

# HOST BODY\*

*Sarah Bennefield*

It lived inside of her. Every day, when she looked in the mirror, it stared back at her through her veins. It mocked her. Wormed its way through every orifice, every organ, every thought. She could feel it in her blood, in her brain, in her eyeballs, on her tongue, and in her sinuses. It inhabited her. Every night she thought about ripping her skin off in order to expose it. She no longer owned her body but shared it with a creature that had no right to live within her. She was never alone.

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She woke up on the bathroom floor to her roommate blotting her forehead with a damp rag. Vomit was in her hair. Her throat was sore and she had bruises on her legs. Her roommate was giggling. Tears welled up in her eyes, but the girl couldn't imagine crying in front of her over something that she wouldn't understand. She bit her tongue and didn't blink.

He kept asking her to go. The frat boy from math class. The one who would always open the door for her and offer her a piece of gum. The one who would often ask for her notes because "You just make it easier to understand." She didn't know why she said yes this time. He invited her out to a party every Thursday. He said that she needed a break from work and school, that it was okay to come out just this once. Sweaty men, sweaty men who break tables when they're drunk didn't seem like peak entertainment to her, but he just kept asking.

He often made fun of her. She thought it was flirty banter. Calling her a shut-in and telling her she needed to loosen up, that grad school wouldn't notice if she went to one party and got a little drunk on the weekends. He wasn't wrong, and his persistence made her wonder whether or not this was just an excuse to get closer so that he could eventually ask her to do his math work. But every time, he ended it with a smile and a slight laugh. She liked him. This time she agreed.

When she walked in, she was greeted with a joint and a compliment on how her skirt made her ass look. The music was loud. It was uncomfortably hot and bodies were filling up the living room. Couples made out on the couch that was now tinted brown from stains. There were girls everywhere. Girls with their tits out, girls with their thongs showing, girls who were way too

drunk. Girls who have bad things happen to them.

Math class frat boy was playing beer pong in the next room. When he saw her, he smiled and waved her over. It made her feel good. He wanted her. But as she walked toward him she could tell he was already too drunk. The alcohol on his breath smelled sour and made her reconsider kissing him before she left. His slurred words, though, exposed a new side of him she'd never seen. A side that allowed for him to enjoy himself, yet still focus purely on her. It was cute. He played with her hair, twirling it around his slender fingers, and let her bounce the ping-pong ball a couple of times. She made it in only once, yet when she did he cheered as if she'd won the football championship.

He then asked her how many drinks she had. When she told him none, he shook his head and left her alone at the table with the white ball. It made her laugh. She continued to play and even forced herself to down two cups of beer. It was nauseating, but it wasn't as bad as she thought it would be.

When math class frat boy came back, he had two red solo cups in his hand. At first, she protested. She made an excuse about having class in the morning. An excuse about how she didn't like the taste of alcohol, hoping he hadn't seen her with the beers. But he insisted. He said he made it especially for her. He gave her that same cute smile he always gives her. She couldn't help but smile back and drink. Tequila. Slightly salty. Fruit juices attempted to mask the alcohol taste. It wasn't terrible. She continued to drink and he put his hand around her waist.

It wasn't long before he was dragging her upstairs. She doesn't remember much, but what she does remember is tripping and falling. She remembers him picking her up. Somehow he seemed more sober than he was a few minutes earlier. She doesn't remember the white door being shut and locked, or him unzipping his pants. She was blacked out. It found its way into her body while she sat sleeping. Encroaching on her most vulnerable self. The creature gave her dreams of hopelessness and hatred, yet she couldn't awake. She was helpless and alone.

She woke up to math class frat boy shirtless next to her naked body. She wanted to scream. To cry. Both. She pulled on her skirt and headed out the door. The long walk back to her dorm room across campus seemed to stretch for miles as her insides screamed and bled. She quietly entered her room so she didn't wake up her roommate and went straight to the bathroom. The mirror reflected a body. Someone who wasn't her. Her eyes were sunken, her throat had bruises all around it. The face in the reflection was hers. Shaky hands undid the buttons to her blouse and the zipper to her skirt. Her clothes fell to the floor, exposing her bare body to the mirror. The bruises on her legs

and arms were already forming. Mascara ran down her face. The image of a parasite gnawing its way through her organs kept replaying itself in her head. She could feel it inside her. It was eating away at her insides.

Suddenly, she couldn't breathe. The naked form collapsed. It writhed on the ground. Tears streamed from her eyes. He put something inside of her. He was letting it eat away at her body, letting it take over. She wanted it out. Her fingers began clawing at her stomach. Pieces of skin embedded themselves underneath her nails. It burned. Blood started to pool on her skin.

It was crawling underneath her skin. It was under her fingernails. Behind her eyeballs. In the corner of her stomach.

She shoved her fingers down her throat and heaved. Reaching and reaching further to get the invader out. It was filling up her lungs. It was in between her legs. Her throat was bleeding now. Her stomach was bleeding now. Her privates were still bleeding, too. Her nails scraped at the flesh inside her esophagus. She couldn't even find the strength to throw up into the toilet. She threw up all over the ground and herself. She was heaving. Gagging and gagging and more gagging. It was like her entire hand found its way down her throat trying to grasp the wriggling thing in her. Nothing else would come up. It was escaping. She couldn't do anything else. Whatever he put in her was killing her slowly. She just sat on the floor while it digested all of her organs. Leaving her a hollow shell for it to inhabit.

The cold, gentle pressure of the damp rag brought her back from out of the shell. While her roommate was giggling, she said, "I heard you had a great time last night."

The girl couldn't explain.

You didn't know what it feels like to have something foreign enter your body - your mind - and absolutely ravish you. You feel dead. You feel empty. You have no room to try to expel it. It is a part of you now. It invaded you, and now it will always share a space with you.

She got up and left the bathroom. On the edge of her bed, she bent over and put on her right sneaker, then the left.

"Where are you going?"

"I have to get ready for math class."

*\*Content Warning: Sexual Assault*



*As a writer, I focus most of my work on the female body, particularly pertaining to the idea of the female grotesque. Mixing elements of horror, both supernatural and physical, with the female experience I tend to create stories that present very visceral and real imagery in order to evoke emotion and reaction from the reader. I seek to pursue and write about topics that aren't blatantly discussed in order to highlight issues and instances that most people deal with daily.*

*Within both my short stories and poetry, topics such as eating disorders, depression, sexual assault, and other mental health struggles take priority. In short stories, fictionalization tends to make these topics easier for readers to digest and talk about. My poetry, on the other hand, allows for a sense of beautification and fascination with the real horrors of life by the manipulation of structure and formatting of pieces. Overall, writing is something that I have been passionate about since I was young, and being able to find my niche between fiction, horror, and real life have allowed me to produce pieces saturated with imagery and emotion.*