

# MBF

## Michael Botur

‘How’s ya sister?’

Simon’s fat fingers curl into his palms, so his best friend can’t see his fingers tensing. He doesn’t answer.

‘I’m just tryin’a make conversation, dog. Don’t kill the party. I’ll talk about Star Wars if you want. What else you like... chess... don’t’ know nothin about chess... Orienteering, that’s another thing you do. What’s that when it’s at home?’

The bass makes their shot glasses tingle. Simon keeps polishing his glasses with the little cloth inside the NASA case and ignoring Rex. It’s Si’s night, but Rex has been punching him in the shoulder and ordering him to hurry up and get liquored. A stripper writhes along the glazed floor, stretches forwards, raises herself in a push-up stance and puts her nipples on Simon’s eyes. Simon revolves on his stool then gets up and runs away to the men’s room, leaving his wallet on the cushion. The girl plops onto Simon’s stool and crosses her legs and checks the time on the cellphone stashed in her g-string. Her mascara is trickling.

Rex shouts at the girl, ‘What kind of a dumbarse leaves his wallet there like that?’ He reaches across the table, grabs the stripper’s fingers with his long arms, brown and plaited with muscle and scales and burnt hairs, and pulls her into his orbit. The girl winces like she’s got superglue on her fingers. A bouncer appears from the shadows and slams down Rex’s hand and pulls back Rex’s index finger and their forearms scrape. Rex doesn’t even look the bouncer in the eyes, but he gives the prick a quick sniff: ‘bout 20 years old; brown; earrings Rex wouldn’t mind ripping out. He’s locked on the girl, and the bouncer is just an inconvenience.

‘No touchin the girls.’ The bouncer applies all ten fingers to Rex’s hand and begins crushing it.

‘You’re lucky,’ Rex grunts, ‘You must be Irish, you’re so lucky: Lucky I don’t have my .22 on me.’

The bouncer pulls back Rex’s index finger until it’s perpendicular to Rex’s big wide brown hand. He puts his big confident lips right inside Rex’s ear, nudging Rex’s ponytail aside and whispers through the layers of noise, ‘Well, you don’t.’

Rex lets go and turns his stool away from the girl and she disappears and he stares at the toilet door, waiting for the master to come out. He’s aware that his finger feels like a broken glass, but he’s not thinking about it. He’s got the scent of the bouncer inside his throat, that nuisance, that prickle. The essence of the big cocky cunt.

The beer glasses are rattling as trumpets and the voices of Motown ladies howl from the speakers. He keeps the bouncer's stench in his nostrils over the scent of tattoos and plastic Foster's ashtrays and greasy titties. He knows Simon's going to come out of the Men's and try to skulk out the exit to his car, but that's not acceptable, that defeats the purpose of coming to a tittie bar with your MBF. Si's fiancé goes by the name of Lesley. Rubinesque, he calls the sheila sometimes, Cherubic: What a load of bullshit. How many times does he have to bark it in Si's face? The girl's a heifer. Don't get him wrong, her personality's gold, and if personalities were a visual thing, she'd be a stunner, but they're not and she ain't. Getting five minutes away from Les is what tonight's all about. Simon chefs too much and gets a rash all up his fat luncheon arms from being sweaty all the time, and his belly button's stretched so wide it looks like a smile under two nipples for eyes, so the man needs a few fresh bitches in his life and a bit of a lap dance or even a suck 'n fuck in the handicapped toilet stall. Les can have him the rest of his life, make him run to the pharmacy for her and massage her and rub her feet and all that nonsense forever and ever except tonight. Tonight, he's meant to be Rex's.

The toilet door opens at last and Simon waddles out cautiously, touching his shiny dome, jeans looking too tight around the arse, crescent of gut showing beneath his Chelsea shirt. He sits down and tries to swat the tentacles of smoke stroking his face. Rex gets one of the waitress/sluts to dump a glass in front of him, and slides it across the table. He uses his bad finger by mistake and gasps.

'I leave for thirty seconds and you get your nose dirty? Already?'

'Got you a bourbon. Drink up, remember this here's like a warm-up for ya stag do.' He's finished most of Simon's other drinks for him. That's Rex's rule: grab it before it becomes ungrabbable. Simon isn't quick like that. He's a thinker, a sipper, a slow consuming python.

'You didn't even say how your sister's doin. She got kids yet? Any of 'em look like me?'

Simon mulls the shot of bourbon, grimaces and squints like Robert de Niro. Orange light passes over his face, then purple again. He tries to slide the drink back to his best friend. 'I'm not allowed... '

'No leashes tonight, nigger. What girl you havin?' Rex twists around and takes in what's new on stage. You can buy pretty much anyone, so long as you get them escorted to the private rooms, you're not allowed to just flop 'em over your shoulder and do the caveman. The rules are harsh. Rex has enough Titty Titty Bang Bang dollars to make anything happen, but really all he wants to do is leap onto Simon's missed opportunities.

Simon is taking out his wallet. 'Good shit bro!' Rex gushes, choking on the ice cube he's crunching. 'The Asian, eh? They love bald dudes, they reckon it's lucky.'

Simon pulls something from his wallet, something square and reflective.

‘You read my mind, the rubbers bro! The rubbers all the way! Happy ending for you, bro.’

Simon flapps a small square of paper in front of Rex’s face. A photo of Lesley, her cheeks shining and red.

‘I’m having *this* girl,’ he says, and stuffs his Titty dollars down Rex’s singlet and walks out of the strip club.

Rex smears the driveway gravel with the tyres of his truck. He does an oversized leap onto the deck, bounces back when he hits the door frame. ‘Told you we shoulda got a kerb crawler,’ he says. He howled as he followed his MBF out of the club, and he howled about who got to drive. His long arms reach out and brace him, and he wheezes and shakes out a smoke and lights it and begins to talk, but Simon clamps his hand over Rex’s mouth. ‘*You want us both dead?*’

Rex snorts smoke at Simon as the security light comes on. ‘Now you’ve done it.’ Simon slides his key coolly into the lock and sighs before he opens the door to his home.

‘Still hurts,’ Rex says, sucking his sprained finger, and then he sniffs around. ‘She’s in there.’

‘I’m not sleeping,’ Lesley calls from the bedroom. ‘Work didn’t phone. You should get more hours, we need more.’

‘Home, I’m home,’ Rex dribbles, ‘Honey, I mean.’ He sits on the lip of the sideboard, bumping ornamental plates behind him. Upright in the hallway seems like a good place to sleep. He has on a pink Polo shirt. It accentuates Rex’s biceps. The muscle on his arms is puffy in places, textured in others. He doesn’t really need to go to the gym, he only goes to make fun of Simon and spot him on the bench-press. Simon’s still got to pay another 32 months on the gym contract he got duped into.

‘How you bin, Lez,’ Rex drawls as he passes the bedroom door, ‘You eating enough?’

‘*Ssh. I swear to God.*’

‘What, bo? The lady wansa talk to me.’ He pinches Rex’s sleeve and pulls him through into the lounge, away from the bedroom where Lesley is calling for the coconut butter oil. ‘Twuz gonna give her a massage...’ Simon gives Rex the cable TV remote then finds a blanket and covers his mate, whose eyelids plummet then hover open, brimming. Rex’s hurt, stiff finger sticks out of the blanket. He yawns and smacks his chops. His gumboots stick way out over the end of the couch.

Lesley stomps into the lounge, arms folded. Rex’s eyes open a tiny bit. A smile greases his lips as he watches her. The fluffy apricot dressing gown makes her look untouchable, padded, swaddled; he’s never had a piece of pussy anything like her, all domesticated. She sits on the other couch beside Simon and tries to hold her dressing gown flaps together over the expanse of her chest. There is a whole cushion’s gap between her and her fiance.

They both stare at Rex as he falls asleep and a frond of sunlight grows through the curtains. 'Why's he doing that?'

'Sucking his finger? I think one of the bouncers beat him up. He always hurts himself, doesn't even need anyone else to do it for him.'

'Sun'll be up soon,' Lesley whispers. 'I did, like, four Sudokus. Garth won American Idol. We're out of milk.'

'I'll get some before work, honey.' Simon shuffles closer to Lesley and puts his hand on her thigh. He can see her veiny breasts until she pulls the flaps of her dressing gown tightly closed.

'Gross, put it away.' She stands and takes the remote control from Rex's lap and heads over to the kitchen. Simon crosses his legs and hopes the jutting erection will fade away. He has to squeeze in a sleep and get up again in two hours and mix pastry to bake two hundred croissants for the hotel's breakfast buffet. He's going to shop for a toupee on his break.

Lesley holds her butt against the sink and channel surfs with the volume off. 'We'll have to use cream instead. I'm not supposed to eat cream. Thanks to you, that's two months worth of diet down the toilet. What do you want to drink, coffee or cocoa?'

'I want you,' says Simon, patting Lesley's abandoned seat.

'Yick, you stink of smoke.' She switches the TV off, kisses Rex's knuckles, and tightens her dressing gown as she stomps past Simon and slams the bedroom door closed.

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Rex spends the season above the treeline where the boulders are the size of washing machines and there are waterfalls every ten metres. He has to come down because his index finger is pretty much buggered, every time he shoots at a goat or carries a rucksack it throbs so badly that he can't help howling into the valley and the echo scares away every other goat, leaving him with nothing but hawks to blast.

He pours half a bottle of Brut into his chest and walks into Simon's hotel and analyses the girl behind the bar. Her apron and black skirt muffle her curves, she has some mystery to her, that's what Rex likes, something not quite right to sniff around and investigate before lunging.

'I'm a hunting guide,' he tells her while waiting for Simon to take his break, 'For three reasons.' He numbers them off on his fingers. 'One - she's - YAAH!'

'Omigosh - is your finger okay?'

Rex tilts his head back and pours the whiskey directly into his stomach. It doesn't even touch his throat. 'Never mind that.' He uses his thumb to count instead. 'Look, what was it, first, you've got the money your Japs and Koreans are bringin ya. They're not used to our mountains. It's thar and chamois almost exclusive that they're after. There's not much deer left any more. People pay for the chase though anyway, that's ya motivating thing, no one wants to get back to their mates and go 'Sorry, I didn't catch jack.' Third,

it's nice to be ya own boss, not have someone tellin you what to do.'

'What about second?'

'I'll have a second of these, sweetheart.' He rattles the ice cubes in his clear glass and she says sorry and pours him another one, a tall one, she's a good girl, she does what she's told, she makes it On The House. He tells her he'll pay her back by taking her to the casino.

'But did they get the bear? That bit your finger?'

Simon pushes the saloon doors open and a ghost of steam chases him. He wipes his whitened glasses. 'Don't listen to this guy. He's fulla crap. You smell like wet dog, bro. Listen, would Sir like an omelette de blanc or an omelette du fromage?'

'What's the lady having, first?' Rex slides his hand across the bar and lifts the girl's hand. 'Give 'er something fattening. She's skinny as. She looks like one a them Somalians. You from Africa, love?'

The girl chuckles and her chins merge into her throat. She pretends to slice lemons, her cheeks burning.

'6.30, by the way,' Rex growls, pretending to sip his whiskey.

'Still with that system? C'mon, grow up.'

'What you reckon though? 6.30 on the clock system? You musta scoped her.'

Simon shakes his head. He wants to get on with eating the omelettes. They have feta and gruyere and spring onions in them. 'Ah... Ten.'

'Ten outta twelve? Nonsense. Chels, you hearing this? Simon rates you ten outta twelve. Y'insulted or what?'

Simon walks away, and Chelsey says, 'So what'd you rate me, big man?' but Rex is already off the stool and scurrying after Si.

They eat their eggs and Rex sucks a milkshake until the glass is empty and everyone in the restaurant turns as he slurps. Si has finished his portion ten minutes earlier. His knife and fork are crossed and he's playing with a bottle of olive oil. 'It's called an omelette du fromage,' he sighs. 'D'you have any idea how much care you have to-'

'It's just eggs to me.'

Si shakes his head and looks out of the window. 'Notice it was albumin only? Lesley's put us on a diet. Wonderful. So, I have to be getting back. You're going to have your way with her, I take it? The home schooled girl, from the bar. The girl who's only been legal for two years.'

'The fuck is that? Ablution?'

'Albumin equals egg whites.'

'So yeah, nah, I could squeeze 'er in this arvo'

'She has a fiancé, Rex.'

'That'd push her up to a nine outta twelve. Thanks for the tip-off.'

Simon slides his plate away and sips his Diet Coke through a pink straw. 'Five months to go til the big day. Lesley wants to lose three kilos to fit into her wedding dress, compensate for the baby. So, no good food round the

house and it's still half a year until... the thing. You know.' Si pushes away from the table and checks the text messages on his phone.

'Until? Just say it, bro. Until you lose your virginity.'

'How'd she get pregnant, then?!'

'Coulda been anyone.'

'SHUSH REX! My boss probably even heard that!'

'Nah, good for you, though. I was beginning to think you weren't into sheilas.' Rex pours more milkshake into his belly and checks under Simon's fork for scraps. 'Introduce us, then, c'mon. Your boss: she's a woman, right?'

'Dude.' He looks through his spectacles at his best friend.

'What? If you're not having a pop at that little jailbait at the bar then who ya poppin'? Shelley, was it? She got somethin against bald cunts?'

'*Dude*. Her name is Chelsey and she's not as... She wasn't *corrupt* until you came sniffing around.'

Rex throws the Sport section of the newspaper onto the floor and struggles to stand. He disappears the rest of his whiskey. 'I've gotta go bush again in a few weeks, soon as me finger's on the mend. I got a little somethin for you though, before I go.'

'Oh do you just? Antlers or steaks?'

'I'm talkin bout an extra dollar an hour, how's that sound. A pay raise.' He squeezes one of Simon's breasts. 'You don't even have to jiggle these.'

Simon shivers and struggles to get Rex off him. He strides over to the bar, lifts the barrier then locks it behind him and storms over to the rack of aprons and ties one on while Chelsey watches with her hand over her mouth.

'Kelsey - what way's ya boss lady?'

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'It's so close now, I'm giddy just thinking about it!' Lesley's naked skin shivers as she giggles. Lesley lists the things which she isn't allowed to do close to the wedding, because she might hurt herself or the baby, or damage her dress. She can't drink black tea, go swimming on the West Coast, eat expired foods, leave electronics on at night, clean up cat poo, use flax-based cleaning products...

'Ooh! There! There! Scratch!' she coos. 'Ahhh!'

Rex's claws are always long. He never bites them and never cuts them. They are dark underneath and full of moss and lichen and splinters. He caresses the muscles on her shoulders, scratches down her spine and digs into the delicate, wobbling blubber at the tops of her arms. He drizzles her with the olive oil he swiped from Si's restaurant.

'He's home in twenty minutes,' she says, passing Rex his can of bourbon and coke. 'I wish he was staying on til 12 though. God he's lazy. Thank you soooooo much for getting him that raise. From all the MacPoyle family. I'm going to make him thank you, I am.'

'Lead a horse to water,' Rex shrugs, and works his claws into Lesley's shiny flesh again. Her neck is interesting to him, soft and exposed as she rolls

her head to the side. 'Mr Master of the Domain's been avoiding me.' He pauses and puts on puppydog eyes. 'I ain't welcome at the wedding, eh. Coz of that thing I done to his sister, probly.'

She adjusts her bra strap and pulls her XXL night shirt on and hops up onto the couch with him. She squeezes his hand and he winces, his finger is still purple, and she kisses him on the cheek and tells him that he's a good boy, he did nothing wrong.

Rex takes the bottle of oil across the deck, drops it in the flower bed, scratches out a good hole, and buries it, pressing the dirt back carefully on top. Only the moon knows about the oily massage.

On the couch, they watch the clock. Ten minutes to go. He wraps his arms around her and she shuffles onto his lap.

'Can I ask you something? When you boys went out on your stag do... '

'Never,' Rex says heavily, shaking his head. 'I wouldn't let him. Root around, you mean, persumably?'

Lesley smiles and relaxes into him. 'That's good.'

They skip to the scene of the DVD where the wedding planner and the groomsman have sex in the laundry while the woman is at work, and suddenly there are red lights and a squirt of gravel and Rex lets go of her and presses the Off button and puts the DVD back in its case and Lesley is putting on the Food Network when Si comes in and rubs his eyes and says, 'Oh. Sup, dog.' He starts putting groceries into the cupboards. He cracks a can of Mad Dog cola for Rex.

'Heaps of caffeine in it. You'll need it for the drive home.'

'Right, yeah, I best be cruising off... '

'Off to visit Chelsey, are we? Or one of your seven other girlfriends?'

'Dog, grab a seat with me. Lax out. Shouldn't your woman be doin that?'

'I've got friends coming over soon, so... '

'What friends?'

'Friends. People. You wouldn't know them.'

'I'll run out and fetch some brews, then. How many people for?'

'I can't drink. Lesley's, y'know... '

Rex goes to the master bedroom and comes back with Simon's slippers, one in his hand, one in his mouth. The other hand holds his can of drink. He drops the slippers at Simon's feet. 'There ya go, take a load off.' He stands there, mouth open. 'I don't want you stressing yourself, bro.'

'Can you just...?'

Rex folds his arms and all his muscles bulge. He spits his mouthful of cola back into the can and places the can in the sink. 'Is this about that slapper at ya work?'

'You seen what she wrote on my Facebook?'

Rex squeezes Simon's shoulder. 'You ain't got the gift of game, dog.'

'It's not a game. It's my job. Know what she said to the boss? She reckons I fed her to you like a dog biscuit. Her exact words, it's, I'm in so much - the

- frickin – She’s all talking about mediation and sexual harassment and the boss has got my performance reviews and litigation and– friggin – friggin – ‘

‘I’ll bring her round,’ Rex interrupts, ‘Don’t you worry about that, mate. And I’m seeing your boss on Wednesday, so -

‘JUST GET LOST, REX! SCAT! EVERYTHING THAT SUCKS IN MY LIFE IS BECAUSE OF YOU!’

Rex takes a while to find the keys buried in his pocket. ‘Left you a DVD to watch.’ The plates on the dresser rattle as Simon slams the door behind him.

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Rex talks Si’s boss into replacing Chelsey with a freckled redhead with a sliver of a nose and no hips who moonlights as a model. The boss catches Rex chatting her up, and she is sacked and Chelsey is reinstated to the bar, and she keeps sabotaging Simon’s orders and swearing at him in front of the lower chefs. He knows that Rex has taken some Americans into the canyons and won’t be back for half a month, although he has a nightmare vision of coming out of the saloon doors and finding Rex waiting at the bar again, salivating into his bowl of whiskey, foot tapping the rungs of his bar stool excitedly.

Simon’s boss sits him down for his contractual review. She uses his name more than he’d like, and he hates the way she reads off paper, as if he’s unprepared without paper. He’s been given goals to meet over the new six month periods he will be contracted to. No, she is not making other members of staff sign such a contract, just him. She tells him to stop feeling so sorry for himself all the time. She says his friend gets along perfectly well in life without feeling sorry for himself. Si should take a leaf out of Rex’s book, she says, tossing her hair - which she’s just had spruced-up with blonde streaks - behind her ears. She scans Si’s contract and says, ‘Can he be reached via satellite phone, I wonder?’

‘Don’t know. It’s good having him all that way away.’

‘I suppose it’s the sort of work where you want to be left alone, rescuing the last mountain parrots...’

‘He told you that, did he? Hey - those are new. Your glasses. They’re, like, thinner.’

She coos and smirks. ‘Rex bought them for me. You’ve filed a leave application? For the weekend of your wedding?’

‘Yup.’

She iddles the pen in her fingers. Her nails are an inch long each and they have three colours on them. Her cheekbones bulge.

‘Rexyrexxyrexxyrex... What are we going to do with you... Simon, I wouldn’t mind if you’d dial him up on the satellite phone, if you could, please. Don’t tell him I begged you to ring, just, I don’t know, make up some excuse, tell him his mother’s sick. Just get him back for me, would you?’

Si snatches the contract off the table and hurriedly signs it and gives the



boss her copy back. 'Um... will do. Are you going to sign this, or... ? I need to know, scuse me, if I can still work here, you know, after, after my wedding, I don't have a - '

'He could have dropped it out of the helicopter, couldn't he, or lost it on a glacier? Sometimes it just rings then hangs up.' She clenches her fingers as if she is having contractions. 'Tell me everything about him. You went to school together, I understand? He used to beat up bullies for you, Simon, I gather?'

'It's complicated, um, look, I'll get him on the phone for you, spose I said we needed to order from him, I dunno, a hundred kilos of venison? They come in 25kg bags.'

She stops fiddling with her earrings and blinks her extended eyelashes. 'That's exactly it. You'll ring him tonight, won't you. Yes yes yes, that order's not a worry.'

'I promise. Ah - how'd I get on by the way? With my performance review?'

She spins the piece of paper. She clicks her pen. She nods repeatedly, folds up the papers, pulls them back towards her and says, 'I'm still evaluating it.'

'Want me to ring you as soon as I've asked him to come back? As soon as I finish my shift, swear to God, I'll get him to finish up his trip.'

She smiles as if she is having a photo taken. She stops clicking the pen, points it downwards and signs Simon's contract.

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Rex comes in through the kitchen trailing mud and sheep shit and a trolley with ten bags of deer meat on it. He rolls his eyes when the kitchen hands tell him the boss wants to see him. 'Catchin' up with my best friend first,' he said. He hefts his gear bag on top of the bar and shunts a stool under his arse. The bag is a metre wide, huge as an art portfolio, and the stool is heavy wood with leather and studs, but Rex has muscle in his hands. His bandaged finger sticks out straight as a pointer. The butt of a rifle is sticking out of the bag's zipper and a father eating dinner with his daughter asks to be moved to another table. Rex sniffs and remembers Chelsey's smell and says, 'You still here?' He gets her to stow his gun and bags behind the bar. She strokes the barrel of the rifle, mouth ajar, and tries to change the bandage on Rex's finger. He tells her the thing about guns is you don't just fire them, you keep them oiled and ready for action at a moment's notice. The hands on the clock became unreadable. He watches the races and sips the beers that came out of Chelsey's salary. He tells her the boss lady said to pay him for the venison straight out of the till.

Everything melts and most customers are ghosts except for a few football fans and the stools are upside-down on the tables and even the kitchen hands have rolled their cigarettes and walked out into the wet streets. Simon comes out of the kitchen and hangs his apron up and finds Rex

splashed across the bar like a spilled drink. He kicks a stool towards Simon and points his rigid finger. The football fans are occupying the other seats, yelling at the TV.

‘I should really get home, see Les...’

‘I already gone and seen her for ya.’

‘Please don’t do that. Not when I’m not there.’

‘Empty nest, lose ya eggs.’

‘That isn’t an expression.’ Simon notices Chelsey tipping whiskey into a tumbler of ice. ‘D’YOU KNOW HOW EXPENSIVE SCOTCH IS?! Give him the cheap stuff. Aren’t you supposed to be out of here at ten? Pack up, go home!’

Chelsey makes her hands hug and squeals. ‘We’re moving in together!’

Rex shields his face with the hand propping up his head and rolls his eyes at Simon. ‘Siddown, dog.’ He grabs the newspaper from further along the bar and pushes it at his mate. ‘Paper?’

Simon looks away. The loudmouths are enjoying the game too much, they’re giving him a headache. ‘Shel – ah, Chelsey – just get us a couple of cokes, please?’

‘I’m not your slave,’ she pouts. The men further along the bar ask Simon if he wants a curly straw and they all laugh and show their teeth and the cruel whites of their eyes. He looks over at Rex almost snoring on the bar and Chelsey rubbing an ice cube along his finger. ‘Baby hurt himself.’

Rex pulls his hand back and sit up straight and yawns. ‘What days does your sister work again?’

‘Look, ah, you’d better spend a few nights with Madeline, hadn’t you?’

‘Who?’

‘My boss. She thinks she’s your one and only.’

‘What are you guys talking about?’

‘Shut up, Shelley. Gives us another whiskey. Si: I’ll doss down at yours tonight.’

‘My sister’s visiting. Keep away. She doesn’t wanna see you again, Rex. Don’t come round.’

‘And she said that all by herself, did she?’

Chelsey pushes another drink in front of Rex and says, ‘How do you know Si’s sister?’

From down the bar, one of the league fans reaches round and jabs Simon’s belly with a pool cue. ‘Tell ya loudmouth mate to keep his mouth shut, we’re watchin the race. If he wants a sleep, tell him to go out into the gutter like a dog.’

Simon stares straight forward into his own eyes, reflected in the mirror panelling behind the bar girl. He fondles his double chin, pulls on the pudding of his cheeks.

‘Tell him yourself.’

The angry fan walks over and slaps Si, who stumbles backwards, knocking

Rex awake.

‘I WASN’T TALKIN TO YA MATE! I WAS TALKIN TO YOU, YA FAT WANKER!’

The man doesn’t see the glass coming as it explodes on his eye, followed up by Rex’s tearing fingernails. Simon doesn’t see it coming either, with his eyes closed tightly. He slides down until his bottom touches the carpet and he huddles there, listening to the fight. He can hear Rex growling, gnashing, tearing, dribbling and cracking and Chelsey’s gasping, asthmatic voice begging for police officers over the phone.

‘Give us that bag a guns!’ Rex yells at Chelsey, as Simon holds onto the footrail of the bar, holds onto everything in the world he tried to make comfortable and orderly and predictable.

When he opens his eyes, between his feet there is an ear on the carpet.

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‘So are yous still MBFs or not?’

‘What’s a MBF?’

‘Man’s best friend. Like BFFs.’

‘We go way back, Les. I used to waste niggers for him, on the netball court, put rocks in my school bag and smack people round the head and stuff. I don’t know what’s got into him, now. The man wants me to come crawlin back like a dog, that’s what he wants.’

Lesley crushes Rex’s good hand with her own and says, ‘*Lower.*’ Rex is sitting on the couch, while Lesley kneels on the carpet in front of him. She strokes his woody arms with light fingertips.

Rex pulls his hands away, but only to get more olive oil. ‘It’s his boss I reckon. She must be putting heapsa pressure on him.’ He squirts oil into the palm of each hand then slathers Lesley’s belly and huge, purple areolas. ‘I had to root the stuffing outta her to get him that raise and she still wants more. Nasty piece of arse that was, horrible, awful.’

‘Don’t even talk about that lady,’ Lesley says. ‘I’m just glad you’re on our side. Hey, can’t you put in a good word for poor old Si, get him a 12 month contract? Pretty please? I’ll do anything.’

She turns around and kisses his cheek. Her breasts are squashed against Rex’s knees. Rex leans in close. The tip of his stiffy is right beneath her chin. He lets his lips brush Lesley’s ear, he leaks his tongue then flicks the ear, and moves the moisture lower, and begins sucking on her oily neck. She giggles and suddenly says ‘Finally!’ and leans her head back and spreads herself out on the carpet for him.

‘*Careful,*’ she whispers as Rex descends, holding her pregnant belly, ‘You don’t wanna hurt him.’

He sniffs her belly, and his beard makes her wriggle ticklishly. He crouches over her on all fours, ready to devour her, but her belly holds him away. He pauses, steadies his hand in front of him, scrapes the soggy bandage off, grabs his purple-black finger with his good hand, closes his eyes,

clenches his teeth, yanks the finger backwards with everything he has in him  
and hooooooooooooowwwwwwwwwls.