

Anatomy of a Date
by Jeremy Kansas

For our second date, Beth picked a generic Italian restaurant. How original. She sat across from me, seeming content to pick at her salad and mumble something innocuous between bites. She had a dull smile and dull hazel eyes and she spoke in a dull monotone as if we were back in the office comparing figures, but this was all surface. "Beth" was just a label, her body a casing.

"How's your pasta," she said.

"That's not why we're here."

"Ah. Okay." She dabbed at an invisible spot of food at the corner of her mouth.

"Never mind," I said, already nervous.

So despite myself I led us into talk about the weather, recent movies, people we knew, hobbies. We talked about everything that wasn't anything. A boring replay of our first date; I needed to dig deeper. We were both humans, at the core. We were both made of the same material. How could I connect with her on that visceral level?

I worked my fingers under the skin near my ears. I gripped it, teased it free, and exposed the wet red muscle underneath. I laid my face on the table.

Beth's eyes widened and she squirmed in her seat.

I removed my scalp and the remaining skin around my neck. I yanked at the muscles of my face and neck, tore them free with a juicy sucking sound. I wrenched out my tongue and tasted blood.

"Stop it." Her dull eyes grew moist and quivered. "You'll embarrass us."

I removed my clothing, then stripped my torso of its fleshy veil and laid my skin gingerly, like fresh dry-cleaning, across the table. I tore free all remaining muscles. I snapped my ribs off like twigs and placed them between us. I used the knife beside my plate to cut my stomach free and placed the jiggling mass on the table. It stank of half-digested rigatoni.

Beth leaned across the table, careful not to touch any of my pieces. "Please," she whispered. "Everyone's looking at us."

But I wasn't done! No more games, no more bullshit. I sought to reveal the truth!

I popped out my eyes; one fell and rolled under the table. I lifted my brain and entire spinal column out from the top of my head. I gripped my twitching heart and pulled it from my chest, veins and arteries still attached. Blood now soaked the tablecloth a deep crimson. I went on to remove the rest of my major organs: tangled ropes of intestines, deflated lungs, slippery liver, and so on. I disengaged all my remaining bones, piled them on the table, and balanced my skull on top.

All that remained, sitting across from Beth, was an invisible essence that was somehow still me. And I immediately knew I'd gone too far. Dug too deep for a second date. Too deep for one as dull as Beth.

"This was a mistake." She stood up suddenly and our glasses of ice water rattled. "I'm sorry," she said but she wouldn't look at where I was/wasn't or at the pile of my elements on the table. I tried to speak, to attempt some kind of defense, but I had no voice box to vibrate, no tongue no teeth no mouth to form the words. The other restaurant goers followed her with their curious eyes as she fled the scene of my crime.

Then our waiter, making no effort to hide the disdain in his expression, brought me the check.