

Martin's Sperm

M A R K K E N N Y

HE SPRAWLED ACROSS the sofa in dirty white sports socks, boxers and an old t-shirt with holes in it. He scratched at his crotch, then brought his finger up and rubbed the stubble on his top lip. There was no-one else in the flat. He sniffed his fingers properly.

Cheese. Most probably from the huge bag of Doritos on his chest, which he intended to fold into a tight, precise triangle when it was empty and leave on the floor. He sighed, reaching down for his beer.

TV was alright at three in the morning. *Family Guy* and *American Dad* episodes back to back. All repeats. He'd seen them a hundred times before but the routine was comforting. Framed his day. Something mindless to burn through the hours before he felt tired enough to sleep.

He sipped the beer, angling his head so he wouldn't have to sit up, and became aware of the ache in his neck. The can fell over as he put it down, beer glugging out onto the carpet. He swore, fumbling to get it upright again, and managed to knock it under the sofa. While he was retrieving it he found a sheet of paper, now sodden. He remembered he'd put it there three weeks ago to keep safe.

Dear Mr Hunt, Following our consultation on the fifth... blah blah blah... we regret to confirm... blah blah blah... standard compensation under the terms of the waiver...

He sighed again. They'd explained the risks when he signed up. He'd dismissed the possibility of anything happening, eager to get the payout. It would clear all his debts with a bit left-over. They hadn't told him how many other men had taken part in the trial and he wondered if anyone else had 'suffered adverse reactions'. He told himself he didn't want kids anyway. He stopped himself screwing up the letter into a soggy ball. He might need it for the claim.

The last episode ended. He watched the credits to the end, not ready for the silence. There was a documentary on next about soldiers in Afghanistan. Gritty reality presented by some former soap actor. Blokes being blokey in sand-coloured uniforms. Penis-themed nicknames. Banter. Then shouts of "Contact!" and shaky footage of the camera operator's feet running for cover.

He stabbed at the TV with the remote and looked round at the room.

"Time for bed," he announced, trying to sound cheerful.

He took a leak, didn't bother brushing his teeth. There was nothing pressing to do the next day.

He woke up suddenly, convinced he wasn't alone in the room. There was something cold and wet on his cheek. Probably spit. He wiped it away and lay still, listening.

Nothing. He laughed to himself and rolled over.

Then, as he was drifting off, he heard a thump. All the hairs on his arms and the back of his neck stood on end. Then the sound of something sliding over carpet. He thought he saw the blankets twitch. He wasn't sure what to do but a rising panic and the pressure in his bladder convinced him to move. He inched across the mattress. The bed creaked.

Whatever was under there started crashing about like an animal caught in a trap. He jumped out of bed, fumbled with the door, and ran into the bathroom. He locked it, pausing for a moment, then pissed noisily into the toilet. He sat down and looked around for something to use as a weapon.

A few minutes later he was listening outside his bedroom door, clutching a bottle of spray cleaner dusty from lack of use.

He burst into his room brandishing the bottle, pointing it left and right like a cop in a crime drama.

The room was empty.

This is ridiculous, he thought. It's just a mouse or something. He flipped the duvet up with his foot and stepped back. Nothing. He got down on all fours and put his head under the bed. On the other side, a long white tail was slithering away from him. He went cold and couldn't move. The tail curled upwards and over the top of the bed. After it disappeared he became aware of something right next to his face. He looked at it out of the corner of his eye.

At first he thought it was a snake, but the head was too big, almost the same size as a rugby ball. It was milky white and shiny like it was made out of glass. There were no facial features of any kind.

The thing twitched. He tried to stand up but fell over backwards, dropping the spray cleaner. He scrambled to get away and banged his head on the wardrobe. The thing followed him as he went, gently snaking through the air. He screwed up his eyes waiting for an attack but it never came. When he opened them the opaque white had cleared. The inside of its head was bustling like a rock pool.

There was a central mass, larger and darker than anything else, wrapped in folds of gently billowing material. Tiny bubbles were coming and going from it, moving along a delicate network of chains connecting all the different parts. There were structures that looked like sheets of lace, others that looked like rough pieces of gravel, and others smooth like blobs of oil.

The thing came forward very slowly and grazed his cheek, then backed off to a corner of the ceiling and engaged in something that looked like preening. He sat up and wiped the dampness from his face. He stared at the thing on the ceiling, fascination displacing fear. He wondered if it was some kind of alien. It must be. There was no animal on earth it resembled. It was like a balloon on a long string. A giant white tadpole, or a—

“No, it couldn't be.”

The creature stopped preening and looked over at him.

“But how... ”

He stood there staring. It looked back for a while, then settled, slowly turning milky again, tucking its head into the loops of its tail. He had absolutely no idea what to do, but suddenly he was exhausted. He'd think about it in the morning, and tonight he'd sleep on the couch. He pulled the duvet off the bed and grabbed a couple of pillows. On his way out he picked up the spray bottle. The chemicals might be harmful. As he left he very gently closed the door so as not to wake it.

Over the next couple of weeks he got used to having it around. Naturally, he couldn't have anyone over. But he never had anyone over anyway, so that wasn't a problem. He began to look forward to coming in after a long night's work. His new friend was becoming a part of his life.

“We need to give you a name,” he said one evening. “Are you male or fe— well, I suppose you're male. I wonder if you already have one, back wherever it is that you're from. Hey, buddy?”

They were in the lounge. They often watched TV together these days. It looked at him and cocked its head.

“How about we just settle on Buddy?”