

# Guts.

by Milan Lefferts

My eyes open to nothing. They blink instinctively, and see no eyelids flicker in front of them. The utter blackness of the winter night seems friendlier, softer than usual at this hour.

I'm wide awake and, as I search my mind for remnants of unruly dreams, I realize I shouldn't be. No restless nightmares invading my rest, no drugs coursing through my veins, no noises to alarm my senses. A seemingly peaceful night yet I feel in my gut things are not as they seem.

My sight adjusts slowly, the vague outlines of my furniture creeping into view. I roll onto my stomach, when something softly pokes my underbelly, with a light pressure that is clearly not part of the usual softness of my bed. A hard object seems to be caught between myself and the mattress. My hand reaches automatically for the object, likely a pen, and brushes it aside. Or at least, it attempts to. Stubbornly, the object sways slightly, but stays put. I reach down again, wrap my hands around it, and try to pull it out from underneath me. Again, it doesn't oblige. Whatever it is, it's somehow stuck to my abdomen. A rather peculiar turn of events.

I push myself onto my side and take a moment to touch the unknown shape. It feels smooth to the touch, almost aerodynamic, with small indents every few centimeters. I've never been good at gaging distances, but it should be a good 20 centimeters in length. From its spiky top, the mysterious shape runs downwards, parallel to my stomach in a nearly straight line. Then, a sudden curve downwards, ending somewhere to the left of my navel.

As my fingers trace the shape, my hand brushes past a second shape, much to my surprise. I drop my body onto my back and, hands under my shirt, I touch both, softly gripping them. A gentle pull reveals, rather unsurprisingly, that the other is also stuck to my skin, identical to its twin. I laugh at my play on words. My hands slide downwards, and I finger the skin surrounding the area where they seem attached. No sign of any glue, nor something else to stick them so strongly to me.

I maneuver myself into a sitting position, careful as to not prick myself with the spiky tops, and reach for my bedlight. With a familiar click, I banish the darkness from my bedroom.

The two shapes can be seen clearly through my loose-fitted shirt, their dark contours messing up the usually pleasant aesthetics of my torso. Carefully I roll up my shirt, excited like a child awaiting their yearly gifts, to see what this strange night has brought me.

I am not disappointed by the revelation: two jet-black lines jutting from my abdomen. In awe I stare at them in amazement and surprise, when suddenly they make a small, jittery movement. I look closely at their shiny exterior and smile to myself. Not a pen, you idiot, but antennas.

"The chitinous material was a dead giveaway", I think out loud. Black and hard, fourth grade biology class introduced me to this wondrous substance, that protects many an insect's

guts from spilling onto the floor. The question was, what were these feelers doing sticking out of my body?

“What ARE you doing here?” I ask them. The antennae only jitter again in answer.

I stare at them for a while and decide I should like to find out more about them. Or rather, about their likely owner. I relax my belly as well as I can (I’ve always had tension issues) and press down in the area around the antennae. Fighting the instinct to flex my abdominal muscles, I feel a strange sensation deep in my stomach; I touch something hard, and in reaction that something moves away towards my intestines. Sadly for whatever it is that has taken up residence inside, there is very little room to move. I observe some organs reposition to places they usually are not and a slight nausea overcomes me, but nothing serious, and I realize we’re dealing with an unwelcome intruder here.

“Guess you’re not going anywhere without some help,” I mumble. I get up and now clearly notice the weight of the thing hiding within my gut. The antennae hold it in position, and I see the weight pulling at my skin. I snicker at the thought that this must be what it’s like to be pregnant. Except of course, this was a very much unwanted (not to mention unexpected) pregnancy. And we all know what happens to unwanted pregnancies!

I make my way to the kitchen, one hand resting on the bottom of my belly, where the creature has taken up refuge in an effort to escape my previous poking around. It feels heavy and I would prefer it to not cause any further chaos to my insides. Who knows what damage it has been doing in there?

I turn on the kitchen lights and immediately spot my target: my brand-new 5-piece set of premium Zwilling Pro kitchen knives. In the anticipation of treating myself to an expansive dinner, I had sharpened them the day before. Instead of exquisite fillet however, something else is on the menu tonight.

I grab the larger one, an 8-inch chef’s knife, and it occurs to me things might get messy. I remove my shirt fully, as well as my matching pyjama pants. Pristine white never goes well with dark red stains, be they wine OR blood.

Fully naked and knife in hand, I walk into the adjacent bathroom, and climb into the bathtub. Satisfied, I turn my attention again to the antennae. I grab the left one firmly, and feel the jittering get stronger. Restless, as if knowing what is coming, the creature squirms and wriggles in my lower intestines.

I pull hard on the left antenna, and witness the skin around my navel stretch upwards.

“There we go,” I sigh as I place the knife onto the stretched skin, puncturing it easily. They weren’t kidding about this knife-set! I cut slowly around the antenna, careful not to slice anything too important. Blood wells up around the antenna and starts streaming downwards past my loins and exposed penis into the bathtub.

The laceration frees up the antenna so I can move it around more slowly, however I’m not the only one who notices this newfound freedom. The creature starts pulling back, desperately trying to dig deeper into my intestines. Perhaps it is scared of light? In any case, I pull back harder, but the creature seems to be stuck somewhere and I’m unable to pull it out with one hand. I grab the second antenna, now holding both in one hand, and use the sharp blade to make a deep gash from the first wound to the second antenna, neatly ripping the flesh

in between. Blood pooling around me (I was sitting on the drain like I always do by accident), I was glad I didn't ruin my pyjamas. My grip now firmly on the creature's feelers, I put away the knife, placing it gently on the edge of the bathtub so as to not damage the freshly-sharpened blade. Slowly, I lower my hand into the wound and feel around inside. The sound reminds me of overcooked pasta, or stirring thick broth. I push aside a tangle of intestines and graze something hairy. I immediately close my fist around the slippery fur and yank it out hard. With a gushy noise, part of my small intestines gives way and, small flakes of meat dislodging from my innards, I raise the creature victoriously into the harsh bathroom light. "That's silly," I say to myself, dumbfounded, "Why would a rat have antennas?"