

## *La Petite Mort*

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*by Jessi Holhart*

NOW THIS, thought Megan, as she stepped out of the building and onto the pavement, *is a dream*. The sounds she had heard from within—loud footfalls and voices—didn't change. It seemed as though the brick and glass of the warehouse had not muffled them at all. Megan turned around slowly, looking for the source of the noise, baffled that she could not find it, especially since it seemed virtually right in her ear. It was almost as though she'd heard the sounds from another time and place, all overlapping into her perception of "now."

*Okay. It's a dream*, she realized. She sighed. She would just have to ride it out. *Okay. I can do this*, she coached herself. In spite of the comfort of knowing that the voices weren't real, she found herself turning at the sound.

*You motherfucking bitch!*

It was a fierce, tense whisper. She almost expected to feel the speaker's breath on her ear. *I am going to hurt you so bad! You think you're so hot. You think you've got him by the balls.*

*Whatever. I'm not going to sit this one out. You'd better get ready, 'cause here I come.*

Megan shook the voice out of her head, only for it to be replaced by others. Her bowels clenched. Cramps. Strong sentiments struck her from every angle, lashing out in dozens of different voices. She held her head.

*Ah, she thought wryly, just what I needed—voices in my head.*

She waded out into them, trying to stay focused on finding her car. It was an endeavor. The voices were a flurry about her, like a powerful and unruly wind, blowing against her, shifting directions unpredictably. She pressed against it, and stumbled ahead of it, and staggered through suddenly soft eddies. The cramps punctuated her struggle, adding a physical dimension to her pain. One kicked in at the tail end of an extremely violent angry tirade, bringing her to her knees with its unexpected intensity. When she could, she stood, too dazed to even care whether anyone had seen her fall. She directed her attention toward her car.

She worked her way down the block in each direction, then started turning corners, crossing streets. The noise and pain continued, sometimes bringing her to a complete standstill. A violent stab doubled her over in pain. She worked her way to a building she could lean against, then put her back to it and slid down. Another stab, and she was groaning and gritting her teeth, rocking in her own embrace for some indeterminate length of time, until she could raise her head. Crouched there, she realized that this night, warm and pink to her eye, felt strangely like a dawn. The voices had faded behind the pain of her cramps, and were an irritating chatter she could almost ignore. She stood.

Her car was nowhere in sight. Her bowels pressed threateningly down. She would need a toilet, and soon. Her eye caught an alleyway she had traveled many times before. The entrance to Kenny's place was about a block or so on the

right. She would break in if she had to. She'd done it before; at his suggestion, even.

She half-ran, limping, with her hand splayed against her bottom rib. She pushed past the gate and banged up against the door before she began to beat on it.

*My God!*

Kenny came to the door. "What the fuck?"

"Just open the door!" Megan shouted. He did. She slammed past him and barreled down the short, dark hallway, slamming the bathroom door open, then shut it behind her.

"Morgan?" was all he got out. She released with a splash more substantial than was comfortable all at once. She groaned, shouted and pushed, abs taut against her fist pressed deep into them. She sat for a moment, aching, and exhausted, laying her torso across her own lap, arms wrapped around her. A timid tap sounded on the door. And hungry. She was hungry.

"Morgan?" Kenny asked, carefully using her trick name. She resented the more familiar "Megan" when she was in a mood, or looking for help or money. "Are you all right?"

"No," she snapped. Then, gathering her strength, encouraged on by a tasty smell from the other side of the door, she sighed. She stood and flushed the toilet. Against her will, her eyes caught the contents of the bowl, spinning and funneling. Red. *Blood and guts!* she thought. It made her lightheaded. She leaned her hand against the wall as her knees gave slightly. She shook her head roughly, and steadied herself with a grunt, pulling her pants up and fastening them. "I'm fucking dying!" she exclaimed, thinking as well, *I want my dog.*

It was through a sheer film of will power that she remained standing. She thought she might puke. She thought she should feel like puking. The vision of that long second of swirling matter...nah, she wouldn't go there. But it played

non-consensually in a memory loop. It was with profound discomfort that she realized that even haunted by the sight, she felt oh, so very hungry. She groaned, washing her hands and splashing her face. Small sounds of Kenny's weight on the wood outside the bathroom door were punctuated by his incessant whispering.

*When did that start?* she wondered. She didn't remember him ever running a constant muttering monologue of his every thought. Her lip curled.

She's so high! Or is she jonesing? Dangerous? She seems so angry! Did someone attack her? Hurt her? Mug her? Oh... oh, no! Not raped! I've never seen her like this before. She's sick! How? Why?

It irritated her. "What are you eating?" she asked, distracted by the smell of it. And before he had time to answer: "Shut up, Kenny! Please!"

Eat...What? I'm not eating. I wasn't saying a thing! What is her problem? Should I leave her alone? Will she be okay?

"Yes, please! Just leave me alone for a few minutes," she answered.

"Ah, okay..." She felt she could *hear* his bewilderment. It sounded like a string of question marks, chiming like organ pipes. "I'm gonna go get some smokes. You want anything?"

"Whatever you're eating."

*I'm not...*

"Oh, forget it. *I'll get it myself!*" and the anticipation of relief relaxed her. "No. Nothing for me. Thanks."

He left, muttering and musing all the way out the door and around the corner. It wasn't as quiet as she had hoped it would be with him gone. The house, an old row house, could have been built of cards; she could hear the neighbors so clearly. She figured she hadn't noticed how thin the walls were before because she was usually here during the day, when people were out. She blamed the noise for the largest

part of her restlessness. That, and her ravenous hunger. And she would fix that in a moment. She dried her hands and headed for the kitchen.

The scent that had appealed to her lingered strangely in the hall, but was almost completely absent in the kitchen. The door out onto the porch must have carried it out almost entirely with Kenny. She opened the fridge. Inside were the typical partial six-pack of beer, leftover pizza, juice, milk, and condiments. There was also a clear plastic hinged box with most of a piece of Tiramisu in it. Nothing appealed. On top of the fridge was an open bag of chips and another bag of cookies, usually quite tempting. Tonight, almost offensive. Her stomach tugged. The scent earlier had been warm and meaty. Remembering it made her even hungrier, and resentful, too, that there was none left.

She sat down at the small square table to collect her thoughts. She competed for space with unopened mail, salt and pepper shakers, and dirty glasses. Shoving the stuff into a pile, uncovered the phone. Car. Dog. *Oh shit. Mother*, she thought. It was the last place she remembered being. There was no way she could see around it: she'd have to call. She dialed and the phone rang three times.

"Hello?" came Mother's harried voice, Raz howling in the background.

"Mom, don't do anything to my dog. I'm on my way."

"Meg...?"

She hung up and bolted for the door. She'd just have to take the bus, like she had before she got Cherry. As she slammed the door behind her and turned, a thought struck her. She felt, then reached into each of her pockets in turn. She remembered that her charged-to-their-limit cards were neatly tucked with her passport, under her bath towels in a box in her missing car. She found something in the neighborhood of fourteen dollars and change in various pockets. She

consolidated it into her front right one, and turned back to the door. She tried to open it, but it was locked.

"Damn!" she cried, kicked it and tried again. With a groan, she leaned her forehead against it; she shut her eyes tightly and caught her lip between her teeth. She did not cry. But she forced air into and out of her lungs in sharp, short breaths.

"Morgan! Honey, where're you goin'?" Kenny jogged down the last stretch of alley and up his steps. He blinked as she turned and looked at him strangely. His voice raced in her ears, softly muttering his concern for her, and liking the way she looked, but his mouth was still! Until she watched his lips actually move and speak: "Stay a while?" he asked, hopefully.

"I gotta get my dog," she answered, distracted by possibilities. She couldn't tell whether the sounds in her head were her own, or actually coming from him. She watched him carefully so she'd know when he actually spoke words.

"Where'd you park?" He scanned the alley, thinking that he didn't see the Cherry.

"I don't know." She scowled. "I've gotta take a bus. I need some money."

She listened. Kenny was surprised that her bad attitude made her even sexier than usual. He liked her timing, always had.

"Oh, okay." He put his key into the door. "You got a little time now?"

"Sure." She closed her eyes before they rolled up into her head in frustration, disgust, and submission to the suggestion. He opened the door and held it for her to enter. That smell! That fabulous scent from earlier. It clung to him. She led the way to the bedroom, pushing the door fully open and stepping in. She turned at the foot of his bed. Blood pounded. Within? Without? He smiled at her from the doorway. Motioning with his head back down the hall and the door

to the bathroom behind him, he said: "Gotta go. Just a sec, okay?"

She nodded and sat on the bed, kicking her Skecher mules off onto the floor. The odd flavor of moments like this struck her. There was always something weird about these arrangements. The shower ran in the bathroom. Voices ran in her head. She felt the world as it spun gently around her toe tips, where they touched the sheepskin rug under them. She pulled off her sweater and the shirt she wore under it as one, folding them in half and tossing them over the back of a chair. He always liked to take her pants off of her, so she sat cross-legged in them on his bed. She was almost entertained by the complex rhythms of the thoughts that swirled around her—her thoughts, his thoughts, theirs—them, the great them, all the them in the universe, as nearly as she could tell.

Then he stepped into the doorway. He wore only a towel around his waist, with his clothes neatly hanging over his arm. His smell was clean and holy, with smoky Frankincense clinging to his hair and the moisture of his honey-hued skin. He reminded her of some subtly flavored barbecue, and it made her mouth wet. It was all part of why he knew her so well: his soft smile and habitual cleanliness. She slid to the floor as he reached to lay his clothes aside. Upright again, he embraced her lightly.

His touch was tentative, even after all the other times. He laid his hands on her shoulders, ran them down her arms to her hands. The softness that was slipping over him retreated slightly. His forehead scrunched with concern.

"Are you cold?" His eyes checked the window. It was closed.

"No, not really." She replied honestly, although she imagined that a nice, warm meal would make her feel positively toasty. She ducked out from under his hands to kneel on the soft rug and remove his towel. Blood beat the air.

She was sure the drum of it in her ears must be her own. And yet, as she watched it fill his cock, the rhythm was perfectly synchronized to that pulse. Her fingertips brushed across his thighs as veins began to bulge. It morphed into an idealized version of a phallus.

“Oh,” she breathed, feeling something new and awkward for such conditions: desire. Her mouth was suddenly dry. And she wanted—it was really weird—she actually *wanted* his cock in her mouth. *She was hungry*. And a vision took her—of this dick in her mouth and that hot, wet pulse running down her throat. Startled. She never liked it at all. But now, oh my, she moaned. The throb of his heart under her fingertips felt positively ripe.

He reached to his dresser and returned with a condom.

The scent of him, heat of him, stirred every inch of her. *She wanted him*. This was really strange. It was like a flash of acid, or maybe ecstasy. Her consciousness shifted. Time blurred. He opened the condom and took his dick with one hand, preparing to cover it using the other. *But no!* she protested silently. Inexplicably to her own mind, she blocked the hand with the condom. She was squirming, flexing, panting with hunger. And baffled. Holding his wrist away, she reached past his hand with her head to touch her lips to the raw veins of his dick. Her lips trembled. She pulled them back to rest her bare teeth there lightly. A deep groan escaped her. Oh, to feel that heat inside! She ached.

Then, with a little cry, she forced herself away. She gulped loudly as she directed his hand and the condom back to their place. He rolled it down, and she kissed and nibbled his hands and fingers in frustration. As they retreated, having done their work, she took his dick into her hands, then her mouth.

The sensations, even through the condom, made her shudder and groan. Blood ran along its length and across the length of her tongue in the most delicious manner. She want-

ed to bite, but instead occupied herself with the agonizing desire, the temptation too savage to consider. Fantasies filled her mind. Troubling thoughts. Hot and disturbing. Her eyes rolled up into her head as she imagined. With tongue and lips she savored every inch, up and down and over again. Even her teeth seemed to have developed a more refined sensitivity, and some even felt loose, moving slightly and throbbing in unison. She used them softly, yet with fierceness, until Kenny jumped and pulled her off. He lifted her onto her feet and slid his hand under her waistband and she unzipped her pants. He rubbed her ass beneath them, loosening them and working them, and her panties, too, down her legs until she could step out of them. He kissed her pubes. It was with a sinking disappointment that she anticipated the touch of his lips and tongue. She didn't want that, though it was usually her favorite part. She pulled him away gently by his hair, and they moved onto the bed together. He pulled her over on top of him.

The disappointment evaporated as she felt him, a fire of life beneath her. *Oh, he was so hot!* Every nerve ending sizzled where it touched him, every pore opening with a universal inclination to let him in. She rubbed herself across him in pleasure, mouth open, palms open, groaning, sighing. Her cheek on his chest felt nearly slapped by the racing of his heart. Half-open eyes went wide though, when she saw a vision of sublime beauty. There before her face were his biceps: firm and round, though not bulky. They were etched with great elegance by fine lines of blood. And there, that one, stood out, larger and swollen, throbbing as if ready to burst. It was thick purple line of happiness, it seemed to her, drawing her like a bright flower draws a bee. She reached across the expanse of his armpit to taste it: with lips and tongue and teeth.

“Take it easy there, Meg!” Kenny reproached, shifting under her, out from under her bared teeth. He reached to guide his cock to her crotch.

That was astonishing! His living, hot and blood-filled self was sliding into her. The pressure inside of him was like a hose with the nozzle completely closed. The wetness was barely contained, perhaps even dripping out and into the condom, and she felt parched. So dry, so thirsty. She almost screamed. Strange images bombarded her, *vagina dentata*: her cunt with teeth, eating, consuming. These were some of her art pieces, and some bad poetry. Inspired by various goddess myths and ancient obscene images; yet made visceral, nearly real, under whatever mind-altering chemistry was affecting her. With hands and lips and, at last, teeth, she glugged herself on the sensations of his skin under her. Yet, just under the surface of that thin skin she could feel it: the wet that which would quench the burning inside her.

She reached for it with teeth and nails while Kenny writhed. It hurt. The desire was so strong. Her teeth, too. She felt them throb in her head and seem to give way as they touched his flesh. At last her nails broke through, drawing a fine line of red across his chest.

“Ow!” He protested. She sprung upon it with her mouth to suck, and he tried to buck her off. “That’s enough of that, missy!” He spoke teasingly, but there was an edge of fear to his voice. He took her shoulders in his hands and tried to push her off, but she clung like a nursing cub. His efforts were like a wild bird’s wings fluttering up against her titanic hunger. She could feel him. She heard him shout, as if far away. She felt her teeth sink into the wound and felt herself slipping, too. Her reality was slipping, as smoothly as a full-sailed boat on smooth water. It slipped softly out from under her and toward those troubling images that had been flashing through her mind. She could feel it. And she stopped. She let go with teeth and claws. With a frantic and mighty

push, Kenny rolled her off of himself, and over again onto her stomach.

He panted for a moment, catching himself, smoothing the roughness of his breathing. He allowed himself to believe he had done it, that the momentary flash of fear was caused by some strange coincidence of leverage and timing. He looked at her, crouched beside him on hands and knees. Her eyes were afire with hunger, dark and deep. It was irresistible. He climbed onto her back and reached around for the tip of his cock, to guide it back into her. She helped. She tilted her hips back. And there he was again: hardening with a sigh of joy, the coursing blood flowing into her, she arched her back. In another moment, he was pumping and panting. She moved under and against him, savoring the clean sweat of his stomach across her back, mesmerized by the tap of his heart between her shoulder blades, glorying in his pulse within. She scratched and bit and ripped at his pillows, enacting the movements of her stroke-like visions, rending him into a grotesque art piece. It incited and horrified her. Her own fascination horrified her.

But then, it wasn't the first time that had happened—her visions scared or offended even herself. She held herself in check, as she had done before, protective of others—Kenny this time. She was accustomed to softening her own actions so she wouldn't hurt someone.

Finally, she had to just hold herself still, as still as she could, for him to finish. With three quick spurts it was over, and he fell away to sprawl beside her.

She took several long, thoughtful breaths. She got out of the bed and got her pants, shirt, and shoes, slipping them on quickly.

"My God, Morgan!" Kenny exclaimed, returning to her dating name. At some point after knowing her for over a year, he had slipped over the line from just a date to some sort of a friend. Being in love with her, he tried to keep it

as impersonal as she wanted it to be. He heaved himself up onto an elbow. "What are you on?"

She smiled wanly, trying not to wonder too hard. She stepped toward the door without answering, then remembered.

"I need the money," she said flatly, turning back.

"Yeah." He got clumsily out of bed, got his wallet from his pants, and counted out bills, stopping to look at her before adding several more. "How's this?" he asked, handing the wad to her.

She took it, fanning it just enough to be sure she could buy the ticket. It was far more than enough. She nodded. "Great. Thanks."

She leaned up to touch his cheek with her cool, dry lips. "I'll let myself out." And she did.