

Halloween Ants

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Brad Anderson awoke suddenly, sitting straight up in bed and staring forward into the dark with wide, horrified eyes. He'd dreamed that he'd killed and eaten his wife. Throwing the sheet off, he stumbled out of bed and into the bathroom, turning on the light and looking at his pale, shaken face. What is wrong with me? he wondered. He stared into his own eyes through the mirror, searching for some sort of answer. Instead of seeing himself he was reliving the horrible dream, seeing the shock and dumb terror on his wife's face as he plunged the knife in, cutting her flesh like he would a deer or some poor farm animal, feeling a dark hunger as he bit into it like a rabid carnivore. She screamed and screamed as he ate, dying a little bit at a time. The sound of her screaming still seemed to ring in his ears.

His heart was hammering in his chest, and there was sweat beaded up all over his forehead. For God's sake, he thought, what is the meaning of this dream? Brad splashed water in his face, dried with a towel, and paused to give himself a once-over in the mirror – short blond hair, trim mustache, sloping shoulders, baggy eyes – then walked back into the bedroom, turning on the light and

looking at the bed. The bed was empty, his wife gone. He stared at it, trying to sort out his thoughts. It must be anger. He did feel anger, a lot of it – that and shock. Shock that it happened. Shock at the nerve of Dale McKinney, who lured her away. Shock that she'd fallen for such a phony, a sleaze.

Brad turned off the light and – against his will – he walked across the room to the north window and pulled the curtains aside. Dale lived five houses down and on the other side of the street. The windows were dark. His wife, presumably, inside. Sometimes he wished he had the nerve to borrow one of Randy's hunting rifles, the kind with the big fat 'scope, and just pick the jackass off as he walked by a window. Or – better yet – out at the golf course while Dale was giving lessons. Blam! Right through the chest.

He could deal with his anger towards Dale. It was an easy emotion to understand, especially considering the situation. But the dream about his wife – it disturbed him. It made him wonder about his mental health.

Brad rolled back onto bed but was not able to sleep. He shifted from his right to left side and back, over and over every few minutes. Finally he gave up, and went downstairs to the living room and turned on the television. A John Wayne movie was on one of the cable channels, and he sat and stared at the images and sounds, letting the television turn off his mind and the ugly thoughts within.

Later, with the sun shining through the windows and across his polished hardwood floor, Brad awoke to the distant sound of

his alarm clock going off upstairs. The coffee was on automatic, brewing away in the kitchen. The smell made him feel better, and he got up and walked stiff-legged into the bathroom to take a pee. He dimly remembered the nightmare, but was able to shrug it off. Things like that didn't matter much in the daylight.

Brad stepped through his weekend morning routine. Shower, shave, dress, then retrieve the Saturday paper and scan the headlines while he sipped his coffee. The house around him was so quiet. It was their dream house, one that Janice was thrilled with, that made their relocation from Concord, California much less traumatic. Brad had been an outstanding supervisor and his company needed a manager for their new huge shipping depot in Arizona— this was their chance, with his doubled income and prestigious job, and this new big house that he and Janice were supposed to fill with children. That didn't happen, and now she was gone and it was only him, the cat and the dust motes that swam in the shafts of morning sunlight. The cat didn't like him, and avoided him at all times unless the food dish was empty. He hadn't even seen it for the past few days – for all he knew Janice had come and confiscated it.

Opening the paper, Brad found the headlines held bad news. Two more people were missing. This time it was Bob and Dana Mueller. Like so many people in this small community, Brad had met and was familiar with these people. Bob was a big, beefy, country-western type who worked down at the local hardware store,

and Dana was a little redhead with a big attitude who worked with some computer firm over in Phoenix . That brought the total to six missing people in two weeks. The Dickson police were appealing to the state for help, and even though the paper didn't say it, it was obvious the authorities thought it was a serial killer.

Brad put the paper down and finished his coffee. He was hungry this morning, much more than usual. His stomach felt hollow, empty, and it was making noises. Normally Janice would be preparing breakfast. A dark thought crossed him – she probably was making breakfast right at that very moment, five houses down the street.

He stood, and picking the coffee cup up, he threw it. It bounced off the wall and the carpet but didn't break. There was no satisfaction in it. Still feeling dark and hateful, Brad exited the house through the back door and out the back gate, walking out onto the golf course path toward the clubhouse.

Along the way he came across several balls of ants. He kicked at one, and they scattered. They were large, frightening ants, all black and orange. The locals called them "Halloween ants." The town's claim to fame was that they'd been overrun by them. The ants were desert natives, and all the new unnatural plants – the lawns, the trees, the hedges and flowerbeds – were a boon to them. It was all food, more than nature had intended, and their population had exploded. Being that Dickson was an upscale bedroom community for Phoenix , some important people had been angry at the ants for eating their grass and flowers. A company

called Nupoint Chemical was invited out to test some of their experimental pesticides on the hapless bugs, which prompted them to form in these large, disgusting balls. Brad had tried once to step on one, but he only killed half of them and the other half crawled onto his shoe and up his ankle. Like wasps or bees they had stingers, and several of them got him before he could brush them off. His leg was swollen for hours, and he never tried it again.

He reached the clubhouse and walked into the small coffee shop, and heard half the conversations come to a sudden halt. He looked around at the familiar faces and none would make eye contact. It was because his wife, Janice, was sitting with Dale McKinney in a booth toward the back. Everyone there knew what was going on.

Janice, her long blond hair pinned back, was dressed in shorts and a nice blouse. She had a sharp nose and long eyelashes, and a solid muscular build. Even though she was aware her husband was standing several feet away she pointedly ignored him. Dale, who was a tall, lanky man with a stylish three-day beard, had the balls to smile and wave. Brad felt himself flush. His face and neck burned. He walked quickly over to the table, and Dale stood up and faced him.

"I have nothing to say to you," Brad said, and turned to his wife.

"I'm the only person you get to talk to," Dale said,

stepping in front of Janice.

Brad lunged, swinging, but the others around them quickly grabbed the two and pulled them apart. The club manager hurried in and took Brad by the arm, leading him toward the door. "What are you doing?" Brad demanded.

"I'm kicking you out."

"You're kicking me out?"

"You have no business coming in here and causing trouble!"

"I'm causing trouble? It's your goddamn golf pro sitting there with my wife."

"I don't think she's your wife anymore. You should go out and find another one." The burley old guy pushed him out the door.

"You don't come back until you're calmed down."

Brad cursed at him and then walked angrily away. He couldn't believe it – the club manager was on Dale's side! Like Dale had a right to anyone's wife, anyone he chose. Brad felt they were all against him, all of them, everyone who was sitting in the coffee shop. He wished he had a machine gun. He wished he could mentally snap like some disgruntled postal worker and step in there and mow them down. Then he'd cut them up into little pieces, fry them in a big pan and eat them. Just eat them. Gobble them down like a good steak, with eggs on the side.

As he walked down the path back toward his house, he heard a group of kids signing in their backyard. It was to the tune of a Christmas song, but the words were oddly changed:

Joy to the world, my teacher is dead

I bar-be-cued her head

Where is the body?

I flushed it down the potty

Round and round it goes

Oh round and round it goes...

Oh round, and round, and round it goes...

The children's song disturbed him, just like his own thoughts disturbed him. He wasn't merely angry with those people. He wanted to eat them. It was a genuine desire, not just a fleeting thought. He wanted to butcher them like cattle and chop them into steaks, especially Dale and Janice.

Jesus Christ, he thought. Where is this coming from? He stepped over a ball of black and orange ants and passed his back gate without stopping. Abruptly he changed direction and headed across the fairway, walking over to Randy's shack. He needed to talk, and Randy was the closest thing he had to a friend out here. In the back of his mind, a niggling little thought persisted: Randy had a gun collection. Randy had let him borrow guns in the past. Try as he might, Brad couldn't get this thought to leave him alone.

Halfway to Randy's shack, Brad stumbled upon the oddest thing he'd ever seen. There were two snakes right in the middle of the fairway, both mottled brown and looking to be of the same

species, and they were eating each other. They had swallowed a good portion of each other's tail. As he stood staring at it, there was the sound of an automobile horn, and Brad looked up to see a van driving right down the fairway at him. Brad took several steps out of the way and the van drove past, running over the snakes. It was a white van with a government seal on the door panel: The Environmental Protection Agency. Brad continued on his way, wondering what that was all about, wondering why the hell they were driving all over the golf course. Randy would be pissed.

Randy, the greenskeeper, had a shack on the back nine, right beside a pond and a large sand trap. As Brad approached the pond he felt an overwhelming wall of humidity. The community was pumping a lot of water into all the lawns, ponds, and swimming pools, and the Arizona sun did its best to dry them out. Phoenix and the surrounding suburbs could no longer brag about the benefits of their "dry heat." Brad walked around the shack to the door and found it closed and locked. Feeling let down and disappointed, he walked around the shack, looking up and down the greens for a sign of Randy, and he spotted the man walking out from the trees, heading toward him.

"There was a van running around on your grass!" Brad called out.

Randy nodded and waved. He was in his fifties, with long black hair that he kept in a ponytail, and a ruddy, weatherworn face. He was dressed in his usual faded jeans and a tee shirt. "I know!" he called back. As he came closer, Brad noticed the man had an

unhappy expression and a haunted look in his eyes. He also looked a bit pale.

"What's going on?" Brad asked him.

"They confiscated the Nupoint stuff. You know, that experimental stuff for the ants?"

"Really?"

"Yeah, they took it all." Randy wasn't looking at him. He was looking off to the side, his eyes unfocused.

"Why did they take it?" Brad asked.

"Didn't say," Randy said. His voice had a soft, faraway quality to it. "I suspect they discovered the stuff wasn't as harmless as Nupoint said it was."

"Was it killing the birds or something?"

"It's not a poison. It's an enzyme. It made the ants turn on each other." He finally looked up at Brad, his eyes suddenly focused. "How are you feeling?"

"Depressed. Pissed off."

"Janice hasn't come home yet?"

"I don't think she ever will. I got into a fight with Dale a few minutes ago." He related what happened at the clubhouse coffee shop, omitting his bizarre cannibalistic urges.

"How does that make you feel?" Randy asked.

"It makes me feel like . . . like borrowing one of your guns and blowing the bastard's head off!"

"And then what?"

"Well, blow her head off, too."

"And then what?"

Brad gave Randy a strange look. "And then have myself committed, I guess."

Randy nodded slowly, his eyes going unfocused again. "I know what you mean."

"The really crappy part is I still haven't had any breakfast, and I'm starving. You wouldn't happen to have any of your rabbit jerky around, would you?"

Randy gave him a sharp look. "No!" He saw that Brad was taken aback, and he softened his voice. "No. I'm not going to make any more. I think the rabbit is . . . tainted."

"Oh, come on! Everyone in town eats your jerked jackrabbit. It's great!"

Randy shook his head, looking down. "I'm sorry. I don't have any." He took a few steps away, then paused and turned around. "I'll talk to you later," he said. "I have things I gotta do."

"Do you need some help?" Brad asked.

"No." Randy's tone was flat. Final. He turned around and walked away.

Brad watched him go, then wandered off in the opposite direction. He had no destination in mind. Not wanting to go home, and unable to go to the clubhouse, Brad roamed the golf course at random and tried to ignore his empty stomach. Maybe, he thought, I should have brought my clubs. He watched other golfers as they drove and putted. One particular couple caught his attention – a

slightly overweight blond woman and her husband, people he'd met but forgotten their names. They looked to be in their late thirties, and healthy. The woman looked good. She was wearing shorts and a half-shirt, and he could see her belly button. She had some meat on her, and a little padding – not much, really – and nice, full breasts. Watching her, his mouth began to water. His stomach growled.

They drove their balls down the fairway and then took their clubs and walked. Brad followed, keeping to the side by the trees. They noticed him following, and kept glancing back at him nervously. Brad thought about approaching them, maybe asking to see an interesting club. He could use it on their heads, and once down, pull her half shirt up and—

Brad realized what he was thinking, and he turned away in horror. But he was so hungry. She looked so good! He could imagine biting down hard, then pull away, ripping the flesh. It would be so hot and succulent in his mouth, so alive, so ... Brad looked down at his hands, which were shaking. He made fists of them and put them to his face, pressing hard. His hunger was a knot in his midsection that was twisting tighter.

He turned back toward the couple, who was openly staring at him now. He started toward them and he saw the woman back away. The man looked startled, and he fumbled in his golf bag, reaching deep, and yanked out a large black pistol. Brad paused, hesitating. The man pointed the gun at him and fired. Brad turned

around and ran, and the man kept firing.

Brad heard the bullets – they made whistling sounds as they passed him. When they hit the trees they made a sound that was a cross between a whack and a sharp crunch and bark would fly off. He ran blindly, leaping over fallen limbs and punching his way through underbrush. He broke out into another fairway and kept running, continuing on far after the gunshots had stopped.

At the end of the fairway was the south boundary of the golf course. Brad stopped his running, and chanced a look back. People were scattered all over the place, standing still with clubs in their hands, and they were all staring at him. Just standing and staring. Then the man with the gun broke through the underbrush and out onto the grass. He began firing the gun again, but not at Brad – he was firing at people at random. They scattered, running in every direction, and the man with the gun picked the people he was closest to and chased them. More gunshots sounded.

Brad took the main road and walked quickly away from the golf course. A few blocks down was Dickson's only shopping center, with a post office, a grocery store, a salon and a gas station. There had been a bookstore but it had closed down, as no one seemed to read anymore. Brad made his way to the phone booth at the gas station and called 911. He was still panting from his run. Gunshots were still booming through the air from the golf course.

A tone sounded in his ear. The telephone said, "All circuits are busy. Please try your call again later." Exasperated, Brad dialed again and got the same response.

The gas station attendant stepped out and looked down the street toward the golf course. She was a short, slight woman with a squinty look in her eyes. "What's goin' on down there?" she said.

"Some maniac shooting the golf course up," Brad said. His third try on the phone failed and he gave up.

"Who is it?" the attendant asked.

"Don't know his name, but he's from around here." Brad looked at her, and she looked good. His mouth began to water, but he caught himself and turned away. "I can't get a hold of the police."

She didn't answer – she went trotting off toward the golf course. He watched her go, eyeing her thighs in her tight jeans. His mouth wouldn't stop watering. He abandoned the phone booth, taking several steps after her, but he heard another gunshot and stopped. Turning around, he saw two cats racing across the parking lot, and one caught the other one and it erupted in a fight.

Beyond the fighting cats was the grocery store.

He walked toward it, feeling desperate, hoping to God that if he would just eat something – something other than human – that these insane impulses would go away. He had to walk around the cat fight. It was vicious; one had the other by the throat, and they were rending each other with their hind claws. There were little droplets of blood all over the pavement. He hardly even glanced at them, as his main purpose in life at that point was to get though

those doors and find some food.

Inside the store it was quiet. There were several customers in the store, along with the employees and the management. He caught eye contact with one of the cashiers, a tall buxom brunette with big hair, and she didn't look away. She didn't say anything, either, just stared at him with glassy eyes and no expression. She didn't look good to him, but he had the impression that he looked good to her. As he took a cart and walked down an aisle she silently abandoned her register and stalked him. Brad passed a man with an empty grocery cart whom stood motionless, moving only his eyes. His hands had a death's grip on the cart handle, his whole body tense. Brad watched him warily as he passed, feeling the man was ready to pounce. The man's gaze shifted from Brad to the checkout woman and back, keeping perfectly still, acting like he was camouflaged and that no one could see him as long as he didn't move.

Brad made it around a corner only to be faced by the butcher, who stood on the outside of his counter and sharpened a huge knife. He looked up at Brad and locked eyes with him, never pausing in his knife sharpening. Brad edged past him, and passing the meat section. The butcher followed. Forgetting about food, Brad decided he'd better get out of there. It was an eat-or-be-eaten situation and he was outnumbered.

Ahead was a big guy – he was huge! – who had a demented expression and appeared to be drooling. He turned his cart so that he blocked Brad's way, and just stood and stared at him with

bugged-out eyes. His mouth was open and he was biting his tongue.

He grinned at Brad.

Brad made a quick left down the junk food aisle only to find two women had their carts side by side at the far end, blocking him in. He continued down the aisle until it was apparent that the ladies were not going to move. Turning around, Tom found the big guy and the butcher had him blocked at the other end, and behind them was the checkout woman.

Brad continued toward the two women at the far end, gaining speed until he was trotting. Either they were going to move their carts or he was going to ram them. Their expressions became alarmed, and they moved to one side but left their carts where they were. Brad rammed their carts with his, making a loud crash and sending the carts and the groceries tumbling. The women hissed and snarled at him as he scrambled past. He leaped over a chain and past a register, but slipped and landed hard on the worn linoleum. As he got to his feet, he saw people running toward him. The manager, the other checkers, the women with the carts. The big guy. They were coming for him, all with grim faces and a dead-eyed look, and Brad turned and sprinted for the door, banging into it and shoving it open. He was out before they could reach him, and his feet pounded the pavement across the parking lot. The cats, he saw, were no longer fighting. One was dead and being fed upon by the other.

Just before he rounded the corner he looked back, seeing a

few of them standing in the parking lot staring back at him, but none were pursuing. As he passed the gas station and headed down the street where he lived, his running slowed to a jog and then he abruptly stopped. He bent forward, hands on trembling knees, and fought to catch his breath.

As he stood there panting, his thoughts became clear. The whole town seemed to be going nuts, but how could that be? How could the town be going crazy? He thought about it, trying to reason it through. First the dream, and then the insane thoughts. Then everyone seemed crazy to him – predatory – as if they were sharing his sudden cravings for human flesh. Brad decided that at some point his mind had snapped. The emotional strain of losing his wife to that bastard, that self-important, smug, swaggering jerk ... his brain couldn't deal with it, his subconscious rebelling against his conscious mind, because his conscious refused to allow himself to commit murder no matter how justified he felt.

Brad straightened and resumed walking up the street, feeling the insanity, seeing through it like a filter. No one had actually chased him at the store. They may have been staring at him, but it was probably because he was acting so crazy. It's me, he thought. It's all me. It's in my head. I probably scared the shit out of that poor guy and his wife. He was firing at me in self-defense.

Even now, looking around the sunny neighborhood around him, things looked strange. He felt like he was viewing the world through glasses that were the wrong prescription – angles were distorted, and people's faces – their expressions – he perceived

them wrong. A mother and her children washing their car peered at him through beady, hostile eyes. The little girl, staring at him, licked her lips. An old man with his small white dog on a leash smiled as Brad passed, and the smile was full of menace. This isn't real, Brad told himself. It can't be. But his knowing this didn't change what he saw. Knowing he was sick didn't cure him.

Brad picked up his pace. He had to get to a phone and call the police, have himself put away. He wanted them to put him in a place where he could get well again. I can get better, he told himself. I can start over again.

A few yards away from his house he came across three large brown birds, cactus wrens with long sharp beaks, and they were in a little group on the grass picking at another of their kind. The other bird lay on its back, wings spread, legs still twitching. They were eating it alive.

He stared at it a few moments. This can't be happening, he thought. I'm hallucinating. Birds don't eat each other, do they? He watched them pulling out organs and ripping off shreds of feather-covered flesh. The birds glanced at him warily, but stood their ground. Brad felt the hollowness in his own stomach, felt his need to eat. The birds were acting so wrong, he decided it had to be a hallucination.

If I'm so crazy I'm seeing things that aren't really there, he thought, then I'm crazy enough to do anything. He looked over at Dale's house, and felt the full weight of his stockpile of

hatred and anger. There are dozens of witnesses who'll testify how crazy I've been acting. Even Janice would agree to that in front of a jury.

Brad passed his house, continuing down to Dale's. He approached the front door, stepping over a pair of lizards that were biting each other, rolling around in a quick frenzy of battle. Turning the knob, he found it unlocked. They were already home from the clubhouse. Brad entered and softly closed the door behind him. He heard sounds, but no voices. It came from somewhere in the house, probably down the hall. Brad crossed quickly to the kitchen, his heart thudding in his ears, and found a wooden knife holder. He chose the long, thin, serrated bread knife. He always thought they looked dangerous, and now he was counting on it.

Brad crept down the hallways, his feet silent on the thick tan carpet. The sounds were strange, like slurping, and through a bedroom door he saw feet hanging over the edge of a bed. His face burned, realizing they were having sex. His hands were sweating, the knife handle feeling slippery. He gripped it tighter, and took another step. He could see part of her, too. They were on the bed together. Gritting his teeth, Brad took another step and he was in the room with them.

Dale was on his back, arms and legs spread, his clothes ripped apart and his torso a mass of blood. Janice was on top, fully clothed, blood staining her arms and clumps of it in her hair. She swung around toward him, startled, her eyes wide. She had a wild, demented look on her face. Seeing it was her husband,

she relaxed, and grinned. Her mouth was full.

A large knife was sticking out of Dale's throat. He had a shocked expression on his dead face. His eyes bulged so much it looked like a cartoon, like it wasn't real.

Janice chewed and swallowed. "Join in!" she said. Her voice was high pitched and sounded half-hysterical. "There's plenty!"

Brad dropped his knife and backed away. She laughed at him, and turned back to her feast. Brad turned and ran out of the house. He ran partly out of horror, and partly because he was so tempted to "join in." Lawn and pavement passed in a blur under his feet, and he ran up to his front door and fumbled to unlock it. He couldn't get the key in – it took forever. Once the key did go in he nearly twisted it in half trying to get the door unlocked.

Inside, he heard his phone ringing. He locked and bolted the door behind him, then leaned against it for a moment, out of breath again. Was that real? he wondered. Could that have possibly been real? Or is that just the way I remember it? Could it be, he wondered, that he killed Dale and this is how his mind was dealing with it?

The phone continued to ring. Feeling numb and lost, Brad walked across the room and picked up the phone. "Hello?" he said.

"Brad, this is Randy."

"Randy!" He took a breath, trying to calm himself. He'd expected it to be the police or worse. "I'm in so much trouble!"

"What happened?"

"I . . . my wife, either she killed Dale and is eating him, or I'm . . . or I did it. I don't know anymore."

"It's not you," Randy said. "It's all of us. I think I have it figured out."

"What?" Dale didn't know what he was talking about.

"That pesticide they tested here," Randy said. "It wasn't supposed to affect anything but the ants. I think they're right, it doesn't, at least not directly. The problem is that it went up the food chain."

"What are you talking about?"

"The pesticide. Once it got up through the food chain it, it got us. You can eat the pesticide all day and it won't do anything, so their tests showed it to be harmless. But once it got into the food chain, and we ate the tainted food, the enzyme changed."

"You mean . . . you're telling me I'm not crazy?"

"Yes, you are. We all are. Our brain chemistry has been modified."

Brad was silent. A chemical? A chemical had done this? It was all real? "This doesn't make it better." His voice was barely above a whisper. "It makes it all worse."

"I've killed too, Brad," Randy said. "In fact I'm the one—" There was a loud sound, and then loud, garbled shouting. "The police are here," Randy told him. "I have to go." The line went dead.

Brad dropped the phone. He dashed to the door that led to

the garage, slammed it open and jumped down the three steps to the concrete. The police would probably kill Randy – they knew about his gun collection. He had to get there before it happened – he had to explain it to them, the police, that Randy wasn't to blame. It was the chemical company.

He started his car while the garage door slid open, and gunned it down the driveway and onto the street. He passed the gas station and turned left, passing the shopping center and the grocery store. The golf course was on his left, and Randy's house was on a street on the other side of the course. There was the sound of distant gunfire, but Brad had no idea if it was the police, or other people who were affected by the enzyme.

He wondered if the police would believe him. Brad wondered if he even believed it himself. If an enzyme changed a person's brain chemistry and caused him to commit murder, then it would be the fault of the chemical, not the person. But, he thought, if brain chemistry determines actions, then couldn't any murder be blamed on bad brain chemistry? Who was to say what influenced it? Anything from experimental pesticides to too many Hostess Twinkies could cause the imbalance. What if it was inherently imbalanced? Was it still to blame?

Brad turned off the main road and sent the car flying down the street toward Randy's house. He could see several police cars and a van out front. There were cops all around and several neighbors gathered together in groups. He skidded to a stop,

jumping out of the car and running up to an officer yelling,

"Don't hurt him!"

The officer held his hand up. "Please stay back."

"You don't understand, it wasn't him—" Brad stopped abruptly, seeing four officers carrying Randy's bullet-ridden body out of the house.

"It was him," the cop said. "We found the remains."

Brad opened his mouth, but closed it again. The question of Randy's innocence was now moot. He watched as they carried the body into the van. The officer who'd stopped Brad walked over to the van as well, and they all crowded in and shut the door.

Minutes went by, and no one came out. The neighbors still stood in clumps, talking in low voices, and occasionally there would be an overloud voice from a police radio.

The police all remained in the van. Thinking this was odd – but knowing what they were doing – Brad walked over to the back of the van and yanked the door open. The policemen glanced up from their feeding, looking guilty. None of them said anything. Brad looked down at his friend's body, which was already mutilated, then climbed into the van with the officers and shut the door behind him.

[Oh man, that was awful! Get me out of here!]