
Raw Space: Layer Zero, Flying Fish and Oceans of Blood

The cold bites at my skin, my blood drawing back to avoid it as if aware and avoiding the frigid weather. The stinging numb sensation prickles my fingers, my cheeks, my nose, everywhere deemed unimportant by my body attempting to endure the cold. Beyond me lies nothing but a vast white, blinding and blurred. The snow no longer melts in contact with my skin, much too cold for that. Tiny specks of white cover me, visible on my eyelashes in my vision.

“Mav!” I hear a calling from behind. I do as best I can to block out the bothersome noise, embracing the freeze that seeps into my bones. Unfortunately for me, the noise is persistent, and I’m forced to turn around, looking back towards the house as warm light pours from the windows and open door. Graham, my brother, calls from the doorway once again, “Mav, inside. Now.” I turn back away from him for a moment, savoring the numbness setting deep into my skin, before making the small trek back to the house.

As I step inside, I am embraced by the warmth of my home. Uncomfortable warmth. I have never liked warm temperatures all that much. I hear a soft thud, before seeing a small, grey figure move toward me. Herlekin, or, as my brother would call him, Henry makes a small *prrbt* noise before he moves to rub against my leg, intending to greet me. As his small face meets my skin, though, he flinches away and begins to sniff me, as if suspicious. I grin at the cat’s reaction as Graham moves to get my attention.

Here we go again. He speaks, monotone as usual, albeit not as softly as is common, “You really shouldn’t keep standing out in the cold like that. You’ll get sick. Hypothermia.” He tosses a blanket over, which I clumsily half-catch half-drop. I counter with the usual argument, “It’s fun. I like it.” For a brief moment, Graham looks like he may respond, rehash the same conversations we have had a million times over. Instead, he simply shakes his head, resigned for the time being.

I make my way to the couch for a moment, leaning over it as I pick at the embroidered vines covering it. Kudzu, the same plant that covers much of our home. It even peeks through cracks in the aged walls. One of the many reasons I’m fond of my home. Old and decaying, I love that. I often find myself picking at the cracks and peeling at the wallpaper, exacerbating the flaws.

Graham speaks up once again to tell me that dinner will be ready soon, and I nod in response. I head toward my room. Down the hall, on the right. I open my door and am greeted by my familiar four walls, damaged and missing most of the wallpaper, with posters sparsely scattered about. The muted yellow carpet of my floor is a welcome displeasure, stains left in most areas, with the corners being pulled up or cut off. I enter the room and immediately move to turn on my many fans. One by one, the whirring noises filled the room as a chill sets in. My own personal freezer.

I grab my remote and fiddle with the buttons, putting on some German Arthouse film. Once again, there is noise, but the noise is welcome this time. Background noise. I consider drawing, making something, but I decide I’d rather just rest. Lying on the floor, desk fan pulled close, I close my eyes. Everything is calm as I hold my breath and I try to will my heart to stop, if only for a small moment. Then, I hear the scratching again. The shifting and scratching coming

from the walls, I've been tracking it's frequency. Usually twice a week, although it seemed to have disappeared for a few weeks until now.

It's not long before I hear Graham again and must move from my place on the floor. As I approach the dinner table, I wonder what mystery meat dinner will be tonight. Regardless, it smells good. It looks questionable, but not anything I'm unfamiliar with. It looks like something between fish and poultry. I sit at the table, and reach up toward my face, hooking my fingers around the seam of my flesh. "Faces stay on at the dinner table." Graham challenges. I simply give him a look and continue what I am doing, peeling the mask away, to which he gives a frustrated sigh.

I set the mask down on the wooden table and begin to eat. The meat is tender, my teeth easily rend the flesh from bone. My brother once again feels the need to fill the silence, attempting a conversation starter, "You should go out more, meet people. Make friends. It'd do you some good." He pauses before adding on, "The sun would do you some good too." He doesn't touch his food. I glance up at him briefly, before returning my gaze to my plate. I stop eating and respond, my voice flat as usual, "I was outside earlier. You made me come inside."

His reply comes quickly, barely letting me finish my sentence, "You know that's not what I mean, Maverick. There's a difference between going out and standing outside in the snow in improper clothing for an excessive amount of time." I do not respond because I have nothing to say. Unfortunately for me, he continues, "I meant it, though. Making some friends would do you good. Get you off those websites. God forbid you talk to a person." I shoot him another look, speaking in the same colorless tone, "I don't want to. You know that."

We sit in silence for a long while, the only noises being the sounds of my fork against the plate and the ticking of the clock in the living room. I watch Herlekin through the arched doorway of the kitchen, as he bats at a vine with his paw. I choose to take pity on Graham and give him a conversation. I set down my fork for a moment, "I heard the thing again. In the walls." He sighs. Alright, maybe this wasn't the best choice for conversation. "There isn't anything in the walls. Logically, I would've heard it at some point too." I roll my eyes as he repeats the same things he has told me over and over.

"Clearly not," I counter, "because it is there, and you haven't heard it." He tilts his head, dark eyes staring blankly back at me. "You're insane, Mav." I return his blankness, simply responding with, "You are too." This seems to be the final straw, as he stands from the table and begins to walk away. "Dinner is over." I shrug and continue eating.

I sit in the comforting cold of my room once again, whirring fans and scratching in the walls. The scratching is louder than usual. It probably *is* nothing, but it's still fun to bring up. I turn to look at Herlekin, seeing that he is pawing at the wall. "Psspss, come here." I quietly coax the cat over into my lap. I gently pet his soft fur, listening to the rumbling purrs he emits. "May as well go to sleep, right?" I ask him. Of course, all I get in return is purring.

After a while, I finally turn the lights off, and pull my blanket over myself. I set my glasses to the side and shift for a while, searching for a comfortable position under the rough, quilted fabric, before beginning to drift off. I hear the piano begin to play, as usual.

When I wake, pitch darkness has consumed my room. As I partially wake, I notice a noise, something like giggling. I shift uncomfortably, noticing sharp pinpricks on my forehead. In my still mostly-asleep state, I swat at the feeling, and make contact with something. I shoot up

out of bed, scrambling for the light switch. Once it's flipped, my eyes are flooded with blinding light, but I notice a blur of movement. Once my eyes adjust and I have my glasses in place, though, there is nothing. Well, nothing save for the new hole in my wall. I refuse to allow myself sleep for the rest of the night.

I relocate to the living room, and watch the light begin to pour through the windows as the sun rises. It doesn't take long to hear shuffling, signaling that Graham is awake. As he walks out to the living room, I turn to him. "There is something in the walls. It was in my room last night." I watch him startle, having not noticed my presence beforehand, before simply looking confused. ".. What?"

I repeat myself, "The thing in the walls was in my bedroom last night. It left a hole in my wall." and then quickly add on, "Also, I want my knives back." Graham pauses, looking confused, he brings a hand to his head. "No, that is not happening. And what do you mean?" To which I stand from the couch, motioning for him to follow me to my room.

Once we arrive, I open the door and move toward the hole, pointing at it. "See?" Graham looks toward the anomaly, expression blank as ever. He doesn't say anything for a long while. I notice Herlekin pawing at the wall again, and add on, "Even Herlekin agrees with me." To which I receive a sigh. "Probably an animal," He states, "I'll get someone to deal with it, it'll take a few days."

I stare back at him, still pointing at the hole. "Give me my knives and I can have it dealt with the next time it comes out." I propose. He immediately shoots me down with a simple, "No." before going to walk away. "Henry, breakfast time." He softly beckons the cat, and the small grey

creature quickly pads after him. “*Traitor...*” I mutter under my breath, before following back out to the living room.

I’ll just figure it out myself.

I wait in the dark, listening to the ever-present whirring of my fans. I lie under my blanket once again, although this time I lie awake. I grip a fork in my hand, since Graham confiscated the knives, I’ve had to get creative. As I wait, my mind fills the silence with fake noise, the piano beginning once again. I let myself be carried off by it, relaxing. I almost let myself drift off to sleep, plans long discarded by my tired mind, until I hear something. A real noise, immediately silencing all others.

Scratching and shifting, until I hear quiet steps slowly approaching, along with jingling. I fight myself, the nervous energy running through me, to stay still. The soft noise of quiet steps and jingling gets closer, and finally I feel the familiar pinpricks on my forehead. I quickly grab the source of the feeling, my hand wrapping around something’s wrist. That’s not an animal.

I move out of bed, and pull the unknown figure toward me, plunging the fork into its shoulder. It cries out in a hiss, before sinking its teeth into my hand and squirming out of my grasp and toward the hole in the wall. I run to block it off and hear frantic movements as it switches course. I watch as it crawls up the walls and across the ceiling, much faster than I would know how to deal with. After scrambling for a while, it manages to run out of my room.

I’m about to follow when I hear a deafening bang and a thud. I pause, before carefully pushing my door open again, to see the sprawled-out figure on the ground. It looks like some kind of clown, wearing a big jester hat with bells, its full-body suit now accompanied by a gaping hole in

its chest, red seeping into the yellow fabric. I turn to see the source of the blast, only to find Graham. He stares back at me, shotgun in hand.

I hesitate, but speak, "Told you something was in the wall." I remark. He shrugs in response. "Think it's dead?" I ask plainly. He responds in a similarly flat tone, "Don't know." There is a long silence, as an idea slowly forms in the folds of my mind. "Lock it up in the cellar?" I suggest as I lean down to fidget with the fabric of its hat, listening to the jingle of the bell. Graham shrugs and nods, closer to the clown, ready to go along with my plan. I think this will certainly be fun.

End
