

Trigger warnings: disturbing imagery, violence, suicide

BONE EATER

“You’re *breaking up* with me?!”

Ossea’s mouth sat agape on her face as she stared with exasperated, sunk-in eyes at her girl. The fluorescent light above her flickered, illuminating the horse flies circling around their grimy, deteriorating booth. Somebody’s blood seeped across the food-littered floor tiles, trailing towards the dimly lit *PLACE OF PANCAKE* sign against the gritty restaurant wall.

Eva shifted in her seat when she felt the eyes of onlookers on them. She felt every other customer in the establishment- a sleeping homeless man and a nutcase scraping his own skin off- judging the two girls intently: a cutesy white-haired babe dotted with black eyeliner and pink accessories, and a thrown-together schmuck wearing oversized flannel above a ketchup-stained Mitski shirt.

She didn’t meet Ossea’s gaze, instead focusing on a cockroach scurrying across the wall. “I just... Don’t see us going anywhere.”

Ossea put her hands up in a *c’maaahn* motion. “What do you mean? I’m feeling good about us. We’re good, right? We’re so good.”

“That’s basically the issue. You’re content, Ossea. I could be glad that you’re content with us, but I feel like you’re *too* content with *everything* around you.” Eva motioned at Ossea with five hot pink acrylic nails. “Like, what’s your plan?”

“My plan?”

“Yeah.”

“I’ve got a job, it’s good. I thought I’d just like, I dunno, just chill?” Ossea scratched the back of her neck and looked away, not able to think of a better response.

Eva shook her head and faced her. “I think that’s fine for you, but that’s not what *I* need. I wanna move up, y’know? My job offers some good opportunities for growth. I don’t wanna be stuck in this shit-stain of a town forever.”

“Growth opportunities at a movie theater?” Ossea threw her hands in the air, now looking right at Eva. Her purple eyes lacked light in them. “You get free movies, girl! Can you get much higher than that?” Her voice lowered as she grumbled, “And it’s not like people as low as us really get the chance to go up.”

“THAT’S stupid, to not even try. That’s exactly your issue- you give up before you even try. How long have you been working in that demented factory? Ever since your mom died, right? It’s been *years*.”

Ossea narrowed her eyes and shot Eva a dejected look, like she’d just struck a knife into her side and twisted it. The stare was all she gave her.

Eva didn’t back down. Her tone grew more irritated as the feud continued. “I’m sorry, Ossea, but you don’t think for yourself. You’re a worker bee. You wake up, take a dump, go to work at that nasty job, go home, watch people die on TikTok, then sleep, and I’m happy for you if you’re *really* satisfied with that, but that isn’t good with me. I need someone who can match me, not tie me down.” She got up from the table, dropping a crumpled \$10 on her unfinished breakfast sampler. “I’ll see you around, I guess.”

Ossea watched her walk away, unable to bark back what she had on her mind. She looked down at her own meal- a funny face, the best item on the kids' menu according to her- and took a bite.

That fucking girl, she thought to herself. She thinks she's so up there. She's right down here on my level! What the fuck! Is it really over just like that? She doesn't know a good girl when she sees one. She'll probably date a man next time, too. That fucking girl.

Ossea finished her meal pouting, then got up from the table and made her way to the door. She shot out a, "See you later, crocogator," to the cute waitress at the counter.

The waitress began sweating intensely from the threat of an interaction. "A-a-after while, croco- ... H-huh- wha?"

"Never change, girlie."

"P-p-please pay for your m-meal... Uuuh..."

Clouds of pollution and smoke radiated through the musty air that Ossea stepped out to. The desaturated purple sky loomed over the pothole-decorated, corpse-littered road ahead of her. Before her was a parking lot devoid of any cars, the area being too run-down to drive on. To her left were a few notable structures: a bus station completely overcome with roaches, an erection out of the ground oozing with gunk and smoke, and an establishment in the distance with vomit-green spotlights shredding through the horizon line. With a cough, she began her tread back to her job.

She continued ranting to herself. *God, I need a new girlfriend. Am I really too content? I just need a girl who isn't, what, pompous? Is that a fucking word? Pompous is a pompous fucking word. Why can't a nice girl like me get someone who isn't so fucking pompous? God, I need a girlfriend.*

She stopped for a second, spotting action in the distance. The ground began rumbling, chasms appearing in the already-broken concrete beneath her. Around the corner, a Worm that put *Tremors* to shame slithered down the road on a rampage. Dirt spurted from its mouth, coating its 5-meter length in grime and grout. With no eyes, the

creature shoveled itself around in a guideless frenzy, bizarrely screeching out human words over and over in reverse. Blood and bones painted its trail as it bulldozed over human roadkill, setting the gruesome sight that Ossea has seen on most of her lunch breaks.

As abruptly as the Worm appeared, someone arrived to challenge its devastation. A flash of green shot past the worm, positioning itself between it and Ossea. A hatted fellow with an olive-colored jean jacket standing in front of her drew out of nothingness a sword with a human spine that towered over their lanky body. When Ossea blinked, they were standing over the monster, having freshly sliced it down the middle.

The hero approached Ossea. “Girl, you’ve gotta run when you see shit like that. These things’ll eat your film.”

“Mm, yeah.” Ossea mumbled a false gratitude and continued her walk.

A girlfriend... Nah, I wish I was fucking cool. Like that dude with the sword. I’m just a jackass. Fuck you, Ossea.

Arriving at her destination, she greeted her boss- a short, cooled man in his 40s with glasses and red slacks- with a nod. He nodded back, allowing her to get resituated in peace.

Goddamn, Ossea. This is why you’re such a little bitch. You don’t do shit for yourself, huh? Eva’s onto something, you really do suck. No wonder you’re gonna be stuck at this mind-fuck of a job for the rest of your life.

She stood up on her little stool, mentally preparing herself for her duties. *Do I wanna get out of this dump? Do I- no, can I go up?*

... Nah, Imma kill myself.

Ossea draped around her neck the noose presented before her, then allowed herself to be dragged off the stool by the conveyor line the rope was attached to. She felt the pressure tense around her neck, allowing herself a moment of instinctual panic before calming her nerves into numbness. Her life left her far more easily than most

Ossea sulked on her walk home that night. *I don't want to be here forever, she thought. I need... God, I don't know. I need something better than this shitty world of death.*

She looked up towards the sky, observing the blood-red moon that glazed the clouds an eerie mahogany. *World of death, huh. That sounds kinda sick. I don't wanna go home yet, I wonder what movies are playing at the theater. She sneered to herself. If that bitch is still working then I can give her a piece of my mind. I'll show her she's as fucked as my own dumb-ass.*

Ossea veered off to the right, heading across the road towards the movie theater instead of the transit station.

The building stretched down both sides of the road, looming creepily up into the sky. The shattered windows allowed gusts of wind to slither into the structure from the west, which then escaped out to the east far cooler than they had been when they entered. A sinister aura emitted from the puke-colored spotlights that interrupted the abyss of the night sky, drawing in victims from miles away, alerting them that this lurking edifice was the home of their favorite new releases. Crumbling human-ivory pillars marched across the sidewalk, supporting a marquee devastated by fungus and spiderwebs. Sprawled across the sign with no missing letters was the title, *EVIL CINEMAS - - - Home of the Cinema.*

Ossea forced open the rotting front door, letting the familiar smell of popcorn and mothballs invade her senses. Despite the disturbing environment, the familiarity felt warm after her life-draining shift at work. The purple-colored carpet decorating the large, empty lobby was stained with shit, vomit, blood, and every other bodily fluid that shouldn't have been there. Opposite to the entrance was the concession stand, offering overpriced bagged candies on broken racks and freshly made popcorn displayed behind glass that hadn't been cleaned in weeks. To the right was a no-manned box office, providing customers no way to purchase tickets outside of concessions or the Evil Cinemas phone app. To the left stood a single crane machine for

entertainment, its claw dripping with fresh blood after an incident with the sugar-frenzied 8-year old still bashing his head on the game's glass from inside the box. Between the "arcade" and the snack counter was a long, dark, desolate hallway that challenged brave moviegoers to find the barely-lit auditorium their film was playing in. An off-limits staircase led to the second floor above the lobby, one with a balcony that overlooked the area. A figure obscured by shadows stood watch from the balcony, tapping long fingers on the balcony rail in an ill-omened, anticipating manner.

On the other side of the bleak theater, one familiar face spotted her. "Goddamnit, Ossea..." a uniform-clad Eva rested her elbows on the counter and stuffed her face into her hands. Ossea's goon stare penetrated the heavy air like a gunshot aimed straight towards her ex's immaculately irritated expression. Determined to devastate this girl, Ossea began to march across the room to her.

Unfortunately for Ossea, she never got the chance to lay into her. A startling, inhuman chortle bellowed out from deep within the auditoriums' hallway. An unsettling silence then fell over the theater as every light coating every surface suddenly dimmed and faded into a disturbing cyan, then giving no warning as the entire leftmost wall disappeared without even a hint of sound.

Standing beyond the opening was a Worm- a *very long* Worm with twelve angry faces grimacing out its sides. The eyeless worm jerked around for a moment before a few of the faces disturbingly mouthed in unison without actually speaking. That seemed to alert the worm, as it then chugged forth in Ossea and Eva's direction.

Eva grew panicked. "Shit, Mitica's on break right now. There's no way I take this thing." She hopped over the counter and ran in Ossea's direction. She murmured a "Get behind me," and half-heartedly draped her arm in front of Ossea for protection.

"The fuck do you think you're gonna do?" Ossea critiqued.

"More than you, asshole-" Eva couldn't finish her snapping as the worm swiftly reached the two. She looked around the room. "Shit..."

Eva raised her arms, positioning her left and right pointer fingers into an X-shape. As she did, a shadowy X appeared in front of the collapsing candy rack, and another on the wall closest to the entrance. With that, the metal prongs of the rack began to rattle, then began to fling themselves out of position. The prongs whizzed through the air like darts towards the X marked on the wall opposite to them, strategically placing the Worm directly in their line of fire. Like arrows, each strip of metal penetrated the Worm's side, triggering an eardrum-shattering shriek from the pit of its form.

When the prongs were done bombarding the Worm, each of the twelve faces began once more to mutter soundless words. Ossea could tell by its body language that the creature wasn't seriously injured, but visibly angry.

Eva grabbed at her own hair, digging her fingers into her scalp. "God, this really is it. Where the fuck is Moody? That son of a bitch. And you, Ossea, what the fuck are you doing here, and why can't you be fucking useful for ONCE in your-?"

Ossea's senses dulled as she stopped interpreting the world around her.

Huh, I guess this is it? That's all, folks? I die every goddamn day, I guess I'm fine with this. Not like this'll hurt after having that job for years.

Damn it, what's Eva saying? She's probably shitting on me again. Now, of all times? Bitch.

... Am I horrible?

I call her a bitch so easily. She could be nicer- she could be a LOT nicer- but, I mean, doesn't she have a point? I don't do shit. Not once in my life have I EVER really cared about something. I mean, yeah, her, but I think I just enjoyed having someone. It's the thought of not being alone in this rotting hellscape that comforted me in life.

Why did I accept things? Why did I let myself be so miserable all the damn time? Growing up, those fucking adults I hated, then it was those classmates I hated, and my own fucking girlfriend that I hated

after I decided that I hated boys. I hated myself, too. Shit, girl, it's all fucking hate.

How differently would things have been if I was nice to myself? Or, if I was just, like, nice in general? Probably not too different. Don't I wanna fuck around a bit more, though? Be nice, maybe feel nice too?

Goddamn. That small strip of film that has my entire life on it is about to get torn to shreds by some shitty monster because someone's on break. They're taking a shit, or arguing on Reddit or something. What a pathetic way to go.

In this world of death, we each get one true demise. Does this singular moment define every moment preceding it? That's sooo fucking pathetic.

We're all just a bunch of moments. We're all just little squares on a strip of film. We all live in a fucked up world with shit-stained carpets and dubious holes and Worms and 35 mm film strips and corpses and superpowers and whatever-the-fuck else. How pathetic.

I let myself fall, and I hated myself for falling, and hating myself let me fall even further. I never did shit with my life, and I spent so much time blaming everyone, blaming myself, that I got too comfortable. Too content...

Huh, I see it now.

I'm not content with this.

I should grow some fucking balls.

Ossea's vision came back into focus, and her hands untensed. She sneaked a glance at Eva, who was exasperatingly looking to her, then ahead of them, then to her again. Ossea looked ahead of them as well.

Mere inches from Ossea's eyes was one silently screaming face, staring angrily into her soul. The foul stench of its breath made Ossea recoil, but she kept looking anyway. Strung up above her and Eva was the Worm, writhing in agony as it's tethered and stretched in the air by two heavy ivory chains.

Looking back to her hands, Ossea discovered a white cuff around her right wrist. Bones decorated each side of it, with one large eye in the middle staring right back at her. The same chain that pierced the Worm was trailing off of the cuff, then fading into thin air.

Looking back at the Worm, Ossea instinctively flexed her right hand. With unsettling ease, the chains fastened to the Worm were yanked in either direction and pulled the poor monster taught. Its flesh began to rip apart like a well-cooked pot roast, draping gray strands of skin and ooze across Ossea's face.

With a begging scream, the Worm was torn in half. Outside of the absolutely vile cyan gore that littered the floor, walls, and windows of the lobby, a few vibrant flowers originating from the center of the Worm drifted peacefully down to Ossea's feet. She bent forwards and picked up the flower, bewildered by the sight.

Suddenly remembering, she turned towards the shocked girl beside her.

“Eva, we had a shit-ton of issues when we went out that I won't forget, but you helped me think clearly for the first time in my life. I don't want to stop here. I don't wanna sound corny, but I wanna figure myself out, and I think I can do that with you. I'm sorry for how I treated you, and I want to try again, with some respect between you and I this time. So, like, could we give this another shot?”

Eva stood there for a second, then let go of her stupor. She tilted her head from side to side, then sighed. “That's way too fucking mature to be coming out your mouth, Ossea. We'll have to have a MUCH longer talk than this.” She smirked at the fluid-covered girl in front of her. “But, uh... Yeah. I'd be down to go again.” At that, Ossea gave her the most genuine smile Eva had ever seen from her.

After the two shared a moment together, a few calculated, meticulous footsteps descended down the slimy stairs behind them. Standing there was a very, VERY tall man wearing a fine white trench coat, a deep red collared shirt, and a snazzy purple tie. Turning to face the two, he brushed his hair back with his long, slender fingers.

The man then opened his arms, looking around the organ-splattered theater in sarcastic amusement. “Now, *this* place is nicer than my *apartment*.”

Eva’s resting bitch face returned the second she laid eyes on him. “Moody, you asshole. Where were you when I was about to fucking die?!”

“Don’t worry yourself with that, sweetums.” He brushed off her fit with a wave and a sly grin. “Anyways-” he turned to Ossea- “That was quite the Feature ability you presented. Bone chains, how slick. You’re like if Ghost Rider was a short Hispanic girl in her 20s.” He continued with a suave only an older man can have, “Eva’s claimed before that your name is Ossea Comedora?”

Ossea tilted her head back, giving the strange man a questioning look. “And who’re you?”

He adjusted his tie. “Mr. Moody Evil, owner of Evil Cinemas, home of the Cinema. Quite a mouthful.” The man called Moody chillingly limbered his nimble body around, analyzing Ossea from every angle. “You seem tired and broken, yet with a newfound glint in your eyes. You work at a Corpse Factory, right? Perhaps you change things up a bit and decide to work for me.”

Ossea shot Eva a look, who only shrugged back at her. She turned to Moody. “The economy’s shit right now. Why do you wanna hire me?”

He smirked once more, sending a shiver down Ossea’s spine. “Ripe young girl, you’re selling yourself short considering your newfound ability. We need strength around here. This theater is, let’s say, *special*.”

He began walking the perimeter of the wet lobby. “Due to our location, this establishment has *quite* a Worm problem. I’m sure you could tell,” he looks directly into her eyes, “Ossea.”

He continued. “Because of our infestation, we need some more brute force to join our cast and help rid the moviegoer’s experience of any and all *pests*. Of course, we’ll also need you to promote our subscription program, Evil Unlimited.”

At that point, he suddenly bee-lined towards Ossea and knelt down to be at eye-level with her. With his height, he basically needed to sit.

“To be crystal clear, Ossea, I’d like to use you. You will be a worker bee, and you will have to do dubious tasks for me day-in, and day-out. I am not offering you salvation from your current struggles, but I am offering you a *slightly* better situation than the one you’re currently in. As well as this, I am *only* doing this so long as it’s mutually beneficial. If I ever have reason to question your strength, I will cut you loose with no severance pay.”

Mr. Moody Evil smiled devilishly, his face now mere inches from Ossea’s as he peered directly into her. “That is to say, I need you to be strong. Work under me, and strive to become stronger, Ossea. Do this much, and I will provide you a slight bit more freedom than what you had previously. The work is challenging, brutal, and rewarding, and that isn’t something you can say about your current employment.”

Ossea took a step back and spoke up. “Alright, enough. Damn, your breath smells worse than the worm’s. Do you floss?”

Eva bumped her shoulder. “Dude, that’s my employer.”

Ossea shook her head, and now it was her turn to look at him. “Thanks for spelling it out for me, I’m still working on thinking about stuff that hard. I don’t know what mind-fuckery you get up to in this place-” she motioned to the bloodied walls around her- “but yeah, I’ll take your offer since it sounds fun to work with Eva. My old job didn’t have any cute girls around.”

Satisfied with her response, Moody extended his hand to Ossea with a suspicious glint in his eyes. “Then, we’ve got a deal.”

She took his hand and shook it. “Yeah, you goddamn creep. Can’t wait to see how *this* job fucks me over.” Moody simply smiled a teehee-giggle smile. She didn’t know.

CHAPTER 1 - END