



**KONN
LAVERY**

CULTIVATE

**SEED ME
RELAPSE EDITION**

FIRST EDITION
RECOGNITION



ULTIMATE

SEED ME
RELAPSE EDITION

— Written by: Konn Lavery —
— Edited by: Cara Flannery —



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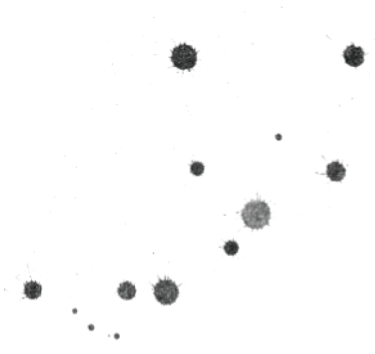
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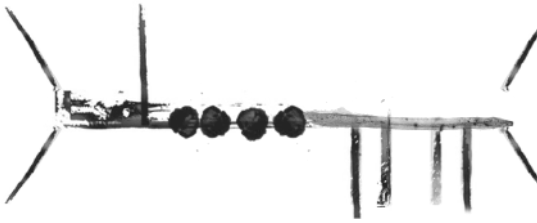
“Konn Lavery has obvious talent, and his Seed Me book belongs on the shelf next to King and Koontz. Great creep factor, awesome pace, refreshing bad guys, and the ability to stay with you after you’re done. Do Consume Seed Me.”

- scifiandscary.com



AUTHOR NOTE

RELAPSE : TO SLIP OR FALL BACK INTO A FORMER WORSE STATE



The Merriam-Webster definition of Relapse fits wonderfully for this rewritten version of the 2016 horror novel *Seed Me*. I decided to revisit this story while the pieces for *The Macrocosm* have come together.

What is *The Macrocosm*? Well, it's a superverse I've been writing towards since 2005. *Seed Me* is a standalone novel with name connections linking to *The Macrocosm*, encompassing various eras, book genres, and characters. More information about the superverse can be found on my website through the interactive timeline and the Wiki, along with the short story collection: *Into the Macrocosm*.

The *Cultivate: Seed Me Relapse Edition* is a complete rewrite. It includes new scenes that share more of the mythos within this story. Now, whether you've read the previous edition or if this is your first time . . . prepare yourself to slip away into something quite sinister.

SPECIAL THANKS TO...

YOU,

the person who is holding this book. You rock for grabbing a copy of this story. So . . . thanks. The stories I write are intended to be entertaining, sucking you into another world and injecting you with something to ponder over. Most writers will feel this way.

So, read between the lines if you'd like, for you may find even come up with your own "ah-hah!" moments. Or don't, and just enjoy the ride.

Thanks to Cara Flannery of Fluky Fiction for editing *Cultivate*, previously known as *Seed Me*. The fresh set of eyes have been fantastic to give this relapse edition the punch it needs!

Thank you to the first edition editor Robin Schroffel and guest editor Lacey Paige, back in 2015 while this story was sprouting.

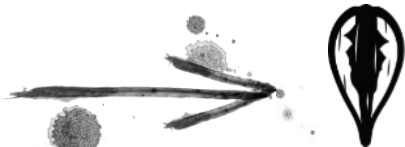
I'd also like to thank my mother, Brenda Lavery, for her countless years of support in my creative outlets. My brother, Kyle Lavery, for always believing in my writing even when I didn't. My father, Terry Lavery and my sister, Kirra Lavery. Lindsey Molyneaux, Nastassja Brinker, Suzie Hess, Nick McQuade, the City of Edmonton Archives for research, and the Empress Ale House for brainstorming on many patio summer nights.

Also, a huge thank you to my continuous friends, family and fans who support my passion for storytelling.

CULTIVATE: SEED ME RELAPSE EDITION BY KONN LAVERY



WARNING



DO NOT CONSUME

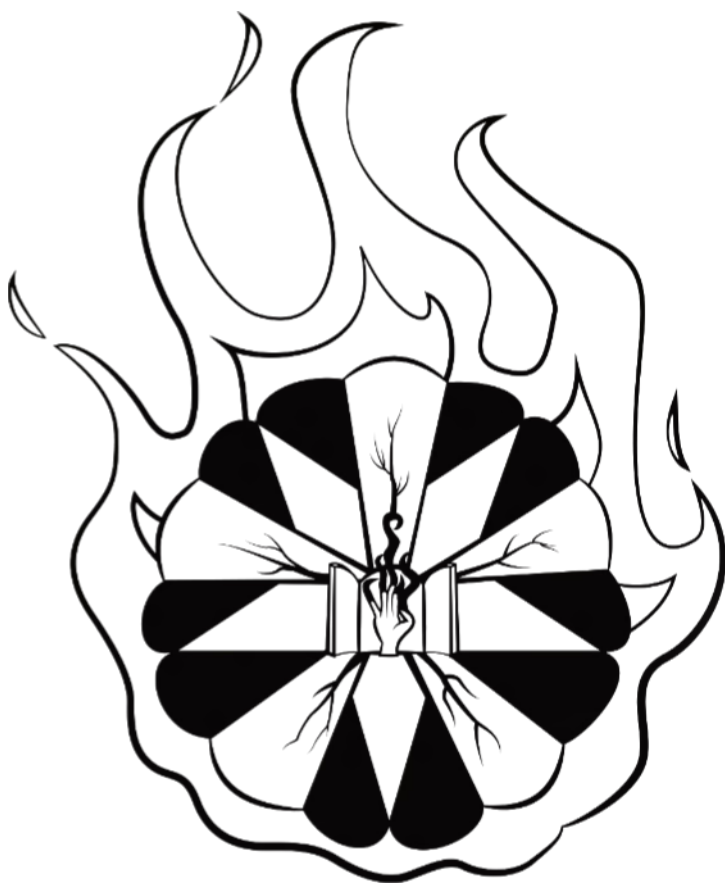
If you're reading this, then you did not take the above warning seriously. In that case, you're probably as stupid as me. By the way, I'm Logan. I didn't pay attention to any warning signs either. Being an unemployed deadbeat in Edmonton with no family and getting dumped by your girlfriend for her best friend can wear a guy down. All I had was my cokehead buddy, Skip, to cheer me up.

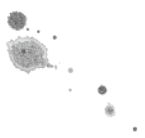
Surprisingly, my precautionary tale was caused by neither Skip nor the drugs. Let's just say a drunken make-out session with a pale girl by a dumpster, who was supposedly pronounced dead earlier in the evening, can leave you mentally jumbled up. A good motivator to figure this scenario out is having robed cultists stalk you, asking where the girl is.

Is this an ill twist of fate? Did I bring this on myself? Is there a reason for my misfortune? Is the moral to not make out with spooky girls behind dumpsters? ~~Hell if I know...~~

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MIDNIGHT DUMPSTER PLEASANTRIES

Logan Cook, remember? The ex-druggy loser with my bandmates thinking we could make a career out of our gig? You know Skip. We're in Deadmonton—sorry, Edmonton. 2016, I think. Fall. I'm glad I found you, after all the parallels we've had since I met you at that bar. It's nice not to be so alone . . . no? Maybe it's the shock or the temporary lack of oxygen in the brain. Ah, the memory will come back to you.

Man . . . all this free time gives you a lot to think about. Like, good and evil, right or wrong, it's all imaginary nonsense. No one asked to exist. We live whether we like it or not. Nature doesn't care and we humans try to make sense of it. At least I've tried. I had this small, SMALL, cocaine blip that rendered me jobless and loveless before we met.

It made me question if my negative actions created bad karma. But, I got over that. Others disagreed. I don't need to overthink the past, and I'm sure you feel the same about your own. I can tell. Isn't it funny how no one can predict where their life will end up, regardless of how much right or wrong they do?

That's why we're both here. Even though you are a far better person than I. You're here, and that ain't imaginary.

Well, if you ask me, I think Darwin was right. Natural selection rules. Either way, we have nothing but time. So, I'll stop rambling about abstract manmade ideas and get to how we first met, maybe it will jog your memory. It'll make sense how I ended up here with you, giving you a front and center seat to the show of my view. Afterall, we're of the same roots . . .

CHILDREN SHARE ALL, SEE ALL

I'm sitting at the bar at a poorly lit tavern, Empress Ale House, just on Whyte Ave and 99th, filling my gut with cool, bitter beer. The place is noisy as hell, packed at every corner, spit and sweat flying everywhere. I used to be a bar guy back in the day. Now I just don't care.

Smoke time. I down the last of the mind-number in a single gulp. Ah yes, the first drink of the evening is the most satisfying, quenching a thirst that was building up all day. Actually, that's a lie. The quench has been building for years, and this is not my first glass of the evening, nor my fifth! Sixth?

Right, that smoke . . . I get up and squeeze through two groups of loud-mouthed baboons (people, really, but one can understand the mix-up). It's a Friday, by the way. This place is filled with what are practically children, in or fresh out of college, getting rowdy with friends or hoping to get their freak on.

Smoking is my determination, pushing me through the flesh sea. There are so many! I catch word of one conversation.

“Bro! Bro. You know me. No lies. You really gotta get your shit together. The drinks ain’t gonna solve it,” says a guy in a red baseball cap.

He doesn’t know his own strength, placing his hand on his friend’s shoulder. The impact wobbles the sloshed friend, slurring inaudible words. Hell, if I didn’t know better, I’d think the statement applies to me. That’s the drinks talking, and I need fresh air.

Around I go through the booze-guzzler crowd. Eventually, I find my way out of the pub. Outside, finally!

A biting wind nibbles my face as I pull out a smoke and lighter from my leather jacket, setting fire to the drag. The six or so pints dimmish from the sobriety of wind and smoke. Penguins (more people) huddle together to maintain heat. Here’s a wild thought—don’t wear tight flimsy fabric, and you’ll stay warm. Just a wild thought, don’t take my advice. You all look fabulous on the night strip in your fast fashion. Bah.

My best friend, Skip, should be out here. He’s the one who dragged me to this bar in the first place and went for a smoke about a pint ago. The jerkoff never came back. Honestly, I would have rather be at home watching TV or playing video games. But NOOOOOOO. Skip insisted I’d “have a good time.” This has yet to happen.

There’s that flake—Skip is at the tail end of the penguins. He’s easy to spot with a no-gel black mohawk and studded-up patch-covered hoodie vest. He’s chatting up some dreadlocked gal who could pass for a high school student. Kudos to the blonde for wearing leggings under the frayed strapless dress to battle the cold. I’m thinking optimistically that she’s some freshman university hooligan out to party.

Skip and I are probably nearing eight to ten years on some of these girls. Like me, he’s single. Unlike me, he’s easily sucked in

by the flirty fabric and fluttering eyelashes abroad tonight. I'm more cautious about potential jailbait, but I'll admire the eye candy. The hippie girl is pretty cute. Surface piercing on her right cheek. Nostril piercing. Plus, she's of age if she's at a bar! That makes me sound like an outstanding guy, someone mom and pops would love, doesn't it?

Anyways, Skip spots me approaching and says, "Logan! My man. I'd like you to meet this fine lady here. Janet, meet Logan. Logan, Janet."

"Hi!" Janet says with a warm smile, politely extending her hand.

I nod, smoke in my mouth, and shake her soft hand. Now I notice the pentagram pendant, an upright one, resting right where her perky tits start. "Pleasure, Janet. You've met my partner in crime, Skip."

She coils her non-dreaded bangs saying, "I did! He is like, so funny."

Oi! This girl seems like another ditz. Skip has a type. Still, I'd never cock block him. That's not what bros do. Like any good friend, I'll lend a helping hand in getting some tail.

"He's a big deal, you know," I say.

"Oh?" Janet raises her thin eyebrow, hair twirling madly.

"He spends all day tattooing *his* art on people and pursues his musical aspirations."

"You play music too?" Janet says, stepping back to get a better eye-bang of Skip.

Skip shrugs. "I'm a man with ambition. My buddy Logan here and I are in a prog-rock band."

"Wow, what are you guys called?"

"Raw Emotion," Skip says.

"Wait, I've seen you guys play! You're the vocalist, right?"

“That’s right. I came up with the name for my raw desire to please pretty gals.” He flicks his tongue.

Janet giggles girlishly, pointing at herself playfully. No way! What a surprise. That move would not have worked if they were sober. It’s late out, and all the baboons are feeling good and pie-eyed, me included.

Janet says, “Oh my god, we’ve met before ...”

“Have we?” Skip asks.

“EEEEAAAAAAAAAAK!!!” shrieks come from a group of three girls down the block. Each dressed to the T in bracelets, pouches, and patchy earth-toned clothes. More raver-hippies!

“Janet!” shouts one in the group.

“Tammy!” Janet says, running to her friend as they bop up and down with joy.

Time to finish my smoke, and fast. The last thing I want is to deal with is a group of loud self-proclaimed tree-hugging bar stars. Half the time, their ideologies are too whacked from all the LSD and MDMA they drop at raves to form any opinion on world issues other than “love conquers all.”

You know . . . maybe I’m getting too old and bitter. Maybe I am jumping to conclusions. In all honesty, I’m making these assumptions based on their age and clothing. Seriously, for better or worse, I have a chip on my shoulder on most things. That small, SMALL, cocaine habit fucked everything up.

“Looks like our night has just started,” Skip says. His eyes are glued to the girls’ asses, mesmerized by the pure wonder of the female form.

I say, “Yours is. I’m going in for a drink.”

“Suit yourself. If you plan on ditching, time it for when I pull in the catch. I may need you to separate Janet from her friends. You see how that brunette looked at me?”

I didn’t.

Either Skip is reading into things, focusing on small signals like what he perceives as the friend's overly protective glare, or I didn't see it because I don't give a shit. Basic social cues that once caught my eye lack the significance they once had. Oh well.

"Come on, man, have some fun?" Skip asks.

"Not with this. Some lines? Yeah. Girls? I can't relate to these ones."

"We're not looking for your Juliet. I just want to plow that blonde!"

"Dude, their idiocy kills my sex drive."

"That's not the Logan I know."

"Yeah? What is me?"

"You gotta get over Eeeee-mmmmm-i-llll-eeeeee."

Skip's lips pronounce each vowel in slo-mo as time comes to a halt. His words detonate, exploding an array of emotions and memories inside me that twirl endlessly around my intoxicated mind. Everyone around us ceases to move as I'm blasted with a rush of negativity from hearing the name *Emily*.

Love: *Good morning, sleepy.*

Hate: *You're such a fucking deadbeat!*

Resentment: *Fuck off, bitch!*

Fear: *I'm nothing without you . . .*

Denial: *All she did was fuck up my life!*

Relapse: *Familiar gentle touches, bursting hearts, comforting smells.*

Acceptance: *This has failed to happen.*

They spiral downward into the core of my consciousness, deflating my entire body and finishing with a twist of my stomach, morphing it into a dozen knots of nausea. I better not puke.

"Logan? Logan?" Skip says.

Time speeds up to the now as Skip puts both arms on me, eyes locked on mine, not blinking. *Emily*.

“I didn’t want to be the one to tell you, yet again, but get your shit together, man. It’s been eighteen months since she bailed on that road trip with her fuck-bud...”

Emily. The name fires up the depressive time machine. I can see Skip talking as I’m sent way back. All senses rewind back to the day she left . . . the same day I was ready to step up my game, listen to her again, drop the coke, and get my career in order.

I remember clearly feeling the smooth silver ring between my sweaty hands, so nervous about asking for her hand in marriage. She claimed I was a deadbeat druggie and fed up trying to support my quote-unquote “sorry ass.” At least that’s what her text said that day, which is how our relationship of four years ended. A text. Fuck.

Skip grinds his teeth; I missed something he said while reliving hell. “...that douche was waiting to scoop her the moment she was vulnerable. Orbiters—I think they’re called. I’m glad he got what was coming to him, that piece of shit.”

“What about Emily, man?” I ask.

“It’s terrible. Which is why me, *Skip*, is telling you, eighteen months have gone by—you gotta start moving on. The 4-20 Draining is a cold case.”

Oh great! Skip is on a roll. We’re going through every single horrible thing that has happened to me today, aren’t we? The 4-20 Draining . . . no. Not now.

“It’s a mindfuck, man,” I say.

“What part?” Skip asks.

“Uh . . . All of the 4-20 Draining?”

Skip had to get boozy me worked up. He’s trying to help, but I’m on a tangent now. For real, Dwane’s (the fuck-bud) and

Emily's death were the most tragic thing that has happened in my life, next to her dumping me.

"Her body, man!" I shout.

"Woah, easy, man. You're gonna summon the Sahara Desert in these chicks."

"No, you brought it up, dude. You saw the crime photos with the rings all over her body."

Flashback number three—Emily's body lay in the snow with every ounce of blood sucked from her body. You'd think a vampire went to town on her from the rings running around her neck, torso, and limbs.

Skip says, "Yeah, dude. I know. Just keep your cool."

"Why'd you bring it up?"

"It's a COLD case. Come on, let's party."

"I don't care," I say.

"Fuck, we're going through this again?" Skip says.

"I don't wanna." I fold my arms, trying to keep cool.

"You did all you could. On the bright side, the police stopped bringing you in. I thought they'd book you."

"Me too . . . Me too. Imagine if I hadn't been with Jake and Seb, eh?"

"You'd be fucked. Look, Logan, let's keep the mood light. It's Friday, and I only got heavy to help you snap out of it." He extends his hand to the hippie gals. "Waddaya say?"

I chuck the cigarette butt, extinguishing it with a single step of my black Dr. Martens. "See you inside."

Thanks, Skip, but no thanks. His words were good-natured attacks that put me in even *less* of a mood to try and entertain the idea of hooking up. Besides, the thought of having to charm some airheaded tree-hugger girl with depthless flirtation sounded exhausting. Like I said, chip on my shoulder. The price of faking interest isn't worth getting my dick wet. Maybe my sex

drive was drained out with Emily's blood. Maybe I'm still cynical from the ugly ending with Emily. Maybe another drink will drown out Emily!

Back inside the stuffy bar, I worm past the bouncer and into the claustrophobia-inducing crowd. Shit. Every stool, table, and bench is filled with people. I think my spot might be gone. March on, man, get that pint. My journey takes me past that red baseball-capped guy from earlier.

"You messed up, bro. Shit happens, okay?" he says to his piss-faced pal, if the drunk can even hear him.

That's another strange statement fit for me.

Continuing on, I navigate the sea of boozed bodies, odour, and excess breath to the bar. As I suspected, every inch was taken. I just want my damn drink! Wash my sorrows away, for the love of God, someone! The prayer is answered, and I find an opening at the far end by the dartboards.

Now, for that house ale. I take out five bucks and a toonie, raising it up as I lean against the bar. In case you don't know, if you want to get a bartender's attention on a busy night filled with shitheads, get your cash out first and hold it up. It shows you're ready to pay right away and are probably more coherent than the rest. Even if sobriety isn't the case, I can put on an act.

"What'll it be?" comes the bartender's high voice.

"Empress Ale," I say automatically. Hallelujah. I didn't even realize I ordered. I was too busy wallowing in my own mind-chatter. Thankfully, my alcoholic autopilot knows how to take care of me and get what's important—beer.

The bartender returns with a dark golden pint of deliverance covered in condensation. Yes. Give me liquid saviour to wash away the skeletons Skip resurrected.

"Five seventy-five!"

I hand the man my cash and take a drink, knowing Skip will come back here, bringing those hippie chicks with him. They'll ramble on about coconut oil or some DJ they want to blow. It makes me shudder. Perhaps this pint will be my last.

VVVVRRRRRRMMMMMMMMMMMM erupts loud rumbling from outside.

A rusty white pickup driving unusually fast roars out front, slamming on the brakes, nearly rear-ending the car in front of it, tires screeching. It's one of dozens of vehicles stuck in the jam down the strip.

WOOOOP WOOOOOOOP! Cop sirens blare, casting red and blue lights behind the truck.

Sucks to be him.

The truck pulls up into the auto-repair shop lot across the street with the cop following. I can't see what else is going on; it's just out of view. Who cares, though? I don't need to watch some guy get a ticket. It doesn't affect my life.

And so, I take a BIG gulp of my drink, shutting out the noise. I need center focus so my thoughts don't run off on tangents or into the past—into Emily. Or her blue eyes . . . her shiny black hair.

Damn it!

Thanks, Skip.

Emily. No.

“-cop has a gun!” shouts some dude.

“There's a fucking foot!” shrieks a girl.

Those words catch the pub's attention, and gradually the random drunken noise turns into shouting commentary about what people can see from the bar. Some baboons rush out the front. The groups beside me dash to the large windows to take a look at the action, finally leaving me with some flex space. Some hands pop out of the crowd, smartphones raised and recording.

Even the bartender is trying to see what's going on while pouring drinks.

It's not every day you see a cop bust someone for having a foot in the back of their pickup. I'm presuming the foot is decapitated. I don't know, and I don't care, for I have my pint. People are overreacting. What are they going to do to help the cop? I say let him do his job and stop watching like it's reality TV.

I can't seem to shrug these brain wanders. God. At least most of the back is cleared out. It's safe to say Skip isn't coming in yet. Those girls are probably scandalized by the cop bust.

One more smoke, then I'm ditching. Skip can handle himself.

I put a beer mat over my pint and pop a cigarette out, going for the back entrance. It's closer and far less of a crowd, so I can enjoy the smoke. I'm not addicted, but once I drink, the desire lights like a rocket. I can quickly go through a pack a night—it's not that much, really. Out back is a small parking lot in front of the alley, facing an apartment complex. No one is here as usual. This spot is a hidden gem if you don't mind no lights and the funk of the dumpster right next to the door.

I go to light my smoke as a rustling comes from the dumpster. I turn to see a skinny, pale gal, dressed all in black, staring at me.

"Jesus!" I say. I thought I had myself together, but I guess not.

The girl stands still as a tree, her straight black hair covering most of her face. Only the ghostly white chin and paperwhite, puffy lips are visible. I light the smoke, eyeing the girl from head to toe. Her arms are tucked into the trench coat that touches the ground. It makes her face practically luminescent.

"You want a smoke?" I ask, exhaling.

The girl lifts her head stiffly, sliding her hair aside, leaving only the bangs draping above her eyebrows. Her gaze is dead-on, but as if she's looking through me. You know the look in one's eye

when they're entirely shitfaced? It's the "lights are on, but no one is home" type of deal.

I step closer, cautious, for I can't put my thumb on her. Is she a crackhead? Dangerous? Or cool? She can't be homeless . . . she's too clean. And the smell . . . is nice.

"A whole lotta noise out front, eh?" I say.

Her cheeks raise, forcing a smile as she tilts her head.

I take another puff and stop about one step away from her. "Me too. Any idea what it is all about?"

The girl's eyes shift to the cigarette, turning her face into a frown.

"You don't like smokes?" She may be high. My curiosity is getting the best of me. "You don't say much, do you?" I ask, exhaling. A breeze blows some of the smoke from my mouth over to her face.

The girl shivers, looking away and sliding back to the dumpster.

"Sorry; Not a fan of smoking, I take it."

I touch her shoulder, trying to show *some* empathy for this weirdo. The contact brings her life, and she glides over. Well, she falls into my arms. I'm not phased and catch her. It must be the pints numbing me.

My smoke-free hand holds her back. She feels . . . cold, and not the typical cold that comes with fall. I can't feel any body heat underneath her coat. The fabric has a peculiar texture, sort of like velvet. I run my fingers along with the fabric, infatuated with it, feeling thicker portions forming a pattern of roughness. The difference in sheen on the all-black coat lets me see the floral, curly design on the material, even in the crappy alleyway light.

She's got a soft, sweet smell. The perfume isn't anything I've encountered before. It smells *really* amazing. The scent is the

most naturally smelling flower whiff I've ever experienced. It's so . . . soothing, like a lilac.

"You okay?" I ask, lifting her narrow chin up. Her slanted eyes are wide, staring at my cigarette in pure fear. What the hell? Even her plump lips are washed out. I know some people don't get enough sun, especially in Edmonton, but this is a bit much.

The back door of the pub swings open. Before I can look, the girl leans up, pressing her dry, cold lips against mine. My senses are slightly numb, so I don't know if her lips are as icy as I think. Her mouth opens, gradually running her thin tongue along the inside of my lip. Her jaw movement isn't smooth and fluid, like regular face sucking. The mechanical motions are moving up and down which is not how to manoeuvre around someone's face hole. I can't taste any alcohol, and there's a significant lack of saliva in her mouth; what's there is thick, slimy, and tastes like blood.

"Hey, Logan!" Skip says.

A prick comes from the inner side of my bottom lip. I tense and manage to pull my face away from the girl and turn around. There's Skip with one arm around Janet's waist. He's got the widest grin on his face, eyeing me holding the weirdo. I know exactly what's going through his mind. He's more pleased seeing me get steamy with dumpster chick than he is hitting it off with Janet. He's a real friend. Annoying sometimes with his persistence, but it gets me out of my rut whether I like it or not. Look at me! I kissed a girl tonight. Or I was kissed, rather.

Skip brings Janet closer to him. "We're heading back. Done for the night."

He's also my roommate.

I say, "Sounds good. What's with that truck?"

“I dunno, more cops showed up. They got the guy in cuffs, and there was a body in the back. Lost interest after that. Higher priorities.”

“Ish so fuuucked! Real bush kill,” Janet slurs.

“I’ll catch up with you later,” I say.

Skip and Janet march back to 99th street, leading away from Whyte Ave, leaving me with weirdo. She’s still in my arms, looking up. I wonder if she even took her eyes off me when Skip talked. What’s her game?

“You do that with everyone you meet?” I say.

The girl smiles, a quick jerking motion just as robotic as her kiss. She starts swaying side to side in my arms. Woah, okay. She leans up for another kiss. I’m hesitant, leaning back.

You have to let go of Emily. Skip’s words echo in my mind. He’s right; I need to move on, and what better way than to get drunk and make out with a dumpster girl? Tongue Town, here we come!

I lean into weirdo, hoping she’ll be better at kissing the second time. Our lips meet, reminding me of how cold hers are. She starts moving her jaw up and down again, just as unappealing as before. The hell with it. At least this is something. Skip is right; I should stop moping and just get laid. It’s been a while.

I toss my smoke and pull the girl closer to me so she’s tight against my chest. Her hand coils around my wrist. I suck her bottom lip, trying to take the lead, ignoring the thick metallic saliva.

I exhale heavily, despite never feeling her own breath. Her hand tightens on me, almost too tight. Another pricking sensation makes me spaz. I’m confident it punctured my wrist, and I try to back away, but she’s moving with me.

The back door opens, and the girl’s grip loosens as two guys come out with cigarettes in their mouths, lighting them up and

eyeing weirdo and me. They keep walking from the bar and down the alley, leaving us alone.

My arm is still locked in place. She must have used a needle or something, drugging me. My heart races from all the excitement. I'm being paranoid. It could have been her nails. There's no way she put a needle in me so slyly.

"What was that?" I ask.

Her cheeks raise again, forcing a smile as one eyelid droops down slow and slides back up. That was an attempted wink, I think.

"You're not much for words, I take it?"

She leans up for another kiss. I tolerate it for a few seconds and lean back. God, I need more liquor for this.

"How about we take this back to my place, cutie?" I say, knowing how rusty and untruthful I am. I hadn't made much of an effort to date or bone since Emily. And even being endowed with liquid courage, I'm not too clear on what I'm doing.

The girl keeps smiling as her grip tightens on my arm. That must mean she wants some action. I take a step back, trying to move her with me, but she doesn't budge. Her grip constricts further, igniting another pain sensation as her other hand wraps around the same arm.

"The fuck," I mutter, looking at my wrist, but her trench coat covers everything, and I can't see her hands. "You coming?" I smile, unsure if this is some sort of joke or if she's an exhibitionist—I'm not.

She pulls on me. I stand my ground, trying to tug on her. She's rooted in place with an abnormal strength for someone so small. I yank on my arm again, and the grip gets so tight my hand feels numb. I try to grab her fingers, but her squishy arm under the coat is too tight on my wrist. Yes, squishy. The texture throws me

off. It's not completely solid with bone. The arm is too thin and soft.

"Cut it out!" My hand forms a fist. I'm no fan of hitting chicks, but this is too much. I want my damn arm back from weirdo and lunge the fist as another hand coils around mine. What? Whose is it? Hers are still around my one arm.

All three arms yank me forward, throwing me head-first against the dumpster with a loud *SLAM!*

My cheek slides against the cold metal until I hit the pavement. I roll onto my back, vision blurry, seeing her dark form standing over me. There are no arms at all. Her coat begins to unravel upward—blowing in the wind?—as sirens echo down the street. The black fabric falls lifelessly.

WOOOP! WOOOOOP!

Blue and red lights flash by, highlighting dried blood and torn skin around her neck. The black velvet coat hides the rest of her. She turns to the lights and slowly slides away from the dumpster.

"Fffuuuuck yooouuu!" I groan, trying to sit upright. Dizzy, I collapse, my head colliding with the concrete. I lay there, thinking it's only a few seconds, but in actuality, I'm by the dumpster for a good ten minutes. The back door opens, and three pairs of feet appear.

"Oh shit!" says a gal as they take my arms, helping me to my feet.

"There you go, bud!" says one of them. "Rough night?"

My vision clears. The headache and dizziness are alive and well. I don't look at the three, trying to see where that dumpster girl went. She's long gone. It's just the four of us.

"I'm good," I say, standing on my own feet, stumbling, and catching the fall. "I'm good!"

The three chatter amongst each other, but I don't hear them as I walk away, knowing I'd best sleep this off. Too many beers and

dumpster weirdos are not a good combo. I feel no pain at the moment, thanks to liquor. Tomorrow will be another story. Lesson learned: don't make out with creepy goth chicks by dumpsters. They suck at kissing.

