

The Trucker's Invitation

A quarter to midnight and the only thing to keep you company was the fluorescent lights, and an array of magazines the owner of the gas station had said you could read if you got bored. You sat on a shelf stacker's stool and read from a current issue of a gardening monthly, which you were surprised a gas station this far into the woodlands had. You hadn't seen so much as a motorcycle or a farmer's tractor on your drive, it was hard to imagine publishing distributors making the trip to keep a gas station's shelves up to date. The article was mind numbing, but it helped pass the time. When you decided you could no longer absorb the ins and outs of whitered toxicology and its medicinal uses, you walked back to the counter, grabbing an energy drink on the way.

The owner was a great fat pig with short unkempt hair and sweaty pink skin, with a patch of black around his left eye and on his back from shoulder to waist. He wore a single article of clothing in the form of blue overalls with a curious dull shine to it, like rubber that hadn't been polished in a long time. The inside of the gas station was cool, but he still sweated like he was seated directly in the sun's rays at the height of summer. He looked at you with casual indifference, and rang up your bottle of "MegaBull Thundercharge" energy on the cash register. It was more expensive than back home, but you expected as much from a roadside business. Convenience and inflated prices went hand in hand.

"So what are you gonna do?" The pig asked, his name tag said "Pen." The section of text which presumably said "I'm happy to help" had been scored through with black pen. "You can park round back and sleep in your car if you want, aint really legal but the cops don't come this way very often. Or at all," he snorted.

"Why's that?" you asked, taking your tall can of MegaBull and popping the tab. You drank the slightly sour tasting carbonated drink while you waited for Pen to answer you, and for the liquid sugar and god knows what else to give you a jolt of awakesness. You were starting to feel tired.

Pen gave you a look that suggested he was hoping you would just move along once you bought something, but he took a breath and continued anyway. "Weird things happen on this route, they call it the Weird Stretch. A slightly bent road that leads from the nearest town a few hours away, right into the heart of the Abergweald, and out the other side... if you're lucky." Pen turned his chair away from the counter to face the window, put his feet up on a stool, and opened the same gardening magazine you were reading earlier. This apparently signaled the end of the conversation.

"Do you mind if I charge my phone here?" you asked quietly.

Pen shut the magazine and reached out with his left hand, gesturing with his fingers for you to hand it over. You put it in his palm and he shoved the charger into a wall socket with force, then returned to his magazine. "Come back when you want it back, but if it's not fully charged, I'm not

plugging it back in. So, y'know. Wait a while before you come back, huh?" He ruffled the pages, hoping you got the hint.

You decided to take a walk outside to your car. An old banger, barely functional at the best of times. You wondered if Pen was being funny when he said "park it around the back," on account of the flipped open hood and the smell of a burnt, dead engine still lingering. You walked up to the bumper and decided to try and pull the car. It shook when you really forced it, but the wheels refused to turn and you wound up with a terrible ache in your forearms and fingers. The cold setting in didn't help.

Honk! Honk!

An orange behemoth pulled into the truck bay. A sixteen wheeler, painted a fiery orange and decorated with twisting, mutable shapes that tailed off into the mouths of monsters, dragons, demons and the faces of strange deities. You squinted and the paintings changed. They were abstract enough to be nothing but shapes, but defined and purposeful enough that you could see any number of beasts in the truckside mural. There was one shape in particular which caught your eye. You thought you could make it out if you narrowed your eyes just right. It looked like a pig with tusks made of flame, hued in purple, and it salivated neon blue in anticipation of closing its fanged mouth around another of the painting's creatures. You forgot what you had come out in the cold to do, when a warmth pillowed against your neck.

"Hypnotic. Isn't it?"

You turned around and came face to face with a belly wider than you were tall. It was covered in a t-shirt made from a taut, black satin like material that clung to the skin beneath like saran wrap over a ripe fruit. When it breathed, the material strained, and you could hear the undulation of its gurgling. Like a sea sloshed within the belly, and every inhalation brought the waves to its shores. You craned your neck and looked up at a smiling porcine face, whose skin was a shade of orange reminiscent of satsumas and the tailend of daylight on a warm Summer.

Standing so close to him, you could smell baked goods and citrus instead of the musk and earth you expected. Something about the way he smelled made you realize you hadn't eaten since the morning, and it was close to being a whole twenty four hours since your breakfast. You apologetically backed away from him, but he took a step forward and kept the proximity between you constant.

"Tell me, what did you see?" His voice was deep, but it was also soft. Easy to listen to. "I usually see a pig, myself. But I am a pig, so maybe that's bias on my part. What about you?"

"A pig," you answered.

"Then maybe that's a sign," he looked over at your car. "Is that yours?"

“It is,” you sighed. “And broken too. The owner of the gas station said I was free to put it round back, but I’m not sure how he expects me to do that. By magic, maybe? It’s freezing, and my fingers nearly snapped off the last time I tried. Ah, why am I telling you this? I’m sorry I’ll—”

The looming pig rolled his shoulders and briefly loosened his suspenders to remove the tent sized overshirt he was wearing. He dropped the plaid mass in your hands, and you nearly dropped it for how heavy the bundled fabric was. You caught your balance and saw the pig reach underneath your car, and with the ease of a child maneuvering their toy truck, pulled the banger around to the back of the gas station. He returned, with only a hint of sweat on his brow. Without his overshirt he appeared even bigger, even rounder. You tried to return it, but he shook his head, plucked it out of your hands, and draped it over you like a blanket.

“You looked cold, why don’t you keep it for now. I know the owner, Pen’s a bit terse but he’s a good lad deep down. Not the most hospitable, unlike yours truly,” he winked. “My name’s Hugh by the way. Why don’t you come on into my cab, that is if you’re alright taking an offer from a stranger at a gas station in the heart of the Abergweald.”

It was a better offer than going numb, or re-reading magazine articles until the mechanic arrived tomorrow afternoon.

Hugh ushered you into the cab of his sixteen wheeler. It was roomier than a mobile home, and double-widened to allow for the pig’s width. He had to be at least eleven feet tall. It was amazing a truck with a cab so spacious could even meet road regulations, it certainly felt bigger on the inside. Despite that, however, it was a bit of a snug fit with Hugh taking up space alongside you. Small couches were placed against the sides of the cab behind the driver and passenger seats. You on one side, Hugh on the other. But when he was seated, his belly protruded further. It reached out to you like a big black balloon. And you tried not to let on that the sound of the gurgling aroused you in ways that were hard to describe.

He offered you a tea which you accepted. It was warm and sweet, much like Hugh himself. He removed his trucker cap and shook out his messy haircut, which he had dyed a stark purple. It looked like it was meant to be worn up like a fauxhawk when it wasn’t flattened down by his hat. Colorful, inviting, and well mannered. He was a godsend to you on this night.

“So how long are you sticking around this little patch of nowhere?”

“Until a mechanic arrives. Pen says they come by in the afternoon... usually.”

Hugh had a mischievous glint in his eye. “Oh? Usually? So, you could be stuck without the home comforts of things like a warm meal and a shower for days. Potentially weeks. If no one comes by, that is.”

You felt the cab get warmer. Hugh shifted himself forward, and now hung over you. He put his hands on the walls of the cab to either side of your head and you could feel a heat radiating,

nearly pulsating from within his gut. You saw it move in a way that defied gravity, as if something from the inside had pushed upwards. It was brief, but the movement was enough to make you wonder if something was inside of him. Maybe someone. And your mind drifted, and you wondered.

How warm was it inside of Hugh's belly?

Hugh looked at you with eyes lit up by purple and blue pinwheels. He licked your cheek to taste you, and he hummed affirmingly. You tasted good to him. He wrapped his enormous hands around you, he felt bigger now, and you felt smaller. The dynamic of kindly stranger and out of luck driver morphed into that of a diner picking up his hamburger. You felt something seep into you from Hugh's palms, and your clothes became tighter. You gently swelled, and plumped up until you felt like the juicy slab of meat that Hugh was imagining. You could think of nothing else than what it would feel like to be warm, and to fulfill the appetite of your gracious host, who was about to save you from the cold.

"A few days, and you'll get your mechanic," Hugh said and opened his mouth. His jaw unhinged like a snake, but kept stretching wider, like his face was made from elastic. He placed you gently on his king sized bed of a tongue, and secured you within his cavernous mouth with the utmost care. You looked dreamily at the ember light coming from deep in his throat, which yawned wide and echoed with the sloshing of the ocean you heard before. The light from behind you disappeared, Hugh closed his mouth, and let you slide down into him with a deep, echoing gulp.

You fell for what felt like hours until you fell into a pool of orange liquid, citrusy and warm. A host of gel-like creatures swam about you, barely moving, letting the currents take them as they constantly turned to transparent slime with bliss on their faces. You, too, could feel it. Your clothes fizzed away, and your bare skin was exposed to the ocean's heat. The last thing you remembered before the haze completely took your brain was how good it felt to get out of the cold.

Hugh waddled into the gas station store and approached the counter. He slapped his sloshing belly, and gave Pen a dirty smirk.

"... you need to stop eating my customers."

"Why? They taste good, and I put them back, eventually," he gestured to his navel which was beginning to drip. "See. That wrestler I ate two days ago is already starting to leak out again."

Pen rolled his eyes. "Man. You're the reason people think the Weird Stretch is haunted by some man-eater, or an alien. I don't know what they're settling on, just make sure you don't get caught."

Hugh smacked his stomach, and let it ripple. "Oh don't worry. It's not like they're going to believe what happened anyway. Besides, I'm just doing my duty keeping folks from freezing to death. Now, how much for a lottery ticket?" Hugh rubbed his stomach.