

FANTASY

Gmonster

By Judah lam

“At nine G’s, you can’t move a muscle. It pins your hands and arms down, and your head weighs 100-plus pounds.” – Major Matt Modleski

This is a story, not a song, yet I hope to hear singing at the end. This is a story about real life; it is a story about being full of dreams, and it is a story about finding which way is up by falling down.

I think that I have been having problems with my blood sugar since May, but I don’t know why. When I realize I am dreaming of being underwater, I wake up and find that I am still in my truck, hauling a double supertanker load of gasoline, bound for Chemainus. I have had four cups of coffee, and I rolled my window down halfway at the last red light, but it has not helped me stay alert. Startled by the fact that while I was asleep, for a moment, my rig has wandered into the oncoming lane, I brake too hard and fish-tail. Time stops thin. The horizon twists. The fuel-tanker trailers I’m towing skid, and I hear tires exploding. The rear trailer seems to float up beside me on my left, and it overtakes my truck before coming to rest in front of me as we finally stop. The groaning sounds of stretching metal roar and shudder through me as the truck settles and falls silent. The tanker trailer and I, in the middle of the day, in the middle of Main Street, are helpless—my fear of sleeping led me here. The trailer, bound for Chemainus Esso, is pinned against my driver’s side. This is my dream: more sleep, brighter days, shorter routes, and longer holidays. The trailer, bedeviled, hasn’t flipped over. The truck has come to rest in full jackknife. *Thank God, the hitch seems intact.*

Christ. I let go of one handle of the tanker ladder to trace my gloved finger along the top of the jagged rip in the aluminum fuel tanker. My chest feels tight. All these trips, up and down Vancouver Island, blend together in my mind. Fuel is lapping out the hole, it is running down the outside of the tank, and it is in the act of hypnotizing me. I stand on the fifth rung, with my hand on the seventh, looking up two steps to the sky. Although I know these fumes are getting to me, I step up the ladder. I see below me in ones and zeroes. I shouldn't breathe in the vapour, yet I'm not exactly being careful, am I?

My eyes burn. Vapour billows around my head. A shrill, high-frequency soundwave catches my guard and penetrates my skull. If the frequency was mapped with sand and magnets and iron shavings, you would see the sound's sigil; the noise runs through my head and exits my right ear. My hand holding one ladder rung from the top, I spin around to the right. The ladder is wet. My ear is hot. Like a branding iron, the searing heat flips a switch in my head and tips the invisible scale of consciousness; the world becomes jagged. I see sigils cast upon tussled blue skies. *The sky is blue with cumulus drifts that are falling too.*

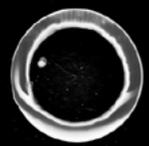
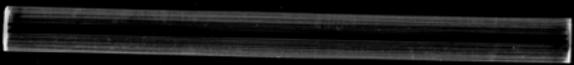
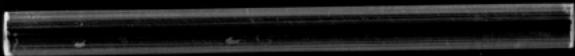
I peer into the gash watching the sloshing waves. I shake my head when the buzzing in my ear takes my balance from me.

“Twang. Buzz. Zap.” I try to look but I am blinded, I am dreaming, but for a few seconds I am also awake. I see a white ceiling, green walls, and bright lights. *What the hell?* I’m lying on my back, my eyes don’t burn, and I don’t smell gasoline. I don’t hear anything but the whirring of electrons. I hear surges from an unknown power source. A helmeted stranger approaches. I hear the tempest of electrical pulses. The chocolate-brown helmet with the black visor nods and steps back. I try to get a look, but the visor is too dark to see through. I can’t see anything but my own reflection.

Where am I? I drift back into the dream and Kali is underneath me. She reaches up and smiles, her four perfect, blue arms, reaching out from the bottom, center green. She is made of wax. So is Alister Crowley, and the rest of them too. *Where am I?* It’s been ages since I knew I was falling off a ladder. Something touches my ear. Something presses on my neck, and my feet. I swim in terror. My heart is the first horse out of the gates.

“Pop.” An electric field consumes the room with blue and rips me out of the dream, but for a moment. A thud and my back arches. My body goes rigid. I feel cold. I smell thunder and all is blue. Electrocuted into place, I’m frozen between death and life with my eyes open, before I’m shuddering. My chest is steaming. The cold is blue, and then hot, white. My body relaxes and I’m falling backwards; the ceiling opens up, and the sky shrinks. Again, a ladder passes as I fall, as my consciousness trades places with my subconscious, snapping back and forth like a plucked elastic band between thumb and finger.

A human tuning fork, my legs are resonating. My right ear burns and my left hand hums. When you’ve driven down the side of a mountain, sometimes you feel as if you need to open your mouth. The room spins clockwise. I am saying something. I can’t feel my face. My tongue is fat.



PHOTOGRAPHY

Major Arcana #2 By Rebecca Wheeler

“Blood pooling in your legs. Contract the muscles in your body, or you will die,” says a voice. It sounds robotic and radiolike. It isn’t coming from the helmet.

My head swoons and buzzes. The rumble of roving, rolling water, a man in a barrel about to go over Niagara Falls, and all the elephants in the world are stomping on the jungle floor. The thundering turns the marrow in my bones. Invisible fathoms press upon me, pressing, pressing. Turbines churn the sea near Departure Bay and the thing the gull dropped hits the water and descends into a vortex of bubbles and saltwater, sinking into black water depths.

Hold him down.

This is the world before the sun, this, before the rhythm of light. The tunnel widens. Something opens at one end. I hear angry machinery whir and click. *How can I have fallen down, yet still be at the top?* A light shines in from above. Jonah and I are vomited into the sea. The cold black sea swallows us. *Let there be light.* I reach for it.

I am dreaming. The falling has stopped. Awake, I sit up. An image of a gargantuan regal moth is burned into my mind. I blink at the pattern of its wings. My vision is blurry and soft. The light is smeared across my face as if I’m sitting in a mirage. The air crackles with cold blue stripes and the devil bobs its head on a sickening, green jelly podium. The devil nods to me. Jellyfish form somnolescent runes in the black water. I can’t form ideas. The murk turns to a blinding light. I’m on my knees and reach up, grabbing at the light. The vision burns like hot sunshine in my hands.

My eyes focus. What I thought was a space helmet is no space helmet. It is a damned devilish caterpillar face, a face with giant, careful, shiny-black eyes. The arcs of electricity are legs coming out of a blasphemous gelatinous belly. There is something strangely familiar about this. I vomit. The caterpillar’s mandibles are shearing at me with a sickening scissor-like sound; the devil keeps nodding. I can’t

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and longer holidays.*

feel my chin. Stripes of white lightning arc out of me when I move and the devil jumps back, away from me. The oily black arms without fingers are feet without toes. Of a dozen, no, of sixteen legs, the two that were touching my neck and the two that were touching my feet now gesture furiously as the chocolate head bobs. It isn't a helmet at all. I see where I am. Don't you know it; I'm in my bedroom. I'm still in bed. *Aren't I?* Slightly turned to my right, I see what today is on the digital clock that displays the time and the day in shimmering red LED block letters. Three, three, three, T, H, U, R. I feel like a submerged target that has surfaced and is bobbing in the cold ocean a thousand miles from shore. *This can't be real.* I can't tell where the dream ends—I keep waking up and finding that I'm still a-dream. I remember reading that dreams, as the aborigines of Australia believe, are the true reality, while reality is the true dream. As above, so below.

My voice is a ripple in the water and my room is a lake of darkness. God, my head hurts. My eyes are drunks staggering about under the stars and my mind is circling like the moons of Jupiter. I feel half-dead.

"I don't understand," I manage to say. Protons are dancing the air into a frenzy. The room growls and hisses. I hear the chime of handbells and the bellowing of lambs.

"Where am I?" the devil says, seeming to have copied my voice. It speaks in zaps and crackles, talking in volts, whispers of amps of current,

mimicking my thoughts. The air clears, and as an immense pressure leaves, I feel my body expand. The caterpillar, the size of a good lion, stands about three feet away from me. This a human being in a devilish caterpillar suit. The devil is acting exactly how I imagine a human would act if humans were caterpillars. It must be human. I think it is.

The devil's fluorescent-green body is riddled with spectacular protrusions. Giant black spines stick out of its head and out of the middle of the devil's green back like stegosaurus plates. The head of the human pretending to be a caterpillar is chocolate brown.

There has to be a person in there. I'm looking for a zipper on the belly. Like the spines, the eyes are greasy black. The arms are black too, oily, like the large eyes. I have a sudden cascade of thoughts that all jumble up onto one another in a pile on the floor. *What happened?*

I realize that the devil has one leg on my foot and one leg on my throat. The other feet are waving. That's too many black, wiggly feet with no toes. I count in pairs to sixteen. I feel like throwing up.

I climbed a ladder when I shouldn't have. I ran my gloved hand along the jagged tear in the tanker hull, inspecting the long narrow hole torn in the aluminum fuel tank, when I shouldn't have. I smelled nothing but petrol fuel when I shouldn't have. I shouldn't have been staring at the waves of gasoline rolling back and forth in the tank, and they shouldn't have been splashing out of the hole onto the ground and hypnotizing me. There's no way that the washy sight of gas fumes should have been all around me. There was no way that the road should have been a pool of gasoline. There was the distant and detached worry of ignition. *Where is the sun?*

That is how the devil comes. Like hearing a song emitting from a cold stone in the dead of night, in the desert, the devil comes—a holy generator of god-coloured sparks that stipple across space, forming devilish electrical arcs in the turnstiles of night. All colours swimming in one imperceptible mass of blackness, purple, therein blue, white,

therein amber tongues that reach inside me and pull on my sin needles. The sheen of the devil's mandibles and the oily black eyes are the two ponds of eternity. They ripple as the feet sign at me and the ponds see me as the helmet nods. I taste the sadness of tears and sweat. I smell water and salt. The devil nods. I believe this thing is human. I'm certain this human thing is asking for my help. The human thing is lost. A Yazidi priest stands between us, swaying back and forth, wailing, and praying to the peacock angel in his language. Tears roll down my cheeks and I sob. The air smells of strawberries and sulfur.

"Whap!" The devil vanishes. I feel like I am gagging. I try to sit up. The green walls remind me that I was just dreaming of when I was twelve, when little Pete and I found the devil walking on Meyersville Road in the swampy marsh of Morris County. My growth spurt had come early. I have a boy's moustache, and new, wide, strong shoulders, and I am afraid to look down at the new curly hair. My sweat smells terrible. When I look in the mirror, I see an ugly boy with dark upper lip fuzz who is riddled with zits and piercing blue eyes. Pete likes to call me pizza-face.

For a few seconds, I am afraid to get out. Through the windshield, yellow arches reach towards the sun. Cars filing through the drive-through seem like robots marching. To my right, neat little houses with tiny square yards line the street. A young boy chases a scraggly, gray dog. I see tailored green grass with red and yellow rose bushes in bloom.

Where the traffic light once was, a yellow house with white trim is brimming with people. I smell barbeque pork ribs. June has been awfully warm. The men, backs to me, in shorts and sunglasses, smile and hold beer cans. Sundress-clad women shade their eyes and nod to each other, saying yes, yes. They are pointing at me.

I feel like a robot. I walk around the tank surveying. My boots make sloshy sounds in the flammable liquid. I feel zombielike; dead-eyed, I walk up to the side ladder and stare at the waterfall of

fuel cascading at my feet. *It's okay. Everything will be okay.* I see the gnarled pole with smashed green, amber, and red lenses lying in the middle of the street. There is a mess of torn wires protruding from the roadside where the pole snapped; the wires make arcing sounds. "Snap. Crack. Sizzle."

A white car is stopped. Four people stand around it. They are holding phones to their heads; one is taking pictures. I don't remember having climbed the trailer ladder. Now I'm standing fair footed, up the ladder. Staring down the hole where the fuel sloshes. The waves are mesmerizing. My comprehension is slipping. The scales are tipping, tipping. I'm losing. My head spins. *Number nine. Number nine. Number nine.*

"Get away from there!" shouts a tall, thin man wearing a gray hat. "You'll go up like a Roman candle!"

I see his mouth moving. *This can't be happening.* Looking down from the trailer ladder, the entire scene looks like a long underground tunnel. I'm not certain that I'm here. My overalls are soaked. Blinking through the sunlight as it burns my vision orange tinted. I face upwind and draw a deep breath. I peer into the gash, watching the sloshing waves. I shake my head when the buzzing in my ear takes my balance from me. My lungs burn when I start to lose my footing. *Don't lose grip of the handle.* There is a growing puddle of fuel at the bottom. I can no longer hold my breath. I can no longer hold on.

"Ishat!" I don't know why, but I'm calling the name of a Phoenician goddess of fire, yelling, falling. I grab at the air and reach nothing. Falling backwards, the sky is getting smaller. Gravity tickles my core. Still falling. No impact, only falling. It's as if I have fallen right through the wet concrete and into an invisible pit. I exhale so violently that I feel myself fly out of my mouth. *Where am I?* "Can you hear me Jake?" says a nurse. I nod. I remember a tall man in a gray hat, yelling for me to get away, and saying something about

candles. Two doctors and several nurses crowd into the small green room with a white door, numbered 9. I nod.

“I’m Dr. Collins. Do you know where you are?”

I shake my head. “The hospital?” I answer.

“Nanaimo General. We thought we’d lost you there. We had to drill a hole in your skull to release the pressure on your brain.” They are shining tiny flashlights in my eyes, left, then right.

I vomit on the arm of the nurse who is removing the breathing tube from my chest. Again, I try to sit up. The nurse pushes a small plunger of liquid into the IV bag, and everything swims and goes blurry. Again, I dream of the past. The doctor is talking to my brother, and Pete is nodding and his cheeks are drizzly. Pete is talking, but I don’t understand. I hear rushing water.

I am almost twelve. Walking home from school with little Pete, taking the shortcut through the swamp. We stick to Meyersville Road until we come to the boardwalk that leads to the trail home. We hear the birds before anything. They are excited, cawing nasally.

“Caw-caw.”

Then I see what they were after. On the side of the road is a huge green, black, and red caterpillar with a chocolate-coloured head. Fish crows have been watching it creep, stalking and cawing from a tall tree in the hardwood forest. The big crawler follows the road. There is little traffic on Meyersville; you hear a car coming for half-a-mile before you see it. Pete looks amazed as I pick it up. The thing goes crazy. It swings its head back and forth trying to get away, trying to bite my fingers, and arching back and forth. I nearly drop the devil, and I come near squashing the thing in trying to keep a hold of it. The red horns are spines, prickly and ticklish in my palms. It is awfully strong for a caterpillar. Rolling up the bottom of my shirt, I make a little hammock and roll the top closed. The giant green thing

eventually stops fighting and rests in the hammock. When it calms, I show little Pete how to make a hammock, and give the devil to him to carry in his shirt. You should have seen his face. As we walked home, Pete walked taller than ever before, face proud as a young lion. I was glad.

“This is a hickory-horned devil caterpillar,” says my teacher, Miss Svaboda. I think she’s really pretty. She encourages us to bring specimens for identification to show-and-tell. My head feels like a toilet bowl that she flushes with a smile.

“Where did you find it?” she asks.

“Middle of Meyersville, near the Great Swamp.”

“That’s pretty awesome, Jake. Thank you for showing the class. I will be setting it free this afternoon. I’ll take it up to the wildlife observation center,” Miss Svaboda says. I like it when she looks happy.

“I’d estimate it to be about a month old. It will be looking for a spot of soft, moist soil near a tree to dig down into and hide so it can pupate. When it emerges in four to six days, it will no longer be a devil, but a giant regal moth. After it flies off, the moth may continue flying for several days just to find a mate, and after it mates, it will lay eggs. It will die only a few days later. Magnificent,” she says. *Miss Svaboda is magnificent.* All the students in the class buzz with questions. The devil has stopped struggling. It is crawling up my arm, cocking back its helmet-like head and waving its sixteen finger-like arms. The devil is speaking caterpillar sign-language to my classmates.

“My brother and I rescued the devil from fish crows near the swamp. They were chasing it, dive-bombing and cawing at it.”

“Is the devil mean? Does the devil bite?”

“It was mad at first, bit once, but it didn’t really hurt that much,” I say.

“What does the devil eat? Grass?”

“Leaves. See, it likes me now,” I say. *Today is the greatest day.*