculated way to instill a sense of remorse or contrived sentimentality, "...think that last night was a mistake, and I feel as though I keep making this same mistake. The worst part is that I can't promise that I won't make this mistake again, because the mistake does feel so good, but it's still a mistake. As a perfectionist, I feel angry when I make mistakes, and mistake those mistakes as something that I can't control. I know I can control them, and feel stronger when I do."

*The beast was clearly talking about a murder of some kind. What else could cause a velociraptor to celebrate the art of false emotion with such conviction?* Guile raptor, George had been onto you from the starter pistol. He sipped at his coffee and allowed the raptor to continue, though the word mistake felt like a heavy sword.

The raptor chewed its lip and explained how this kind of relapse filled it with intense disappointment; it felt like a step backwards, and would take the raptor days to forgive itself. *Then, why did the raptor do it?* Because, it had been hatched from an egg, contorted for a long gestation period and snugly secured, then unfolded itself into the warm sphere of life as a raptor. Raptors yearned for comfort, and as social beasts, found comfort in others. Yes, the raptor felt compelled to mention that there were plenty of others out in the world and that was why it was so focused on its brood, it distracted it and it was fun to be with them.

George was compelled to ask, and did, if the raptor had ever heard itself speak. Had it ever stopped and listened to the words it seemed to carelessly mash together, like snowballs hurled without regard for the recipient? The food came, and thanks to the dim and ill-fitting geniality of the waitress, an opportunistic pause was granted. He tapped tabasco onto his eggs while the raptor crossed its arms and wrapped its claws around its puny shoulders. George asked the creature that faced him if it'd been given enough

syrup. It sniffled. *What was it with velociraptors? They cut, clawed, stabbed, and chomped, but as soon as they were prodded, they folded into themselves.* It's no wonder that feasters at the acme, for whom everything is so easy, are at a loss when they earn a bruise from defending prey.

George counterfeited a thirty-dollar bill of an apology, which was accepted as genuine, after a bit of haggling. He told the raptor that it should start eating its waffles because the Belgians were a distasteful bunch during the winter and lived for the hotter times. At a loss of what to say to a raptor, he also said that the light was bouncing meticulously from its scaly hide, and that it looked appealing in spite of its claims of being tired. The raptor lightly grazed his shin with its foot-claw with a conflicted upward curling of its lips.

"Have you seen Enid, by chance?" he asked the velociraptor, offhanded. He mentioned that she'd been absent from his bed that morning, and that he couldn't find her in the pantry or the ice cube tray. He'd looked up and down the apartment. He'd checked everywhere, and his precious Enid was nowhere to be seen.

The raptor began to sob and excused itself to the bathroom. *What a waste.* The syrup had now permeated all of the waffles' honeycomb-like dips. It'd become a soggy mess that George wouldn't want to help finish, even if he was asked nicely. He thanked the waitress for filling up his cup and told her that he'd, "Take the cheque, because the morning was progressing at breakneck speeds, and he really had to start getting on with his day... so just the cheque would be fine. Ma'am."

The raptor returned from the bathroom, its yellow eyes tinged with rubicund fog.

"George, I know that I've changed, and it's difficult for me to keep doing this with you. I hate being mean to you, but I have to do things for myself and my own improvement. I hope you understand that this is a time in my life where I need to be independent and not rely on you for moral support anymore. I'm grateful for all the years that you've been by my side, all those times when I couldn't handle what I was up against, but maybe having you there made you my crutch. I have to learn how to be my own woman, and I can't keep going through this cycle and having these conversations with you. You might think that this doesn't hurt me, but it does. I know I'm sending you all kinds of mixed signals, and I know that you want to get back together, which makes me feel even worse for leading you on. I just... I just... need space. Time on my own. I don't know how much time. Maybe forever, and maybe not. I still think about you a lot, but less and less every day that we don't see or talk to each other. I actually like that. I need that. I'm attracted to you, and I don't think there's any room in either of our lives for each other's friendship. You understand, I know you do, and I have to ask you to try and see me in a different light. I've changed, and have new goals and a new frame of mind. I'm still Enid, but I'm not the same woman you met and fell in love with. I wish I could make you stop loving me. I wish that you didn't love me, because knowing that you do lets me know that I always have a place to go back to when I grow sad and feel alone. I can't have that option. Your love is the worst thing for me. But... I need this. You need this. We both need the opportunity to start new and fresh and see if we can find others that make us truly happy. We're not meant for each other, and there's someone, maybe more than someone, for each of us out there, but we won't know until we try to look."

George was nonplussed. He said so. The raptor's speech meant that Vincent had been surgical in his callous prognoses. He decided that it'd been a good idea that he hadn't chopped his friend's off. He'd need it to carry all the wisdom that he'd clearly collected during his time as a thieving sage. George leaned on the table and shifted his eyes between the raptor and the outside, through the painted window that showcased the diner's name. The waitress placed the cheque on the table. George's hand landed first, sliding the check from beneath the raptor's claws, carving the receipt into strips as he pulled it from

underneath them. He insisted on paying, since the raptor had barely touched its waffles, and breakfast was the only meal that served no purpose to pack up and take away. It was ruined once it got cold, and never attained the same magical texture and taste when reheated back home.

“Say something,” the raptor put its talons on George’s shoulder, retracting them as he plucked a cigarette from his packet. George stared inertly at the blue sky that was hugged between trees and buildings. He didn’t know what he could say to a raptor. It had mentioned that it had a stressful period of work ahead and didn’t need this right now. Its tail stood straight up, feverishly erect.

“I can see that you’re agitated,” he remarked, “but I don’t think that I have anything more to say to velociraptor that only seeks to sate its monopolistic appetites on my delicate organs and weak flesh.”

“Veloci-what?” it snarled. It took a step towards him and demanded to know what he was talking about with all this raptor business he’d been going on about all morning. He stepped back, out of swiping range, and told the raptor to forget it, and that it wasn’t a big enough deal to cause a public disturbance.

“So, I guess this should probably do it...” he squished the cigarette beneath his foot against the pavement, “...be it, I mean.” He was still looking down at the shoe he was pivoting atop the pavement. The raptor said that it was appreciative, and reiterated that it just needed some time. He said he understood, though that combination of words made no sense to him. The raptor said that it still cared about him and just wanted to be happy. George nodded unappreciatively. The raptor pressed its toothy snout against his fleshed cheek. “Good bye, Enid,” George said with a fistful of hardened tears. What a dexterous, cute-nosed, and entirely imperfect creation.

After George’s shower, he turned to apply some ointment to his back, but no longer saw the slits. *It must’ve all been in my head*, he thought in his same head. He made the bed and was pleased to find not one single tear in the sheets or the mattress. The pillows and comforter still smelled of raptor; not at all fetid, but off-putting enough to be stripped and thrown in a basket for laundering.

Vincent showed up at the door for teatime. He asked George how the rest of his morning had been, and if he’d sorted out his pesky raptor problem. George overlooked the disagreeable smugness in his friend’s tone and said that he had, as evidenced by the fact that there was no raptor currently stalking around his apartment. While Vincent prattled on about something inconsequential to raptors, George, from his seat on the arm of the couch, looked down at the end table and saw what he’d previously mistaken for a little figurine of a little man reading. He made a repulsed cry.

“What is what?” Vincent startled. George pointed at the dead rabbit beside the photo album. “The statue? Oh, I suppose I never noticed it before. It really blends into the surroundings.”

George tweezed the dead critter between his thumb and index and held his breath while speedily walking to the trash, dropping it in the bag, and closing the lid. He added taking out the garbage, along with the laundry, to his to-do list.

After the interruption, Vincent continued on while George retook his seat. *What was that?* George hadn’t been listening.

“I said,” Vincent said, “that you finally saw Enid as a disfigured, brutish queen, did you?” George defended his position with lukewarm parrying, but acquiesced. “You look healthy again, like a human man,” Vincent said. George asked him to clarify and said that he should restrain from pointing when saying such things; his arm still wasn’t promised, in spite of his clairvoyance. “For a long time, my friend, I didn’t see you as a grown person, but as something that mutated between an emaciated and de-

maned lion, a frightened hare, a besieged turtle, and a spineless blobfish that puddled atop whichever surface it resigned. It's good to have you back."

"You're welcome," said George.

Vincent carried on anew about something to do with war and pollution. George was sifting through the pages of his photo album. "Have you always known?" George blurted, interrupting Vincent's ignored soliloquizing about the news.

"Have I always known what?" Vincent hadn't a clue whether George was referring to celebrities or the economy.

George saw himself in a variety of manifestations. He mostly saw the human him, but also saw a pack-mule, a troglodyte, a wounded dog with a cone around its head and a bandage around its paw, a sloth, and a lamb. He'd known that hours ago when he'd turned the pages of his album and seen himself and Enid together. While he mostly appeared as himself, he was standing alongside a jagged-fanged velociraptor in every image. *Would it always look like this?* He wondered.

"Was Enid always a raptor?" George asked.

"No, George, Enid wasn't always a raptor. Nobody's born a raptor. I saw her transform into that less than amiable creature a while ago, slowly beginning to strip the skin from your bones, relish in the tawdry chew, and always making sure to leave enough flesh so that it could grow back and reassemble to dine on another day. Everyone knows that there's no way to explain the existence of raptors, old friend. I was worried that you were going to be cut apart and eaten. Raptors are very hungry this time of year."

"Have you ever heard of a situation where someone has successfully reversed their mutation?" George asked. "Are there any cases in the archives, that even with all the war and music and terrorism, that a raptor has ever been turned back into a human?"

"To the best of my knowledge, no. Though, it should be noted that it *is* possible that many, including she, will never see herself as a raptor. Not even a trace of a speared tooth, angled snout, or hooked claw."

"I suppose that's a good thing. Life must be tough for a raptor." George asked Vincent to hide the photo album in the hopes that one day the pictures would look at least semi-normal again. He said this, even though he knew that life wasn't all that difficult for a velociraptor. Not in the slightest.

"See, that's the problem," Vincent said to George, who had his hands over his eyes. "A velociraptor can't be unseen."

He told him to open his eyes.

"Once it makes itself visible, all bets are off."

