

Cigarette Molehill

by Colin White

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[flashback to a heartbreak]

Although he had no idea why, one could so much better appreciate something truly bad after something truly good. Eric put the cigarette to his lips and struck a match on the headboard with a deft snap of his wrist. That touch of pure unadulterated wickedness after a genuinely wholesome meal. It just made sense. Every satisfied pore sat and sighed following the feast, and now a dash of poison would serve to pacify the savage beast.

Tracing a bead of perspiration down from his jaw line to his mouth with a delicate sweep of her slender fingers, Freya allowed a moment for him to draw the creamy taste of slow suicide into his lungs, and then plucked the thing away like so much candy from a babe. She rolled over onto her front and grabbed this month's magazine from the bedside table, as Eric sent his draught of smoke into the air like a dragon with a belly full of villagers.

There was a dark brown mole on the blunt edge of her shoulder blade that seemed to be begging for a kiss. Being such a gentleman, Eric was only too happy to politely gratify its tiny little wish. He found another more subtle mole just below, and it appeared reasonable enough to kiss this one also.

"That," she said, "was transcendent." Eric laughed, unbreaking from his survey. "Like at the end of a movie. The audience gets its happy ending, its Hollywood resolution; the boy and the girl fall into bed to fuck like bunnies in whatever extreme and sordid manor that the viewer's imagination can dictate, as tastefully the picture fades to black and the credits begin to roll. Before you know it, everybody's

outta there, traipsing back into their dreary lives with a headful of idealistic fluff and overpriced popcorn stuck to their molars."

Eric gently gathered and lifted the chocolate curls that cascaded down Freya's back to follow a constellation of moles that continued up her neck, respectively marking each and every one with another tender kiss. "Numb from the waist down and from the mouth up," he sputtered between stars, "already eager for the inevitably shitty sequel."

"Well I hate to say it, Eric, but I can see our credits rolling. I feel compelled to reflect."

"Oh I thought I could smell something burning," he retorted.

Freya flipped the page of her magazine and held aloft the cigarette so that it met with Eric's lips once more, ever so casually keeping her grip, not letting go, just spoon-feeding him.

"I mean it, I'm inspired. We're gonna be hard pushed to beat that one. Ever. And would it not seem so... nongermene, we could spend our entire lives pitched in its attempt. No. Sadly I fear we may have peaked, m'dear. You know, we should probably quit now while we're ahead."

Again, Eric merely laughed, utterly absorbed in his present business. He was working on her spare arm, the one that didn't hold a cigarette or support her chin. There were more moles here too, along the inside seam, where the joins would be if she were actually a doll.

"It strikes me that the irrational pursuit of mankind is to become immortal, to last forever, and to trap moments in picture frames or test tubes or jam jars when, in reality, nothing is supposed to last forever. For all the good that we can experience and accomplish,

nothing's meant to last particularly long. Nothing. Life is short, and we should make the most of it while we can."

A mole is a member the skin blemish, or naevus, family. There are two types of naevi. Pigmented and vascular. The latter type includes strawberry marks and port-wine stains, caused by a randomly abnormal collection of blood vessels. The former is caused by sporadic overactivity of the melanocytes, the skin cells that produce the brown pigment melanin, which gives all of us — from the skin and hair to the iris of our eyes - colour.

"It seems to me that it is our privilege to experience all the highs and lows that life has to offer, to enjoy everything, and go everywhere if we possibly can. The trick is realizing when something is no longer worth one's own fervent pursuit."

The activity of melanocytes is controlled and regulated by a hormone secreted by the pituitary gland in the brain. Production is increased by exposure to sunlight, to protect the skin from the dangerous effects of prolonged exposure, and thusly the skin darkens.

"I mean, you and I have barely lived. We probably have the smallest idea about who we are, or what we're supposed to be doing on this cancer patient of a planet. Do we? We may pretend every day that we do, when we walk down a street, painstakingly dodging other people, avoiding even so much as the fleeting eye-contact with our fellow human beings. We're so cool, we know exactly who we are, what we're wearing and where we're going. But, what the fuck do we know? It's all assumption based on nothing!"

There were thirteen perfectly placed moles on her buttocks, and now he was working his way down her legs. Lovingly examining every inch of her, and kissing every marker that he found along the way. And she was benevolently bending at the knee, without fuss.

"Surely you must wonder what else is out there? Outside of this room, this town, this life? Just waiting to be discovered?" She said all of this calmly and with a smile, as though experiencing some epiphany of the quietly divine.

He noticed a freckle on the forth toe of her left foot. Her wedding toe. A direct result of one frenzied crowd of melanocytes in the dermis, adjacent to the epidermodermal junction. The fruit of a very subtle orgy.

Eric kissed her ankles. "It's a small world, easily charted. Everyone knows that."

"Well I'm not so sure. This is certainly a small town..."

"Do you wanna know how many moles you've got? You'll never guess!"

Freya snapped her magazine shut and spun around, with all the willowy elegance of a trapeze artist, to look at her dearly devoted lover. "Do you know what, I'm not sure that I do. I'm not even sure that you should. As much as I adore you, Eric, I think we're in serious danger of pushing the extremities of our earthly encounter, beyond which our triumphant peak becomes just another trough and suddenly you and I find ourselves incomprehensibly betrothed to one another, and to a life of tedious over-familiarity. Christ, that scares the crap outta me and I would end up hating you."

He stammered in simple protest, "I... figured we'd chart the world together, eventually, at our leisure."

"Sweetheart. Your trouble is you play for keeps, when really there are no rules."

The average person can have up to forty or fifty moles, sometimes more. You might have been born with them, although many will develop in nature and in number during periods of hormonal change such as adolescence, popping up virtually anywhere, only to fade again some half-century later. Scientists cannot reasonably explain why they appear, or for what purpose, only that their frequency is determined before birth.

For a second more they just stared at one another, naked and unblinking.

"I'm trying to say good bye, Eric," she said at last, before half-extinguishing the cigarette in the ashtray by the bed, then waltzing away to wash off all his kisses under a nice warm shower.

He regarded the familiar smudge of her lip-gloss around the yellow filter with a frown, and watched the last wisp of smoke as it drizzled from the ashtray up to heaven, like the faithful ghost of honey that has finally found peace. An escapee, like Freya. Forever gone but never forgotten. Bittersweet. Killing him softly.

