

Dark and Stormy Night

by Ali Jon Smith

It was a dark and stormy night; which is, apparently, the worst way to start a story. And in turn means that if you are still reading my piece, your expectations are particularly low and it bodes well for me.

But why stop at a boring old storm? Why not make it a snowstorm, or a monsoon, or a hurricane? But I have not experienced them, so I could not write about them convincingly. But, but, but, BUT. You are not supposed to start a sentence with but, let alone a paragraph. But who cares.

I need a character to get this story started. I choose a Heroine. It was a dark and stormy night and my Heroine was cursing the spittle that tapped on her window like geriatric saliva. Then she cursed the retro TV that refused to return anything more than crackles and broken, distorted images like Alzheimer memories. With no chance of watching a show, she sat down in front of her computer and brought up a browser window instead.

I Live!
Damn Rain
Damn TV
Damn All
So Bored
Old Friend

My Heroine is a young woman of keen mind and cool temperament. A little socially awkward, but not prone to anger or tears unless strongly provoked; break ups, family deaths, MS software updates, the usual things. She has plain looks, as much by design as nature. Dark hair, dark eyes and a slightly yellowish hue to her mocha skin. But she wears no makeup and her hair is cropped to a manageable length, tied back with a simple hair band. She does not believe in making herself look 'pretty' or 'feminine' for other people's sake. Still, she was aware of those imperfections, those that made the loathsome word brush across one's mind: the slightly misshapen nose; the patches of vitiligo on her temple that made a few strands of her hair white; the clusters of sties under her left eye that reminded her of the warty skin of a frog. *Ugly*. But only in her eyes, not mine.

Who Am I?
Phlegmatic?
Hate MS
Balochi
Modest
Own Style
Own Ideas
Flawed
Crooked
Freaky
Ugly

She was in a small flat, all she could afford as a sculptor of collectable miniatures; manga characters, robots with guns and comic book heroes. They littered her apartment, heaped with the tools of the trade; dental picks, green modelling putty, soldiering irons, halogen lamps and wire armatures jabbed into corks. Clear workspace was at a premium. The only empty area was in front of the microwave door. The pride of her collection was a large scale squid-shaped solid resin cast of the gunship from the popular Japanese anime 'Turkey City.' It had prime position mounted on the wall above her computer, where she could admire the tentacles-come-gun turrets she had spent so many months sculpting.

But A
Kickass
Artist
Counts
More?
Counts
To Me
Love Squid
My Best

But what's this? As she browses the internet her hand comes down to her jeans. She undoes the brass button and hovers there as she thinks about touching herself. *Is she watching porn?* What type? Here is my chance to be edgy. I long to do something edgy. Thirty years ago making her gay might have done the trick. But not now, it's just not daring enough. What are today's maligned perversions? Bestiality? Necrophilia? *Paedophilia*? No, too edgy, too daring.

So Horny
Shall I?
Its Really
Naughty
But Hot
My Secret

Ah, try this.

My Heroine was staring at a picture of a robotic lover. A 1.8m tall silver facsimile of a man. A fully anatomically functional sex toy with a reshapable, resizable cock and a wide variety of pre-programmed and downloadable erotic scenarios.

Metal Hunk
Growing
Inside Me

Each chromed segment of the body was gently articulated on a bed of latex to produce a feeling both hard, smooth and metallic, but gentle and malleable under pressure. Vibrating finger tips. Comes in a variety of colours and tongue appendages. Easy clean.	Astride Me Strong Firm Caressing Sleek
Or at least, that's what the ad claimed. She wished she could afford it. She longed to feel that steely body press up against her, to have an inexhaustible lover tease her and please her for as long as she wanted. Something that would do everything she asked it. Everything she <i>told</i> it. An entity that existed solely for her. That infantile fantasy of being the centre of attention made real. Alas, artists are always poor.	Too Much Hug Me Pound Me Pound Me! Love Me
So this is a sci-fi? How far in the future? Surely not too distant; she still has a TV that falls prey to storm-static. Near future. And still capitalist. Is this the allegorical story of one person's fight against the mega corporation? Yet another ineffective blow for socialism? Is there any other kind of sci-fi? No, she can't afford the robot and we'll leave it at that. She doesn't feel oppressed. She doesn't even know and won't come to know about the wars in the third world caused by the demand for coltan, a key component in the robot.	Love Tech Need Cash Want Robot Want Metal In Me Feels Good
Something needs to happen. This 'story' needs a plot.	
There was a knock at the door. "Pizza here," came the call.	
My Heroine pulls her hand out of her jeans and feels an acute pang of shame at having forgotten about the caller, almost as if she had been discovered in the act. She rights herself and goes to the door. A tall wiry boy in his late teens stands there with the pizza box in hand. He has two day stubble and the smell of sweat on him. A little metal bar though one eyebrow denotes his choice of music as thrash-pound. He looks her up and down, as if considering her before speaking. It makes her a little nervous.	Fuck! Idiot Me! Forgot Ewww D-rating No Chance
"Veggie special?"	
"Yeah," replies my Heroine.	
She takes the pizza and hands over some money, but instead of leaving, the Pizza Guy stands in the doorway and stares over her shoulder. A little, knowing smile creeps into his face. He has seen the net ad for the robotic lover. My Heroine feels instantly violated. That was <i>her</i> fantasy, <i>her</i> guilty little pleasure.	Hungry What? Bastard! Look Away!
He leans casually against the doorway and drops his voice to a smooth velvety tone like a bass guitar filled with red wine.	Go Away!
"What's your name, honey?"	
He thinks he knows her. He thinks because she is looking up sex machines she must be lonely, frustrated and craving human contact. He thinks she will be easy. He thinks he wants to fuck her.	I Don't Think So Does He?
What is my Heroine's name? Up until now we have been doing fine with Heroine. Did you know Heroine™ was a brand name thought up by the same pharmaceutical giant that brought you Aspirin™? It was called Heroine™ because it was the way it	He's Weird And Smelly If He Wants

was supposed to make you feel. It was advertised as 'all the joy of morphine, but none of the danger of addiction'. This is called irony. My Heroine knew that, and she enjoyed the irony so much that her net name is Heroween. Her other is ~Irona~, meaning 'one who feigns ignorance'. She never feigns ignorance. (This is also ironic).

Me Then
He Must
Be Broken
Broken

No, Heroine has sufficed so far, so I choose not to change it.

"What's your name, honey?" the Pizza Guy asks.

"None of your business," says my Heroine, in as caustic a way as she can muster.

Instantly the Pizza Guy's demeanour changed. He leaned impertinently far into the apartment, so the door could not be shut and almost hissed at her.

Twat

"Listen girlie..."

Girlie has to be the most insulting thing to call a woman. It implies a lack of significance; inferiority in terms of physical strength and age, which in turn means less sense, less aptitude, less experience and, ultimately, less use. My girlfriend says I am being silly and that 'cunt' is obviously the most insulting word. But I'm not so sure; I always liked the symmetry it has with 'cock'. Cunt and Cock. Cunt and Cock. They go well together. But I digress.

Girlie?
Cock!
I'm Not
Small Or
Dumb!

"Listen girlie," the Pizza Guy spat out, his breath close enough to her face that she winced from the smell of pepperoni, "I don't have to put up with you." He jabbed her in the shoulder and took a step into her apartment.

So Close
Move Back
Out!

Don't 'Oh God!' she thought, 'this stranger is coming into my apartment and drag me touching me, and there is nothing I can do about it'. It was just so far into this. I'm out of normal manners that she didn't know what to do. She not in the habit tried to knock his fingers away, but he grabbed her wrist. The of taking sides like situation had already gone completely out of her control. that. Do you really Whilst he held my Heroine, he stared down at her – down expect a reader at her breasts – with his breath held, almost as if he was to cope with this deciding something. It was with some dread she realised he typesetting mess? was deciding something; he was deciding whether to rape her.

Oh God!
What do
I Do?
Ouch!
Let Go
Stop Leering
Oh Please
No!
Not That

"GET OUT! She screamed. "GET OUT, GET OUT, GET OUT!"

Fairly base isn't it? resorting to sexual violence to keep interest? I know I invented it, but I had good, moral reasons. The Pizza Guy seemed a little taken aback by her sudden explosion of screeching. He let go of her. He stared at her for a few seconds more, then stepped out of the apartment and went away. My Heroine slammed the door behind him. Far from breathing the classical sigh of relief, she almost asphyxiated with fear at the prospect of what might have happened to her. Adrenalin made her ears ring with blood.

GET OUT
GET OUT
GET OUT
GET OUT
GET OUT
GET OUT
GET OUT

Reasons like a sense of shame; things a society needs to function and behave. Slowly, very slowly, she peeled herself away from the door and went back over to the computer. She minimized the robot ad and set the machine to hibernate. She didn't feel particularly horny anymore. She clutched herself and listened to the wind howl outside, driving sheets of rain into the

GET OUT
GET OUT
GET OUT
GET OUT
GET OUT

building, and the distant crack of thunder.

Trust me, it's all part of a plan. It is a better plan than you've got. You actually believe the reader will google for 'Turkey City Lexicon' just to get your squiddy jokes?	Had she really been in that much danger? Had she really been able to see through his intentions? Her mind simultaneously reached two conclusions: Yes she had judged the situation correctly and she had been stupid to let him in the first place; and no, she hadn't been, and she had been stupid to get so scared by it. And then she reached a third conclusion; she was stupid for simultaneously believing two contradictory things about herself simply because they confirmed what she already suspected. Then the logical loop frazzled her head and she wished there were an alt+ctrl+del button somewhere on herself.	What Just Happened? You Idiot You Idiot You Idiot You Idiot You Idiot You Idiot Arrrgh! ####@\$
Digressions. I love digressions. What do you think that whole Onan thing was about, eh? As if I'd kill over cum stains!	I love the semi-colon; you may have noticed? I love the idea of joining two separate sentences together, but tying them to a single thought. I think it is closer to how we mentally construct things than the artificiality of the separate clause, the comma, conjunctive and the full stop ('period' to those of north American persuasion). Sorry, I'm interrupting aren't I? You want to get on with the story. Go ahead.	Ok, Calm Down Girl Nothing Actually Happened Not Really
Think about it. That would mean killing billions to be consistent.	There was a knock at the door. 'Oh god, its him again isn't it?' was her first thought. He couldn't kick the door in could he? <i>Could he?</i> Painfully, she called out "who is it?" in a voice somewhere between a shout and a whisper that came out as a throaty rasp. "Janine Gray," came a woman's voice.	Go Away it. Could he? Oh Please Not him
This pair are a pain, never give me rest.	"And her husband Alasdair," came a man's voice. It was definitely not the Pizza Guy's voice, it was much more gentle and mature with a hint of Scottish. "We're here to tell you about the good news," said the woman.	Oh Thank You Jesus?
Playing a close game, eh? I'll forgive sins against me, but not against my people. Remember that.	Jehovah's Witnesses. Suddenly the only thing my Heroine wanted in the world was someone's company. And it didn't matter if it was these strangers. It didn't matter if all she did was sit with them talking at her for half an hour, before taking a piece of literature and lying about reading it in the morning; what she wanted was just to spend a little time feeling safe in the company of kind people.	So Lonely Please Comfort Me I Need Company
You know you run the risk of offending someone here? But you know that, don't you?	My Heroine opened the door and was glad to see a thirty something woman and middle-aged man, both in grey business suits and carrying a pile of slim leaflets. The leaflets seemed to show a big group of people of every conceivable age and ethnicity, happy and smiling in the rays of light cast by some divine being just off the side of the page. "Jehovah's Witnesses?" asked my Heroine.	They Look Nice Leaflets Made Not To Offend Anyone Cult?

Ick, I hate that Name.	"No," replied Janine, "Easy mistake. We're Yahweh's Faithful. Do you have a minute to talk about Jesus and happiness?"	Oh Well Whatever
So difficult to say in English.	My Heroine had not heard of Yahweh's Faithful, but she didn't let that stop her.	Nevermind
You may as well call me Allah, that will make sure even more people are offended.	"Please, come in." She would have offered them somewhere to sit, but she realised she didn't have anywhere. The pair looked ever so pleased; perhaps it was rare that the door wasn't instantly slammed in their face. They came in and stood very formally, Janine in front of Alasdair, just like a nineteenth century photograph. "Do you believe in Jesus?" asked Janine. "No," said my Heroine. "Do you mind if I ask why?"	Make Me Feel Safe You Want Me And I Need You
We're easy sport aren't we? Too easy for your joy.	My heroine thought carefully. She thought of all the reasons someone might believe in Jesus, then fixed on the one she thought was most compelling.	Silly Question
Straw gods float, not crash.	"I guess I was never brought up by Christian parents. My family was Muslim. Jesus is just a prophet to us, not the son of god."	Not Beaten Into Me
Do you want a hint to the real religion? Only one gets you in you know? Bah! As if I'd let slip!	The two of them smiled even more; my Heroine was merely brought up in the wrong faith and setting her on the right track. That would not be difficult. Unbeknownst to them, my Heroine had already study the religious teachings of Mohammed, Jesus, Buddha, Crowley, Krishna, Hubbard and a variety of other less well-known messiahs, and rejected it all as thinly veiled bullshit.	They Look Happy Pity They Won't Get Very Far With Me
Keep your head down, be good, and you'll get a prize at the end. Sounds fair that way doesn't it?	"Let me tell you about our faith," said Janine. "We believe two thousand years ago a man called Jesus predicted the end of the world and a happy time when the good people will rewarded and the wicked people will all be punished. We believe those predictions started to come true during the first world war, and that the time when the good will be rewarded is imminent."	Here We Go ZZZZZZZZZZ ZzZzZzZzZz zzzzzzZZZZzz Hang on!
But what about the other way?	My Heroine wanted to let her finish. She wanted to just smile and be pleasant, but she couldn't. She was ~Irona~ and couldn't help but say her piece.	That's Not Right
I love you, more than you can know.	"The first world war? Didn't Jesus say it would happen within a generation? I mean, like, the First World War was almost a hundred and fifty years ago by itself."	2000 Year Old Bullshit
So love me back or I'll burn you in lava for eternity.	Janine looked peeved. "We're pretty sure about the dates. We've had some very smart people look at them again and again. We know the world is just over six thousand years old and the time of Jesus's return is close."	She Won't Argue, Just Quote More Shit

It's a bit more tyrannical that way.	This time my Heroine gawffed at the statement. She had taken anthropology classes at uni and had a broad knowledge of the dating techniques used by archaeologists.	Ha Ha Ha They Know Nothing
Ever noticed that in all the pictures of Adam and Eve, they have bellybuttons? But they didn't have umbilical's!	"Six thousand years old! Only if you ignore carbon dating, dendrochronology, uranium series, photoluminescence, ice cores, magnetic flux, oxygen isotopes and genetic clocks, to name but a few. I mean, if god planted all them, he did more than try to tempt the unfaithful. He tried to actively convince every person with a gram of brain power that the bible is a lie!"	Love Science Love Showing People Up
How many flames will this earn?	Even as she said it, my Heroine knew she had gone too far. Janine's face crinkled with anger, then rage.	She Looks Pissed
A small mind is easily filled with faith.	"You bitch!" shouted Janine. "You think because you know science we are stupid? You haven't studied the text! You don't know how sublime god's plan is or how much he loves us!"	Very Pissed To Far?
Your Heroine seems to be in a bit of trouble now.	My Heroine was entirely surprised by Janine's reaction. You do not expect the godly to get angry, you expect them to be offended and leave. As Janine ranted, her rage built and became that kind of inarticulate emotion that bursts blood vessels and starts wars.	This Isn't Fun Anymore Worrying
People kill in my name all the time. I'd ask one question, just one.	Janine launched herself at my Heroine. She grabbed her by the throat and tumbled her backwards so that she was bent over her computer desk. For a few seconds my Heroine just did not understand what was going on. Then the choking pressure made itself all too apparent. "You bitch, you bitch!" repeated Janine.	Aaargh! Neck! Pinned! No Air! No Air!
Are the people you imagine I want dead, the same ones you want to kill?	My Heroine tried to pull away, but Janine was much too strong. She looked to Alasdair, hoping he might try to restrain his wife, but he was just standing there smirking. It was an honest mirth and seemed much deeper than his polite smile from before. He reached into his pocket and took out a camera.	Choking! Choking! Choking! Choking! Choking!
<i>Flash</i>		
Because if the answer is 'yes,' you're doing it for your own reasons.	My Heroine was utterly incredulous as he began taking pictures. Janine's concrete hands unrelentingly crushed the air from her windpipe. My Heroine could see red in the periphery of her vision and knew her life was about to end.	Help! Help! Help! Help!
<i>Flash</i>		
Narrative tradition is a thorny thing. Before my novel gets to chapter 2	So how am I going to save her? Narrative tradition dictates that Pizza Guy should come running back into the apartment; a prince come to save the damsel in distress. This ties up the story nicely by giving all the characters involved a part in the	Help! Help! Help! Help!

I've already had	conclusion. It also fulfils our desire for pseudo morals: All that	Help!
3 wives pretend	glisters is not gold. Whist the 'goodly' missionaries turned out	Help!
to be sisters and	to be sadistic killers, the 'rapist' Pizza Guy reveals himself as	Help!
5 younger	the true hero. Ah, and the architype of knight in shining	Help!
brothers usurp	armour is so strong! What she could want with a robot when	Help!
older brothers.	has a real steel man?	Help!

Flash

Give people what	But I don't want someone else to save her. She is MY Heroine.	Help!
they expect.	She has to do something HEROIC.	Help!

Flash

They'll thank you.	But what?	Help!
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Flash

Are you so very	Sorry, my Heroine. I think you may have to die.	Help!
completely out of		Help! Help!
Ideas? It does not befit	<i>Flash</i>	Help! Help! Help!
an author to have such little		Help! Help! Help! Help!
imagination. I would be ashamed.	I think I'm out of Ideas.	Help! Help! Help! Help! Help!
Your poor creation is about to expire!		Help! Help! Help! Help! Help! Help!
Looks like I might have to intervene then, eh?		Help! Help! Help! Help! Help! Help! Help!

FLASH

That was a sneaky move, denigrating me and Arrgh!
my believers for the entire story, only The last flash Arrgh!
to have me intervene at the last was accompanied by an Arrgh!
second and restore my rep. almighty crack and a shower of Arrgh!
Makes one wonder glass and sparks which plunged the room into Arrgh!
where your ethics darkness. Alasdair screamed. Even in her half dead state Arrrrrrrrrrrrrrgh!
actually lie. my Heroine knew the apartment had been struck by lightning. Arrgh!

I won't steal	For a minute moment, Janine's grip loosened a fraction. It was all	Loose!
anymore space	my Heroine needed. The lightning flash had thrown a shadow	Chance!
then. So long,	across the wall; the shadow of a gunship shaped like a squid.	Squid...
your Heroine	My Heroine stretched her body and reached up behind her to grab	Almost...
is on her own	a tentacle of the heavy resin model and brought it crashing down	Yes!
From now.	into the side of Janine's mouth. She lost consciousness instantly.	Yes! Yes!

Goooodbye	Blood rushed up and air rushed down. Even though she felt	Air!
Goodbye	woozy, she span quickly to face Alasdair; she was sure he would be	Alasdair
Bye	coming for her now. But instead he was lying on the floor with a large	Dead?
	piece of glass wedged in his head. The old TV had exploded when the lightning	Gruesome
struck and blown out the front glass. It was just fortunate she a retro TV that used		Thank You
glass		

I think I have been making too many of my character's decisions. I think I will leave the final one to you. Does she:	Next?
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A) Call it 'divine providence' that she owns a soldiering iron and that both Alasdair and Janine own arseholes (if you chose this option you are probably a psychopath, or at the very least a Quentin Tarantino fan).	Hurt Them?
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B) Phone the Pizza Guy, lure him back to the apartment and frame him for assaulting the missionaries (if you chose this option, you are the kind of person who likes superficially simple connections in life, and probably believe in government conspiracy theories).

Try To
Protect
Myself?

C) Forget about the missionaries and phone a lawyer to sue the TV manufacturers. Then spend the compensation money on a Fuck-o-Matic 3000 Live Playmate™ (if you chose this option...ah, what's the point. We all know this is the option you're going to pick).

Kinky
Robot
Sex!

The End

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