

God's Acre
by Braden Meyer

I: All out Life

The CD began to skip inside of the player just as Henry was getting into the violent state of mind that Slipknot inspired. He waited for the disk to get back into its own groove before the annoyance drove him to remove the CD and throw it out the window. At this point, Henry's day had been a collection of minor inconveniences turned major setbacks.

Henry took another pull from his cigarette before furiously throwing it out the window towards his CD. After a brief daydream about the cigarette undergoing an extreme case of the Butterfly Effect and catching the entire town of Columbus Texas on fire, he heard a car horn beep from behind him. He looked up to his rearview mirror and suddenly remembered why he was in the parking lot to begin with.

Behind him was an SUV with a multitude of heads emerging from the open windows and looking directly at him. Dianne was driving with Lilith taking shotgun. Tucker and Glenda sat in the passenger, assumably sitting around his seat. He waved his finger to signal he needed a moment. Stepping out of the car and rounding the front, he opened his passenger door, grabbing his instant print type camera, backup film, his Marlboros along with a lighter, and double checked that he had his wallet. He closed the door and pressed the lock button on the set of keys suspended from his front belt loop.

The beep of his car signaled Glenda to let herself out of the SUV and welcome Henry with a hug. Henry and Glenda had only been friends for something short of a month but had



become relatively close in the short time. Everyone else was an absolute stranger, which would have been a few feet outside of his comfort zone if not for his trust in Glenda.

Henry sat behind Lilith and Glenda sat to his left. Tucker was well distracted by the music pumping from the speakers to introduce himself. Dianne turned the music down to address the occupants of her car.

“How's everybody doing” asked Dianne as she swung her head to face the backseat, then back to the road, her long black hair swinging almost violently towards Lilith as she did so. Tucker felt obligated to answer first: “Y’know I was doing fine until you turned it down, *Dianne.*” Henry felt the comment was rather rude but since he didn’t know either people or how they normally acted toward each other, he didn’t object.

Lilith reared her head round to the backseat, her bright red hair falling over her shoulder as she did so. She went on to inform the group about her day in an anecdotal manner, smiling brightly with a gleeful attitude. Tucker leaned back into his seat and set his head on the window, closing his eyes as a silent protest to what he saw as Lilith rambling. Henry already wasn’t on Tucker’s side and felt puzzled as to why anyone invited him. Lilith ended her story by saying how she got the front seat before Glenda could, and turned back to face the road ahead of her. Dianne catches Henry's eye in the rearview and arches her brows at him, asking for an answer.

“Tell us about yourself stranger,” said Dianne unexpectedly. Henry’s mouth fell open trying to respond before he even knew what he would say. “Uh well . . . I . . . work for construction. In fact I was at work before I got here.” From the corner of his eye, Henry saw Tucker sit up.



“Oh yeah? What kind of construction?” asked Tucker in a more provocative manner than Henry cared to respond to. “Small scale work mainly. Remodeling interior and exterior, building decks, new roofs. That sort of stuff,” said Henry as he reminded himself of all of the annoying events that took place while at work, cursing to himself. Tucker gave a sarcastic impressed look and a light chuckle, further annoying Henry.

“I do the whole shebang buddy. Foundation, framing, all the way up to finishing touches like painting and staining,” said Tucker with confidence that even Henry found off putting.

“Sounds like some hard work man. What's the pay?” asked Henry with a small grin pleasantly placed upon his face. Tucker leaned in as if to raise the tension in the air between them both.

“\$11.50, per hour,” said Tucker. Henry remembered his starting pay at \$12 per hour and the few raises he'd received, returning Tucker's chuckle from earlier. He looked back up to Dianne, catching her eye in the mirror. “My day is going great hun,” said Henry with a bigger smile.

After an unhealthy and rather early dinner at a Chinese buffet, the group returned to Dianne's car “Where we headed now?” said Henry, as he was told of the plan the day before but had forgotten it since. Dianne had looked up to the rearview again to meet Henry's eyes. “To the bowling alley,” said Dianne, looking back down to her phone, then putting it back in the center console. “Dianne, you idiot,” said Lilith, who suddenly looked up to her with a concerned look. “I told you the alley is closed for the next week!” Dianne looked down to Lilith with her mouth agape with disappointment. “Well why the hell is it closed on a Friday night of all times?” said



Dianne with irritable frustration. “Renovations,” said Lilith, turning away to look out the window, hurt by her friend’s tone of voice.

A few moments of silence passed and Henry felt it was okay to speak again. “One more time, what’s the plan y’all?” Everyone shrugged in response, except for Glenda who looked like she was thinking of a scheme rather than an evening activity. “Got anything Glenda?” said Henry, looking down to her.

“Just one really,” said Glenda, a smile forming on her lips.

II: Cemetery Gates

Dianne’s car coasted down the highway, hurdling back towards Columbus from El Campo. The sun was falling and disappearing into the ground. The beauty of the colors fading through the clouds with such vibrant colors gave comfort to all who saw it, however it only reminded Henry and his new friends that their destination would be bathed in darkness within minutes. They knew all too well that the stars of that night would not be of comfort where they were headed. The car held a silence unfamiliar to its occupants. As a collective, Glenda’s idea seemed interesting and deviated from their own personal mundane activities. But individually, everyone felt uneasy and were too scared of being ridiculed to suggest a new idea. By the end of the night, everyone wished they had protested the idea.

Dianne once again took it upon herself to break the silence that was causing heavy tension in the air. She didn’t want to turn on music nobody was interested in. She pulled up the auxiliary cord from the center console and handed it to Lilith letting her have the burden of annoying the group. Lilith grabbed the cord from Dianne’s hand without hesitation or an



exchange and plugged her phone in. She scrolled for only a moment before she picked a song and laid her head back to enjoy it.

Henry was surprised to hear what he could only assume was a cello humming a single note, followed by a chorus of trumpets softly emerging from the lone cello. Henry knew it was “The Breaking of the Fellowship” by Howard Shore from the first *Lord of the Rings* movie. He laid his head back as well and let the beautifully choreographed instruments ease his nerves until he fell asleep against his own will.

Tucker gazed outside towards the sunset, disregarding the damage he was doing to his eyes. The music distracted him from the nearing destination, taking him somewhere better than where he was now. Somewhere better than his home, somewhere better than his life, better than his mindset. His mind came back to what he had said to his father this morning. He knew his threat was empty, but it felt like a promise at the time. He pulled his phone out and went to message his father. He sent a simple apology, and his father sent a simple retort that he never got to see as his phone died just as he was beginning to open the text. He exhaled with dread, put his phone down, and looked back to the horizon, which was getting darker by the second now.

Henry was awoken by a stinging pain on his knee. His eyes shot open as his head jerked up to see what was going on. The seats around him were empty, and the car presumably stopped. He looked to his right and saw Lilith standing outside of his open door. He was surprised to see Glenda standing behind her as he was pretty sure they fell asleep on each other at some point. He unbuckled himself and scooted out of the car, grabbing his phone and his instant print camera before closing the door, lighting another cigarette as he followed.



He turned to see the girls already walking around the front of the car. He followed them and found Dianne giving Tucker a hug, her hand petting his head as if to calm him down, and her eyes closed as if to comfort herself too. They broke the hug and Tucker fixed his shaggy hair, which prompted Henry to do the same, as it had the tendency to become a distraction if not tied up.

“Have a good nap man?” asked Tucker with an attitude that contrasted his normal tone of voice. It sounded more welcoming than before. “At four hours of sleep a night? I’ll take anything,” finishing off with a shared chuckle between them. Henry returned a nod from Tucker and turned his gaze to the skies which was now black. Stars that would have otherwise been shining brightly were drowned out by thick and threatening clouds. He sighed to himself as he now knew that aside from the lonely pole light they stood under, they were totally in the dark.

His eyes were caught by a metal sign that seemed to gleam in a manner that wasn’t easily conceivable due to the angle of the light pole. “CEMETARY” read the sign, in an old fashioned and off putting font. He thought back to how he’s never been in a cemetery for anything else than a shortcut in his hometown. He’s never lost a family member and thus, never had to go to cemetery for what they are meant for. His most vibrant memories were from movies where hands would reach out and try to grab the living by the ankles. He never believed in such ideas as monsters, but he also was never given a reason to believe either.

Returning his gaze to his friends, they already turned around and began to walk into the cemetery. He took another look at his surroundings, readied his camera, and flashed a picture of his friends.



III: The Obelisk

It didn't take long for everyone to understand that something was amiss around them. According to Dianne, Glenda had an act for what she could only describe as "a special kind of sight." Henry nodded and assumed that Glenda could, or at least claimed, to be able to see spirits. Even a skeptic like Henry could guess that anyone with a special sight for the dead would feel alert in a cemetery. Lilith took hold of Glenda's left hand as she was growing more anxious. It didn't take long for Dianne and Tucker to follow suit; Tucker taking hold of Glenda's other hand and Dianne taking Lilith's. Henry followed behind them.

Henry heard a sound behind him and stopped, the group pressing on. He slowly peered over his shoulder to try and find the source of the sound he later wouldn't be able to describe. A light placed in the ground, shining on the front of a headstone caught his eye. He attempted to move toward the headstone, but his muscles wouldn't let him. He tried turning his head and just moving his eyes but neither worked. He tried to walk away but his legs were now subject to someone else's will. Even his jaw wasn't totally under his control.

"Glenda," struggled Henry, breaking the silence and startling the group. He couldn't hear anything. He wasn't even sure if he had said anything to begin with.

"Glenda!" said Henry once more, much more concerned than before, fear and adrenaline slipping into his heart. He still heard nothing, and it was becoming deafening. His vision began to blur as his ever opened eyes began to dry out, when suddenly his sight cleared and was centered on the bright headstone. As his vision came into focus and his curiosity overtook his fear, he saw that the light was shining on a face. Henry's stomach fell into his legs as they gave out beneath him, and he tumbled to his haunches. The face was white and horribly disfigured.



Bulbous lines cracking across its bald head. A hand was placed on his shoulder, but he couldn't react as every muscle in his body had decided to tap out for a moment. A yell was attempted but all anyone heard was a high pitch squeal. Glenda kneeled before him and took his head into her hands, examining his dilated eyes.

"I . . . I uh . . . he just . . ." Henry struggled to speak but was interrupted by Lilith who was calling out for Tucker. Glenda helped Henry to his feet as Dianne struggled to turn her phone's flashlight on.

"How the hell is my phone already dead," exclaimed Dianne, holding back a worried scream for help. Henry realized he had left his phone in the car as Glenda checked her phone, which quickly climbed down from eight percent to zero in a matter of seconds.

"Tucker! Where are you?!" Lilith's speech became stifled as her fear grew and she didn't even try to go for her phone. She desperately cried out to her friend and dared not move from where she stood. Henry's eyes began to adjust to the darkness as he faced and began approaching the direction where Lilith was screaming towards. Seeing nothing but cement, he took his camera and held it firmly in both hands as he held it up to face the path, and clicked to take a picture.

As the blinding flash covered the area in an unpleasant glare, Tucker, who was standing just ten feet away from Lilith, was engulfed by a spontaneous fire.

A scream erupted from everyone in the cemetery except for Lilith, who was beginning to walk towards Tucker, with an arm reaching out to him, and tears streaming down her vermillion cheeks. Tucker managed to slap Lilith once, as his hands flailed madly through the air, writhing in pain as every nerve in his body was slowly torched and burned down to its root by the flames. Dianne noticed Lilith first and yelled for her to stop. Lilith had already reached into the inferno



and grabbed Tucker's shirt before Dianne could grab her by the arm and rip her away. Dianne quickly extinguished the fire on Lilith's arm with her hand, Lilith finally screaming out of pain as she did so. Steam was pouring out of her red and newly disfigured hand. Glenda and Henry waited for the others to catch up with them before running for the car. Henry made sure to grab the still developing picture from the ground.

Lilith looked over her shoulder to see what came of Tucker and saw as the flame that once towered over them, shrink down into nothing but an ember. Her face suddenly collided with Dianne's back, who had stopped suddenly, sending Lilith down to her hands and haunches. The group had rounded a corner and came face to face with an obelisk in the middle of their paved path to safety. The obstacle was not out of its environment, as there had been a few of them scattered about the area, but this was the only headstone that was on the path, and the only one that had made the decision to levitate from the grass, to the face of the group.

Lilith slowly climbed to her feet, not wanting to upset whatever was holding up the obelisk. Glenda began to step forward, noticing the name on the bottom of the obelisk. Henry quickly took hold of her hand in objection, but she shook it away. She took another step forward before squinting her eyes to read the name inscribed out loud.

"Tucker . . . Hill" The obelisk must have been waiting for someone to read the name, for as Glenda spoke their friend's name, the obelisk fell to ground with a silence shattering boom that could have woken up the devil himself. Another scream filled the air as the obelisk began to fall towards Glenda who had already jumped out of its way since it fell. The group began to run away from the shattered obelisk, but Henry waited a moment before following. The obelisk was not a solid block made to commemorate the death of a stranger, but rather a shell, made hollow



by the creature that violently haunted the cemetery. Within the shell was a humanoid form that was sizzling and very faintly moaning in pain. Tucker's body lay before Henry, burnt to a black and ever living crisp. Henry wanted to help him, but he knew he could do nothing but run. Run to safety and from a time in his life where fear did not linger in every darkened corner, for the rest of his life. He eventually built up the nerve to look at the picture that ignited Tucker. All he could see was Tucker, eyes agape with dismay and a single marred hand resting upon his shoulder.