

FLENSER

(to strip the blubber from a whale)

## Flenser

That guy from the floor above me, you know the one whose head is always covered in bloody shaver nicks, well he called me into the office, you know the one covered in erotic pictures of men holding cheques. It was in that camp friendly tone that generally predicates a bollocking, so as you can imagine I went in expecting to be tonguing through shit for the rest of the week. Licking enough ass so my face could disappear back into the faceless herds of middle management. Unfortunately this was not the case. As I entered the room his eyes darted towards mine, full of stewed aggression. The idea that he had to move away from liking photos of himself bred disgust and genuine contempt. As he barked business rhetoric at me the data pooled in his saliva. KPIs shot out of his mouth and into my face. Large folders bridged the room. My redundancy was knocked back with a quart of cheap vinegary wine. His smiles were laced with chewed venison and his teeth stained by fags. He took a selfie, #takingcareof business and then penetrated a cabinet. Inside was an axe fashioned by a stray intern. He hoisted it into the air with both arms, exposing a premium cologne. Its tobacco and vanilla scent swooned me into the swinging weapon. Fountains of blood sprayed from the legs left standing as I flew out the window. The trunk of my severed body was impaled by a fixie missing a saddle. Half man, half fixie, I cycled back to Bethnal Green, where people noticed how cool my desecrated corpse looked. I basked in this, quickly forgetting my worries and the decay.

I chained myself to a skinny tree outside the concrete wasteland that bled rent. Children played amongst the needles and piles of Pitbull faeces. Lads smirked from tinted windows as they drove around selling cocaine to jaded professionals and spoilt babies. They spread the seeds of the concrete chromosome, without consideration for the world they were creating. Bristle Beater used to be one of those lads. Back in the day of the Cray twins, he'd saunter past women, eager to replicate his disdain and demonstrate his fighting fury. At war with himself he had a litter of children and then fought his way into prison, where he was eventually stabbed to death by a toothbrush.

Most people wish for a beatnik father. All mine did was beat me and nick coins from my piggybank, always oinking like a mad cunt as he injected black tar heroin into his tired veins, partly funded by his daft son. His muddy ashes are kept in a ceramic vase with his name embossed on it in cheap faux bronze. The same rusty colour as our mother's mattress. My siblings cowered in the corner as I entered the apartment. The absence of violent outbursts and casual theft indicated that something had disturbed their routine. I pondered over the fact that work might have called, but remembered that they were most likely going to avoid any contact with their crazy ex who took a nosedive out an office window mid-conversation. I walked closer to the cluster of cowering children, taking note of the loose tears and quivering faces. Had someone from dad's old gang come into our home, it was hard to tell as it generally always had that ransacked crack den look about it. Ever since my mother took to fried chicken, she swapped caring for her children with inhaling simulated Southern flavours. In the early days people complimented the glow that the chicken munching brought to her skin. Meanwhile, I became the world's best man-

mother, serving stolen vegetables to those that would eat them, the others managed to survive on mother's reflux. They didn't look hungry, which was strange. In fact some of them were chewing on chicken skin. This is the point that I realised that mother must be dead.

Clarifying this assumption was a more difficult process than one would typically assume. Most weeks her post-eating state gave off the stench of death and her lack of movement did little to help this situation. I had developed two methods to determine her physical well-being. The first was to make a move towards her food, which generally resulted in a lethargic air grasp that served me with whatever words I needed to hear. The other method was to take a look inside of her mouth. Due to her habitual eating her mouth would remain chewing at all times. I often wondered was this an indication that her repetitive actions had caused a dysfunction in her muscle processes, but preferred to believe that she was trying to speak to her emaciated family. As I moved closer to her face I noticed a stagnant face that soothed the stench coming from the excretion soaked mattress where she lived. The lack of movement in her tongue spat dread into the room. I sat on the corner of her bed for a number of hours chewing on the odd bit of chicken. Her timing was impeccable. The one night I decide to escape an employment execution and return decapitated from a job that all the word speakers around me say is a thing I should be attached to. Even my bed-bound mother thought this, I could tell from the way her tongue swirled when she ate a snack box on a Sunday night. My wallet was the gateway to her chicken paradise. My religion was her mass. My siblings eventually unfurled and within hours were bouncing around on mother's springy corpse and arguing over who got to control the TV remote. All I could think about was the expense involved in fitting all of her in a wooden box. On top of that the chicken was dry as fuck and I cared little for the bracelets they were selling on the shopping channel.

Before dissolving into static the television brought forward a man of relevance. In his well manicured hand he held a custom carving device that resembled a saw, but had a surgical styling all the way down to the detail of the polished metal. He danced around on the screen like all good salesmen do, but his movements were jarred by his immaculately fitting suit. Amidst his boisterous banter with the twenty-something blonde bimbo bosom barrage I felt genuine moments of unease towards the buckets of flesh scattered around my feet. The girls heaved their buckets into the rule of thirds and provided decadent sales for his otherwise morose business. They bounced out of frame only for a meandering fade to present us with a pair of obese twins, both on the slab, dead as the day they were born. Even countesses of the great perfect fried chicken fall asunder to the greasy desires of the taste of fat. Driving daddy's business into the grind house they ate their way out of purgatory and gorged themselves into the grave. The adept and angry salesman flings a skeleton of a man into the scene. He rattles his way into a string of dialogue that resembles my suffering thoughts towards my stinking mother. How can one in this modern society afford the expense of a custom coffin when they charge by the pound?! I think this is a question, but string an exclamation mark at the end to express how this is confounded by the stench of death coming straight from the holes in my mother's rotting teeth. There is

an answer, the suited man bellows it in the form of premium rate telephone digits - 1850 FLENSER. This is your mainline to the ultimate cost-cutter. Any doubt is removed by the public demonstration that begins. The suited man makes his way over to the first corpse and gently massages it with the surgical grade saw that he has been waving around flamboyantly. It cuts through their butter and the lard and in one quick motion a third of their mass flops to the floor like a dead fish being beaten off a rock. Chicken nugget tumours make romantic patterns on the otherwise visually unappealing scene. Within minutes both women have been reduced to pencil thin goddesses. They are tied into bodices that help perpetuate this visual appeal, while also holding in their remaining innards. The crux of this performance pivots around both of these women being placed into standard sized coffins. The savings are projected onto screen as canned happiness fills the studio. I share in the salesman's delight as the realtime sales figures grow. My grease soaked fingers struggle to dial the number, but eventually I manage to press the right sequence of numbers and begin queuing for my financial salvation.

Hi you're through to The Flenser hotline, I'm Dave Old how may I help you?

The question hangs in the air soaked in Dave's forced enthusiasm... An awkward silence is caused by the greasy chicken clinging viciously to my throat trying to avoid another death in the acids of my stomach. It plummets into the secondary abyss as I cough to prepare myself for the words sitting on the edge of my brain.

Hi, my name is Donal Tetherfeather and I was curious about the cost involved in having my mother's corpse flensed.

Well sir, that really depends on the package you are looking for. Have you used our service before?

No I only just heard about it it on the television.

Interesting, I only mention this because we have a special one time loyalty card offer extravaganza for new customers who meet our eligibility criteria under contract terms Damian/BA14Z. I'm going to transfer you through to one of our specialist teams to investigate this further.

But! I am immediately transferred to a holding queue that has an extremely camp remix of the Haddaway song What is Love playing at an aggressively high volume...

HI THERE, YOU ARE THROUGH TO FRED FLUMEHEART IN THE CUSTOMER ACQUISITION SERVICES AND DEPENDENT TRANSFER OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT, HOW MAY I ASSIST YOU? Fred screamed kind suffering down the line with the exasperated subtly of a dog in heat. His Birminghamian aggression distracted my logic and I mumbled another dead statement into the phone.

Your colleague Dave Old referred me onto this line, I'm not really sure if I'm through to the right department.

WHY DIDN'T YOU FUCKING TELL ME DAVE OLD REFERRED YOU, I'M HERE TO HARD SELL YOU INTO A PACKAGE THAT YOU WILL MOST LIKELY NEVER MAKE YOUR MONEY BACK ON AND IF YOU DO ONE OF OUR MANAGERS WILL PUT ON A STOCKING AND RANSACK YOUR HOME AND SHIT ON YOUR PILLOW. THAT SAID WITH EVERY FLENSWE WE OFFER A FREE MARTINI AND ALMOST GUARANTEE THAT OUR OPERATORS WON'T CASTRATE YOU. AT THE LOW PRICE OF £150.56 PER YEAR (FLENSWE EXCLUDED) WE CAN OFFER THIS TO YOU, AND PROVIDE A FREE ONLINE PHOTO STREAM AND FOLLOW-UP FORMALDEHYDE FRAMING SERVICE FOR YOUR LOVED ONE'S SEVERED FLESH. I'M GOING TO TRANSFER YOU THROUGH TO OUR PAYMENT DEPARTMENT TO PROCESS YOUR LIFETIME MEMBERSHIP.

Jesus!!! I'm now on a line where funeral procession music is bellowing, I can imagine the forklift shouldering my mother's coffin so decide to stay on the line in memory of her.

Hi you're through to Markus Thorn I'll be your payment service operator today. Before I process your lifetime platinum membership and share agreement with our company I need to ask you two quick data protection questions.

1. Are you happy to continue being fucked in the ass by companies such as ourselves?

What the fuck kind of question is that?

Sir as per our language agreement policy I cannot speak to you if you continue to use language like that. I'll just put N/A down on that one. Right final one:

2. Do you have any knowledge concerning philosophical reasoning?

Well I enjoy writing short stories that operate as philosophical allegories.

You should have told us in the first instance that you were a free thinking individual, I'm going to transfer you through to my colleague who will look after your request.

The Scarface song Push it to the Limit plays for a number of minutes until finally my call is picked up.

Hi you're through to Dave Old, how may I help you?

An age passed while Dave Old processed my application, methane shots from mother's burping body lulled me through the transaction. He welcomed me to the world of Flensing and then I dropped the receiver into a pool of Dorito vomit. Imagined thanks gurgled from

her stiff tongue and I knew in that moment that I would surely come first place in the international son contest. I dreamed of the award ceremony, people cheering and me smiling, spraying champagne over everyone, receiving so many handshakes that my hands start to bleed. These moments loop as my body quivers on the living carpet. At least my neck is cushioned by the empty crisp packets and the crusty tissues. This happiness is interrupted by the sound of knuckles dancing on the front door. I dart towards it knowing that my Flenser has finally arrived. As I open the door I am greeted by the bald adonis that dissected my business career and initiated my severance package. Now he is standing at my front door with a big fucking F planted on his t-shirt like a suburban superhero dipping his toes into the wilds of the concrete jungle, I could see by his slicing grin that he was ready to cut. Without hesitation I let him crawl through the doorway and make his way towards her room. On the way we witnessed my siblings, who had become wrapped together in a ball like the rat-kings of yesterlore. Trapped in their own excretions they heralded a transformation that was the antithesis of mother's indulgences. The Flenser and I walked past them with cultivated sorrow. They begged for attention; frozen in empty glances, at least they could be fostered by formaldehyde and displayed to those curious enough to observe their abject monstrosity. They revelled in this unspoken certainty with the quiet conduct of any decent exhibition. I could see people purchasing merchandise with their image sketched all over it, they just needed more time to ferment.

Her door needed to be pushed hard, the toxins had created a vacuum that demanded force. Once the tiniest wisp of air had forced its way into her domain we were quickly allowed entry into the festering wasteland of dried chicken skins dazzling in the gleam of crisp packets licked immaculate. She eclipsed the further reaches of the boneyard in soiled shadows. Each passing footstep was soothed by crunching and the air's toxic grasp had become oily. The Flenser crept towards her with the finesse of a galloping giraffe, but there was a strange allure to his awkward movements. It's as if every second of motion was secured by his impending financial gain. I know they say money talks, but nobody ever speaks of its quiet whispers that penetrate our souls and turn us into mechanical wrecks. My meagre salary used to slice through me like a currency of scalpels and all I could do was question the atrocity of inflation.

Do you want her svelte or cut to fit?

The first batch of words that leave his mouth actualise my thoughts towards the importance of financial capital. Obviously I wanted her figure to look as graceful as possible, but wanted to avoid depleting all of my remaining coppers.

We can reduce the cut to fit cost if you are willing to handle the flesh bucket?

The Flenser could tell by my dire expression that I was a willing subject. He swipes my bank card across his wrist and politely demands for my security numbers. Once processed he tosses me a sticky bucket and we get to work. With the demure of a sedated masseuse he gently straddles her and begins to strip away her blubber. These gelatinous off-cuts are

tossed into the bucket that I am cradling like a newborn child. It quickly fills and The Flenser's eyes usher me towards sibling buckets that join the flesh storm. 57 buckets later I see a rectangular block that vaguely resembles my mother.

In order to meet standard dimensions I had to remove the limbs. These will be refined into shitty ornaments and sold on the shopping channel. As for the blubber, this will be sold on to Durden Soap Industries and should at least recoup our callout fees. Are you happy with this?

Apparently a tear can sign a contract and legally speaking a grimace can be construed as a declaration of acceptance. At least that is what my scaly lawyer stated over the phone. The Flenser smirked at my desperation and continued cleaning his instruments. Once disconnected, I obliged him by carrying the buckets out into the van. By bucket 30 the bones were starting to squelch due to the odd slosh of her innards spilling onto the floor. The Flenser produced a slippery floor sign in order to avoid any more of my legal deviations. Once the van was loaded he beckoned for a handshake. I leaned in to grip his hand and the sound of soggy bone crunching echoed his vice grip handshake. His dilated pupils peered straight into my eyes, he held his stare long enough for me to question myself and then called it a day.

In retrospect I'd rate The Flenser 5 stars. He was efficient and dealt with our misery in an orderly and professional manner. Our funeral costs were reduced by at least 40% and he threw in some svelte cuts free of charge. Everyone admired how mother looked like butter spread evenly in her coffin. Buried as a Southern flavour her grave was filled with crispy chicken skins and golden brown breadcrumbs. My siblings rolled around the funeral reminding us of childhood innocence and the price of excessive indulgence. More contracts were signed with tears. The priest absorbed a bundle of cash and spoke kind words towards a stranger programmatically inputting her name into his rehearsed to death speech. The Flenser appeared to make sure his work was well received. Almost invisible in the overcast distance I could see his bone saw glisten as he waved to me. I responded with a friendly salute, sipped on my complimentary martini and we all lived happily ever after.