

Exerpt from
"EARTHLY THINGS"
by James Krokee

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FADE IN:

INT. ANONYMOUS ROOM -- NIGHT

ANGLE ON SEWING NEEDLE AND THREAD

Rhythmically piercing dark pieces of fabric by a low, flickering candlelight. A woman hums a languid, broken melody.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. APARTMENT BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Slivers of orange light from the city street fall through twisted window blinds onto the bed. It's difficult to discern in this dim room, but two people appear to be having sex. In this broken light, it is all *fragmented*. A MAN'S hand drags its way up sweat-stained sheets. A glistening finger, encircled with a wedding ring, presses into a woman's crimson mouth. Beads of sweat roll down the man's back. All the while, a constant, violent motion.

But the sounds are strange. A low electrical hum and the unmistakably squeaky sound of *plastic*.

The woman's skin is PLASTIC.

With a shudder, the man climaxes and falls upon the woman. There is a clicking sound and the electrical hum stops. The room is silent--except for the man's deep breaths.

The doorbell rings.

INT. TOBEY'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

The shadowy outline of the man walks to to the door, opening it. From behind him, we see another man on the porch, tall and commanding in a white suit--a minister, JOHN CABOTT.

CABOTT

Good evening. My name's John Cabott.
(he reaches out with
a pamphlet, but Tobey
doesn't take it)
I'd like to invite you to service
this Sunday at the Methodist--

The shadowy man slams the door shut.

SCREEN TO BLACK/TITLE CREDIT:

INT. AUTO SHOP GARAGE -- DAY

The large shop is bustling with activity, the whine of hydraulic wrenches and the clattering of tools. A radio blares a classic rock station. Into this mix walks TOBEY, a mechanic in his mid-to-late-twenties, unshaven and bleary-eyed--but ruggedly handsome. He stops at the coffee maker and peers at a large clock on the wall.

His boss, LARRY--a stern-looking bearded man in his fifties--creeps up behind him.

LARRY

Hit me with it. I'm dying to know what piss-poor reason you've got for being late.

TOBEY

Shut up, Larry. I'm in no mood for this right now.

Larry smacks Tobey on this side of the head.

LARRY

Son, you best learn your manners. I'll say whatever I damn want. I write the checks. This is the last time, you hear?

He waits, in Tobey's face, until he nods.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Go get changed. There's some lady out front with a tow truck and a Pontiac that won't start.

Tobey brushes past him, and walks into...

INT. EMPLOYEE LOUNGE/LOCKER ROOM -- DAY

Tobey opens his locker, sets his coffee down and starts changing into his work shirt.

EXT. AUTO SHOP GARAGE -- DAY

A woman--roughly ten years older than Tobey--in a loose, flowing dress with a hieroglyphics print and various strands of beads around her neck, stands beside a Seventies-era Pontiac. She is skeletal and fidgety.

Tobey walks up to her with an estimate form in his hand. He avoids the woman's eyes--which are black and piercing.

TOBEY

Larry told me you're leaving the car with us. Is there someplace we can reach you?

MADAME XANTHEY

Here's my card...all my information's on it.

Madame Xanthey hands Tobey a business card. He writes some information down on the estimate form.

TOBEY

Madame Xanthey's Fortune Telling?

MADAME XANTHEY

That's my business. I read palms. You should stop by sometime. You've got nice hands...

(she looks at the
name sewn on his
shirt)

Tobey.

TOBEY

I don't put much stock in that sort of stuff.

MADAME XANTHEY

I'll give you a discount.

Madame Xanthey reaches out for his hand, but Tobey pulls back. She smiles and holds her keys up, shaking them. Reluctantly, Tobey reaches for them. She takes his hand in hers and traces a line with her fingernail.

MADAME XANTHEY (CONT'D)

(quietly)

They're softer than I imagined.

TOBEY

(scrutinizing her)

Have we met before?

MADAME XANTHEY

(frowning)

Hmmm. I don't see *this* much. That's not good.

TOBEY

What's the matter?

MADAME XANTHEY

Call me.

She smiles again and turns around, walking off down the sidewalk, leaving Tobey staring at his hands.

INT. AUTO SHOP GARAGE -- LATER

After dropping the hood shut, Tobey gets into the Pontiac and cranks the engine. As the engine rumbles, he looks over at Larry, arranging some tools by the bay door.

TOBEY

I think that'll do it. But I'm taking it out for a spin to make sure.

Larry shakes his head and goes back to organizing some wrenches. Tobey backs out of the garage and drives off.

INT. PONTIAC -- DAY

Tobey is sailing down a winding, forested road on the edge of town. Both sides of the road are heavily lined with trees.

As he goes around a bend, a river bank appears at the edge of the road. Out of the corner of his eye, Tobey sees an attractive young woman--FAITH--in a lime green bikini, sunbathing alone by the water's edge. He slows, nearly stopping, admiring her. Suddenly, she looks around--and up towards the car. Tobey hammers the gas and speeds off.

As he drives away, he peers up at the rear-view mirror, and takes note of the odd assortment of items hanging there--a cross, a chicken's foot and rosary beads.

Tobey reaches into his shirt pocket and pulls out Madame Xanthey's business card.

ANGLE ON HER ADDRESS.

EXT. MADAME XANTHEY'S FORTUNE TELLING -- DAY

Tobey pulls up in the Pontiac in front of the shop on a street lined with small businesses and a large Methodist church directly across the street--where John Cabott stands, passing out pamphlets. The car rumbles for a moment before he shuts it off. As he steps from the car, the curtains part and the shop's door opens with the sound of chimes as Madame Xanthey steps out. Her head is wrapped with a gypsy-like scarf that drapes down the back of her neck.

MADAME XANTHEY

Well, I certainly didn't expect this.
You do this for all your customers?

TOBEY

No. I was just curious. Have a listen...

He climbs back into the car and cranks the engine. It roars to life and purrs--for a moment, before dying with a horrendous shudder. Tobey steps out again, his head hanging.

Across the street, Cabott watches them.

MADAME XANTHEY

I don't suppose that's acceptable,
now is it?

TOBEY

I'm sorry. I thought...

Madame Xanthey smiles as he stammers.

MADAME XANTHEY

You're already here...why don't you
come inside and we'll do that reading?

Tobey ponders it for a moment, shrugs, and follows her into
the shop.

MADAME XANTHEY (CONT'D)

That's a good boy.

INT. MADAME XANTHEY'S FORTUNE TELLING -- DAY

Tobey and Madame Xanthey are seated around a small round
table in a dark, candle-lit room--surrounded by heavy curtains
and curious occult trinkets and books displayed on various
shelves. But the merchandise appears old and untouched.
And the requisite crystal ball perched on the table has a
fine crack fanning out across the globe.

Madame Xanthey holds Tobey's hand in hers on top of the
table's felt surface--once again tracing the lines in his
palm with the tips of her fingers.

MADAME XANTHEY

You've got a lot of kindness. This
line signifies compassion. Some
girl's going to love you for that.
Maybe sooner than you think.

TOBEY

Yeah?

Madame Xanthey caresses his palm.

MADAME XANTHEY

You've already met this girl--somebody
who'll appreciate you. You just
have to want it, Tobey.

TOBEY

Ms. Xanthey?

MADAME XANTHEY

It's not my real name, you know.
But April's fine. Just call me that.

TOBEY

April, what else do you see in my hand?

April sits silently for a moment, noticing Tobey's ring finger.

APRIL

There's somebody else...you haven't said goodbye to yet. You need to let go. She's gone.

TOBEY

I don't know how.

APRIL

You will.

(beat)

There's no rush. Keep my car at the shop as long as you need. I don't drive it much, anyhow.

INT. TOBEY'S APARTMENT -- NIGHT

It is spare and uninviting--with minimal furnishings and nothing decorating the walls. Instead of bookcases or shelves, cardboard boxes with a layer of dust are stacked against the walls.

Beneath the glow of a harsh, bare lightbulb, Tobey eats his microwave dinner at a folding card table. He's soiled with grease and still wearing his work clothes. Across the table from him, a place setting with an identical meal is laid out--but the food is untouched. What looks like a woman sitting there is actually an inflatable sex doll. Clothed in a thin, yellow dress, she has a blank expression, and the familiar wide-open crimson mouth.

On the table between Tobey and the doll is Tobey's wedding ring.

TOBEY

You're not hungry?

Tobey gets up and walks over to her. He puts a bite of food on her fork and tries to feed it to her. But even he realizes the absurdity of it and begins to break down. Softly, he caresses her hair.

TOBEY (CONT'D)

I love you.

Silence.

TOBEY (CONT'D)

It doesn't mean anything to you,
does it? You don't care. There's
only one thing that you want.

Tobey grabs the doll and throws her down on the carpet--which is mottled with suspicious stains. Climbing on top of her, he unfastens his pants and forcefully pushes himself into her.

TOBEY (CONT'D)

Does this make you happy?

He continues to push harder, dragging her across the floor. Suddenly, there's a loud "POP" and a rush of air. The doll deflates beneath Tobey. He is horrified.

TOBEY (CONT'D)

No, no, no. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

He holds her face as the air escapes.

TOBEY (CONT'D)

You can't do this to me, too. Damn
you!

Tobey rolls over and stares at the ceiling. Whimpering, he finally closes his eyes and falls asleep.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. CEMETERY -- FLASHBACK -- MORNING

Clothed in black, Tobey stands near the center of a huddled group of MOURNERS. The rolling grass of the cemetery stretches out behind them, spotted with trees.

MINISTER

...And let us not forget that even
in the darkest of hours, God's love
does not fade. With the same arms
that He welcomes Sarah into the
kingdom of Heaven, he comforts us...

In the background, near a tree and unrecognizable, is APRIL.

CUT TO:

INT. TOBEY'S APARTMENT -- DAY

ANGLE ON TOBEY'S EYES

...As he wakes with a start. Tobey sits up, his pants still around his ankles. He stares at the completely deflated doll beside him.

He takes the doll's stump of a hand and traces a wrinkled line. Looking down at the doll's panties, he fixates on their color--*the same color as the sunbathing Faith's bikini.*

Suddenly, he's on his feet, stuffing the doll into the kitchen trash can. He walks quickly toward the front door.

INT. PONTIAC -- DAY

Tobey is again driving the secluded road. As he nears the river bank, he pulls over to the side of the road, concealing the car beneath some heavy foliage.

Sitting in his car, Tobey grips the steering wheel, the knuckles on his fingers turning white. Through the window, past the trees, is the broken image of Faith in the green bikini, partially obscured by the late summer leaves.

Taking a deep breath, Tobey reaches for the door.

EXT. SECLUDED ROAD -- CONTINUOUS

Tobey gets out of the car and creeps over to a break in the trees, peering out towards the river. He keeps his eyes locked on Faith, sunbathing alone.

He carefully and quietly descends to the edge of the water. Slowly, he approaches Faith from behind.

TOBEY

Excuse me.

She turns and quickly tries to cover herself with a beach towel. She drops a large book that she's been reading—a Bible.

FAITH

I didn't realize anyone else was here.

TOBEY

No, don't do that. You shouldn't hide yourself. You're beautiful.

FAITH

(backing away)
Please leave me alone.

But Tobey is right next to her, getting closer.

TOBEY

We could go for a drive. I live very close to here.

FAITH

I will scream. Get away from me.

TOBEY

My name's Tobey. I thought maybe we could be friends. I've noticed you out here, all by yourself.

FAITH

What's the matter with you? I'm not your friend. Leave me alone, you psycho.

TOBEY

(closer still)

I don't think you understand. I'm supposed to meet you.

FAITH

Stay back!

She tries to put on her skirt, but Tobey grabs for it, ripping it from her hands. She screams and tries to run, and Tobey pounces on her like an animal, covering her mouth with one hand. She struggles to break free, but he's too strong.

TOBEY

Don't worry, I'll take care of you.

FAITH

(muffled and in tears)

No! Please don't do this... It's Tobey, right? Please, don't do this, Tobey...

TOBEY

(whispering)

Shut your mouth. You just shut your mouth and be a good girl. I don't want to break you, too.

As he restrains her, pulling her arms behind her back, Tobey glances back at where she lay and the Bible on the ground. Suddenly, Faith kicks at him, breaking free, and claws at his face--raking her nails across his cheek.

FAITH

(screaming)

Help me!

Tobey runs after her, grabbing her again. But this time, he shoves her down, her face violently hitting the ground.

FAITH (CONT'D)

(pleading)

Please, God, help me. Please let me go. Just let me go.

Tobey grabs her by the throat and starts choking her, his hands circling around a delicate gold cross pendant around her neck.

TOBEY

Shut up. I just need a replacement.
I just need you to be quiet.

She stops fighting and instead gasps as he steals the life from her. Her face turns purple and the capillaries in her eyes burst. Her head falls limply to the side. She is dead.

Tobey looks around. Nobody.

He walks toward the car, but slows as he approaches the trees. Stopping, he looks back at the body, lying motionless on the ground.

Quickly, he scurries back to the body, throwing it over his shoulder, then retracing his steps to the car.

INT. PONTIAC -- DAY

Tobey is sweating profusely. His cheek is bleeding where Faith scratched him. He blindly drives through several red lights. A COP appears behind him, lights on, squelching the siren. Tobey pulls to the edge of the road--right in front of the familiar large Methodist church.

Above the swinging cross, in the rear-view, the cop--young and purposeful--gets out of his car and walks toward Tobey.

The cop knocks on the window and Tobey rolls it down.

COP

License and registration, please.

Tobey gives the cop his license, but doesn't have the registration.

TOBEY

It's actually not my car. I'm a mechanic. I was test-driving it.

COP

Through three red lights?

TOBEY

It...it dies if I let it idle at intersections.

COP

Then I guess it's not fixed.

The cop looks at the license, then at the car.

COP (CONT'D)

What happened to your face?

Tobey reaches for his cheek, thinking quickly.

TOBEY

I scraped it earlier, working on the exhaust.

COP

(scrutinizing Tobey)

Mind if I have a look around?

TOBEY

No.

Tobey hesitates, as the cop walks toward the rear of the car. He looks into the rear-view, then back through the windshield. His eyes grow wide.

Across the street is MADAME XANTHEY'S.

As Tobey watches, April walks around the sidewalk corner carrying a sandwich bag from a sub shop. She shuffles along slowly, never looking up from the sidewalk--never looking across the street at the car.

Out the passenger window, a small group of people walk out from the church. One of them is the John Cabott, again in his white suit; he waves toward the car. Tobey looks into the rear-view--the cross still swaying--and watches as the Cabott walks up and shakes the cop's hand. He peers through the rear window at Tobey.

The cop returns to the driver's window and stares at Tobey for a moment, then tears off the citation he's been writing and hands it to him.

COP

Get this car back to the shop.

Tobey nods, and drives off, slouching low as he drives past Madame Xanthey's.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT BEDROOM -- AFTERNOON

A warm, late afternoon light spreads across the bed. Tobey lies there, staring at Faith's body next to him, softly caressing her face.

Slowly and awkwardly, he begins having sex with her. But her body is somewhat rigid and it frustrates him.

When he finishes, he kisses her and closes her eyes, sitting up next to her on the bed.

TOBEY

I can't keep you. You won't last.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORESTED AREA BESIDE THE HIGHWAY -- EVENING

The dying sun filters in through the pines. Shafts of light scatter across the pine needles and low brush. In the shadows, beside mounds of earth and a shallow open grave, Tobey stands over Faith's body.

He rolls her into the hole he has dug. From his pocket, he removes the cross that hung from the Pontiac's mirror and tosses it in with her. For a moment, it looks as if he might say something, and then he begins to shovel the dirt.

CUT TO:

EXT. PONTIAC -- EVENING

As the sun finally sets, Tobey throws a shovel into the trunk of the car and drives off.

A sign by the road out of town reads, "Come Again Soon!"