

In All the Wrong Places

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Hangovers is the Pancreator's way to tell men they should never stop drinking.

- Francis Vandermar, captain of the Could Be Worse

It's 2:00pm. That's what the time piece embedded in your inner ear tells you. But you know it's a lie. Time has ended, and you have spent the last eternity in a Hell where overtime pays double, and all demons need money for the next down payment on their mortgage. An infuriatingly bright ray of light – harbinger of a shining sun, merry warmth, singing birds and other things you prefer not to think of at the moment – manages to hit your fluttering eyelids, which forces you to do the worse thing you could possibly do.

You awake.

You are in a bath, marinating in half an inch of something that doesn't look, taste or feel like water. Your brain, beside shrieking in abject pain, informs you that this place looks mightily like your own bathroom. The comfort of being home is tainted by the realization that you will have to clean the mother of all messes. But then, maybe you are not too survive long enough to ever hold a mop

again. The thought somewhat soothes you.

You are dressed. In a fuzzy, pink Vorox suit you never saw before of all your life. One of the Vorox ear is plastered again your face. You don't know with what, but it feels like it's moving. You feel like screaming, but it requires far too much effort. So you quietly pray for death.

After fifteen minutes, the grim reaper as not yet come. You suspect he might not be coming, after all. It figures. He must have standards. For a lack of better alternatives, you manage to raise a hand and turn on the cold water faucet. The ice-cold water slaps some consciousness in you. That is *such* a bad thing.

Thirty minutes later you have took a few staggering steps toward salubrity, soberhood and consciousness. However you still feel like you're made of mud, you can't quite manage to keep your eyes looking in the he same direction for more than a handful of seconds and while you could spell out your name, you fervently hope that no-one will ask you to do so. You just tooth-brushed away that awful taste of tar-drenched hay permeating your mouth. Munching on the ten pain-

killer tablets that you managed to pop in your mouth, you take a gander at yourself in the mirror. Exception made of the twin dried cranberries that have replaced your eyes, shaking hands, greenish-white complexion and spasms happening here and there, you don't look too bad. On the inside, your heart goes thump-gah-THUMP-thump-gah-THUMP while your abused brain whines and your liver lowly mumbles bio-obscenities. Your very own little internal demented troupe of minstrels. Lovely.

You coax your mind into remembering something, anything, about last night. You remember receiving your paycheck. The first showing a double digit number since you set your foot in this backwater excuse of a planet. There was much merriments, assertions that celebrations was in order. You remember... friends, a pub, pitchers of beer, heated discussions, pitchers of beer, loud singing, pitchers of beers, maybe a game of cards, pitchers of beer, argument about the correct way to hold a fork and pitchers of beer. You're not sure, but pitchers of beer could also have be involved somewhere in there. Then the memories get blurry and patchworked. There is some images and flashes. A dashing smile. Sparkling eyes.

Doubts creep in.

You meekly peer outside the bathroom. Oh loving Pancreator. Either you brought someone home, or Big Bobby and his scraver friends paid a visit to remind you of the 50 talons you own them. The place is utterly wrecked. Each smashed vase and holes in the walls hints about unbridled passion, or eagerness to try a newly-bought sledgeham-

mer. But that's okay. It's not because you searched half of the Known Worlds to find those vases that they really meant anything to you. As for the holes, they are not so bad and kind of brighten the room. Beside, your pretty sure you and your neighbor never needed that separation anyway.

The door to the bedroom is open. Damnation. You retreat to the bathroom, where you promptly gobble up all the pain-killers that are scattered on the floor. You wash them with a bottle of something you fish in the pharmacy. Whatever it is, your stomach objects with outrage. Good. You hate to be the only one feeling miserable.

To think you swore that last time would be the last... But there is point to run away from fate, and so you find yourself walking toward the shadow-filled bedroom. Your battered mind desperately tries to think of something more appropriate to say than "Wonderful day. I feel like dying. What's your name?"

Gently, you push the door open. Rather appropriately, it morbidly squeaks like a thousand mice dying of syphilitic infection.

You force yourself to step in. You hope your smile doesn't look too fake, and that none of your teeth will explode from the pressure your clenched jaws put on them.

And then you see. In the bed, half-covered with ruffled sheets, sparkling eyes open, is the disproportionately large Gannock head that was, until yesterday, mounted on the wall of the Grinning Gannock.