

# Meat Bundles

by Evan Tyler



Murder Lazer Publishing.



# Meat Bundles

I enter the butcher shop. "Hello, what can I do for you today?" asks the butcher. I can't help but notice his blood-streaked apron tied tightly around his waist. I answer, "Um, well, I was wondering what your specials are today".

"Well now", he rubs his hands together, "we have two specials on today – we have some freshly ground beef made right here in our store, but if you want to spend a little more, we are featuring Canadian Black Angus steaks at a reasonable price, anywhere from \$6.00 to \$10.00 per steak, depending on the thickness".

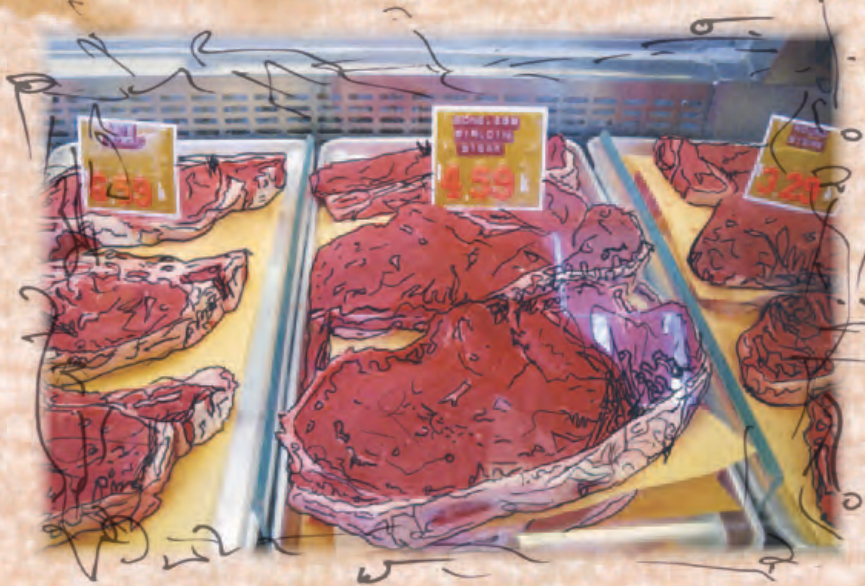
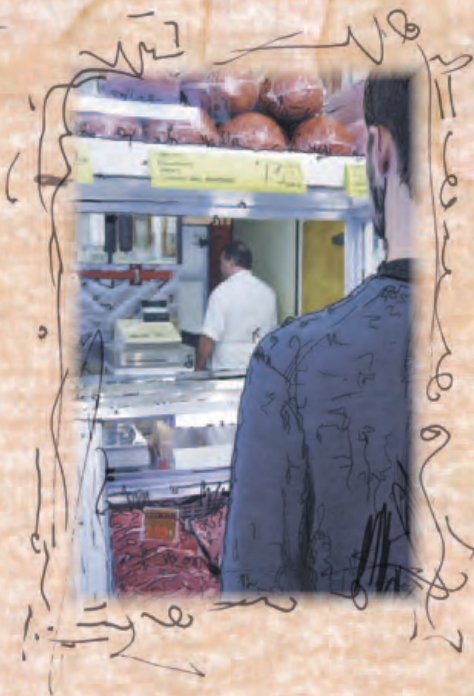
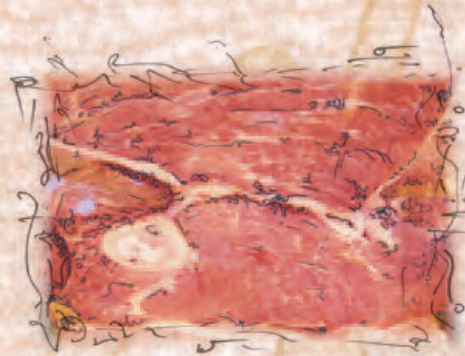
I run my fingers over the cool glass of the deli case, perusing the Italian deli meat, prosciutto, mortadella, genoa salami. I glance up at the butcher block with its boning knives and a meat hook. The meat slicer gleams with a half roll of Blue Ribbon Bologna sitting on the edge of the cutter. I shake my head and ask: "What grade for the Angus steaks?"

"Triple A Beef, that's what I got here."

"Well I thought maybe I would get some ground lamb for burgers, but I was also thinking of marinating some flank steak because it's leaner and less expensive".

"Oh well, the only ground lamb I got is frozen, but I can get you some of that from the freezer. You know what, let me just double check if we have any fresh lamb in the back."

The butcher disappears into the back room. I watch him as he searches the meat locker for fresh lamb. The humming of the florescent lights resonates and then begins to magnify in my brain and I feel stimulated by the sensation.



After a few more turns of the head and with his hands on his hips, the butcher returns with a rather neutral expression on his face.

“I’m sorry but you will have to come back Tuesday for the lamb unless you want frozen. As for other cuts of beef, well I don’t have any flank steak today.” Then while looking up toward the ceiling, with a finger on his chin, he continues, “I have some fresh offerings in the back - 16 ounce T-bones that are well marbled, very tasty, but if you’re looking for lean, I do have some New York strip loins that I can cut for you – half inch or inch steaks”.

“Hmmm”, then I ask him, “Do you ever offer bison?”

“Well yes”, he replies, “every Monday I get the sirloin steak and roasts too. Sometimes I get bison tenderloin, but I have a waiting list for them – popular cut with some customers, that’s for sure”.

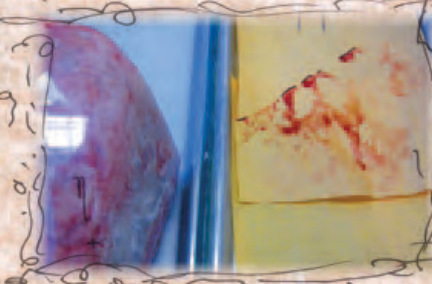
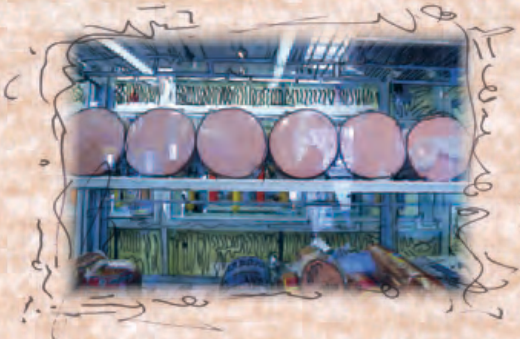
“I’d like to try bison. I’ll come back on Tuesday for both the ground lamb and the bison”.

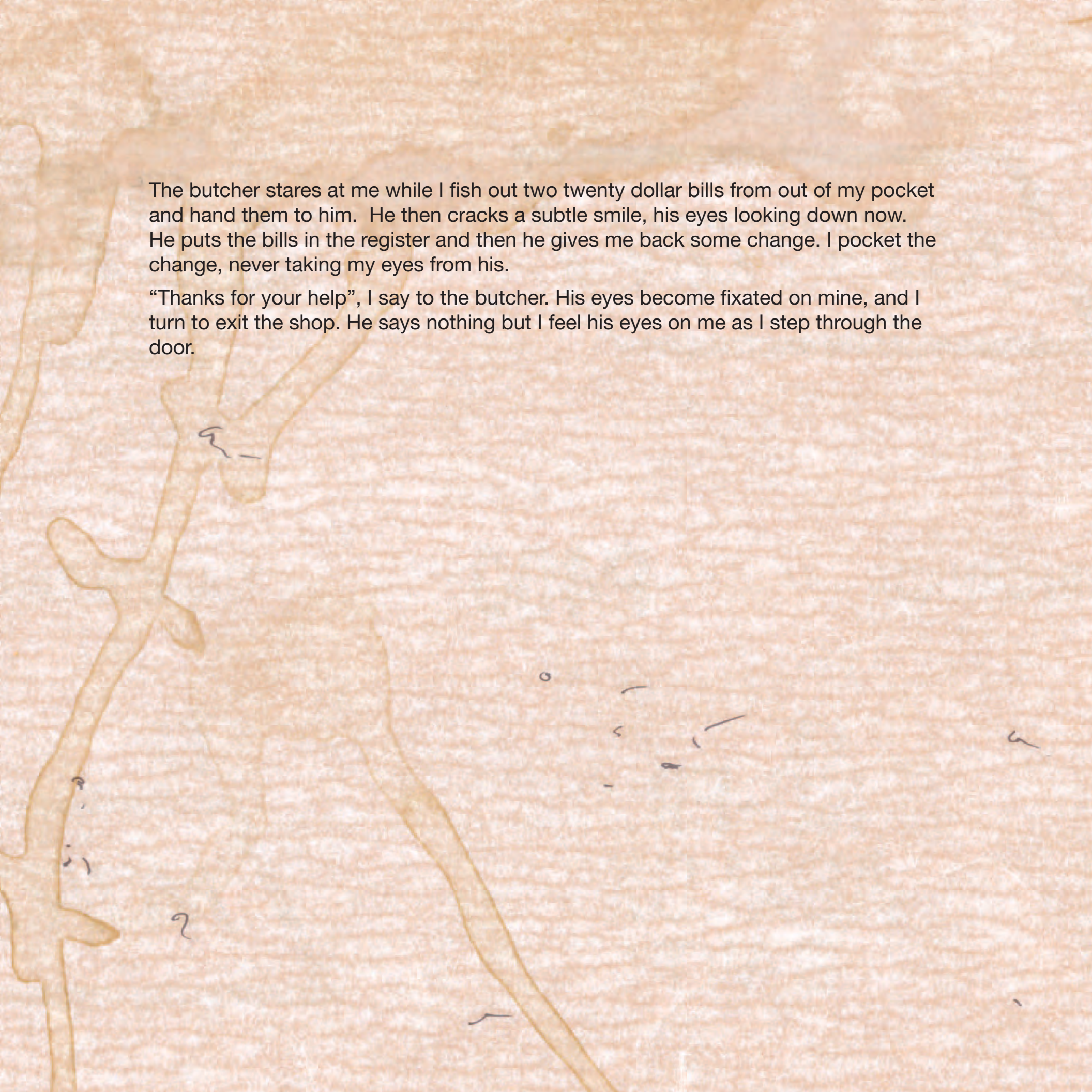
“Sure, now what can I get for you today?”

“Just bag me up about three of those strip loins; I’ll take about a dozen slices of that honey-glazed back bacon and I’ll be back on Tuesday for the rest”.

“Yes, coming right up”.

The butcher divides the meat and weighs it on the scale. The humming from the freezers and the lights are still heavy in the room, penetrating my consciousness as I watch the glistening red and pink meat cuts get packed into little paper envelopes and eventually are presented to me as bundles, my precious meat bundles.





The butcher stares at me while I fish out two twenty dollar bills from out of my pocket and hand them to him. He then cracks a subtle smile, his eyes looking down now. He puts the bills in the register and then he gives me back some change. I pocket the change, never taking my eyes from his.

“Thanks for your help”, I say to the butcher. His eyes become fixated on mine, and I turn to exit the shop. He says nothing but I feel his eyes on me as I step through the door.






Phased from this encounter, I cross the street to where my car is parked along 11th Avenue. My car key is troubling me. The plastic shell around the key that acts as the lock/panic/unlock unit is busted up around the sides leaving the key vulnerable to contort sideways. Also, the battery inside the unit is dead, rendering the device non-functional and forcing me to manually open the car using the key. This is problematic due to the sensitive nature of the key device; one wrong move and you have yourself a bent and broken object. I fear this fate as I approach my car, wrestling around for my keys in my pants pocket. To my surprise and delight, with just enough care and precision I am able to open the car and start it without any complications. I immediately set my groceries on the seat beside me and grapple around in my glove compartment for a tape. I come across "Steely Dan's "The Royal Scam". As I slip the tape into the deck I pay close attention to the physical and sensory feeling of the tape being transported into its place, informing me of its position with a "click". I really feel the "click" and everything after it seems different. The tape begins playing halfway through the song "Green Earring". The melody and words are intoxicating; I listen closer to the lyrics: "Greek medallion, Sparkles when you smile, Sorry, angel, I get hungry like a child". As I glance at the clock in the car I notice it reads 3:22 p.m. The clock is actually seven minutes slow so the real time is 3:29 p.m.

The drive home is unsettling. Heading south I light a cigarette somewhere between Hill and 24th. I manage to hit every red light possible on the way back to my apartment and this provides me plenty of stop and go movement to the point where I feel carsick. I tend to get carsick anyway - it's a problem I have had since grade school. I start to notice things around my car, the dust on the dashboard, a french-fry on the seat next to me, some gum stuck to a napkin. These properties catapult me further into a downward spiral of sickness. I try to hold my bearings; I break a cold sweat on my forehead. My windows will not roll down and it is hot inside of the car.

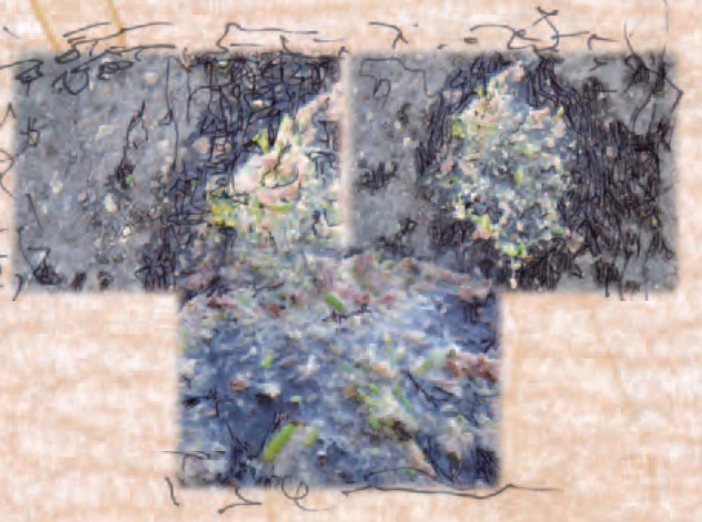


The background is a piece of aged, yellowed paper with a textured surface. There are several faint, illegible markings and stains scattered across the page, including a large, irregular brown stain on the left side and several small, dark marks and lines. The text is centered on the page.

I'm undeniably anxious about returning to my apartment. I begin to think about my guests. They are probably wondering where I am by now. The closer I get to my apartment, the more uneasy I become. I think to myself, "Is this really what I want to be doing in my life?" I feel hollow all of a sudden, like an empty vessel navigating familiar paths throughout the city. The retched presence of bacteria and cigarette stench leaves my taste buds scorned and vacant. Only now do I really start to feel the effects from last night's drinking - I am parched, dry, thirsty and sick. I heard somewhere that alcohol deprives the brain of oxygen and inevitably shrinks it. As I take a left on Gordon Road I anticipate getting out of my car and liberating myself from the constraints of the seatbelt, simultaneously dreading entering my apartment building.



I pull into my parking space and quickly release the seatbelt and stumble out of the car door. Immediately I vomit a beige and green display all over the ground. The puddle of vomit looks crude, vile, grotesque and yet helplessly vulnerable. I can see green beans and creamed corn bubbling on the surface like something out of an alien movie. I take a moment to compose myself. After only a few seconds of relief I begin to feel the anxiety set in again as I make my way through the parking lot to the front of the building.



As I enter through the doors, the stairwell appears steep and impossible. My wrists are shaking and I visualize myself vomiting again. I put one foot in front of the other and drag myself up each stair. Things become increasingly disoriented and unstable on the way up. The experience is incommensurable. There is no standard or measure to describe the torture I feel on this jolting, nightmarish journey up the stairs. I cling to the railing for support and I hear my knee clash with the brass crosshatched railing along the side of the staircase. The resulting sound throws an electrifying vibration through my system, a sensory pain so deep it is almost pleasurable. My eyes tear a bit as I approach the top. I wipe the sweat from my forehead, realizing that I am still breathing.



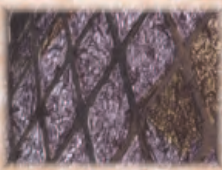
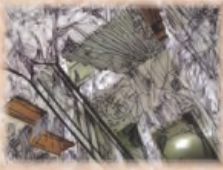
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At the top of the stairs I see a silhouette of a figure from down the hall. As I gradually make my way to Suite 14 where my guests await, the figure reveals itself as Mrs. Saunders, my neighbor. Mrs. Saunders is a woman in her late sixties; she is somewhat eccentric and is very sociable. She parted ways with her husband Tom two years ago, and she loves Chinese food. I know this because I often see it being delivered to her place. Sometimes the delivery man comes to my suite by accident. I suppose she would be Miss Saunders now that she isn't married. Usually we greet each other with a quick hello and exchange a polite acknowledgement of some capacity, never anything too energetic or time consuming. Today, strangely, she stops me in the hallway to ask me about the branches rubbing against the windows on the east side of the building where both of our suites are located. The frustration caused by her query tests my ability to stay even mildly composed. I reach deep down within myself and search for it - and then it surfaces.

"Hi Mrs. Saunders".

"Oh hello, how are we today?"

"Doing alright I suppose".

After just these first few words, my stomach feels like cottage cheese on a hotplate. Dreadfully I watch as Mrs. Saunders puts her bags down to speak to me. Putting the bags down is a bad thing. When the bags hit the floor it sounds like a baseball bat hitting a row of metal high school lockers, though slowed down considerably. My stomach is bubbling something fierce.

"You know what, I've been meaning to ask you..." She pauses.

"What's that?"

She answers immediately, "Do you hear the branches scraping against your window panes at night?"

"No, I don't think I have, I..."

She cuts me off, "Well I'll tell you, I always hear the branches against my windows at night making this really screechy noise, but only at night though. It keeps me up at night and it's just the silliest thing, you know."

"Well maybe..."

She cuts me off again, "I'm going to have to talk to Murray about it because I just haven't been able to sleep very well. I suppose maybe the winds pick up a bit..." her voice trails off.

I take another breath, and prepare to respond and before I can let it out, she cuts me off again.

"Because I just don't know..."

"Yes, well, I'm really sorry to hear that. I'm sure Murray could talk to maintenance or go up there on a ladder and trim the branches".

"Yes, I'll have to talk to him. Well then, I don't want to keep you. You have a nice day."

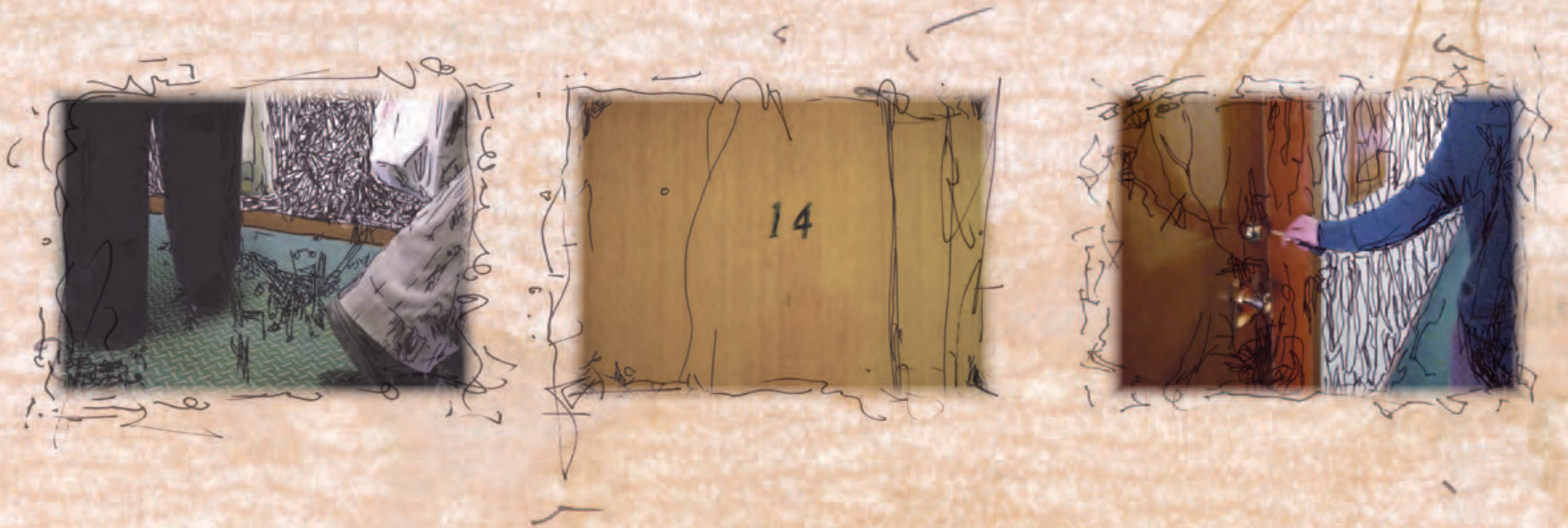
"Bye, Mrs. Saunders".

"Oh wait" she says...

I feel like turning around and screaming in her face and then she quickly responds:

"Oh never mind, I thought I had something else to say. Take care now."

She walks slowly down the hallway and the smell of strong flowery perfume follows her, lingering just enough to make me vomit a little inside of my own mouth. I force myself to swallow the few chunks back into my stomach, having nowhere to discard them. I take a deep breath and really feel the oxygen enter my system. With a last attempt to collect myself, I take one more even deeper breath and head towards Suite 14. As I rattle around for my keys I detect an absence of noise from inside. I turn the handle of the door and enter cautiously, and I still hear nothing.

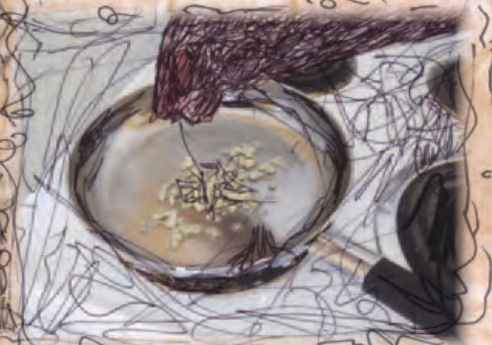


I take off my shoes and make my way into the kitchen. I pass a dispersion of shoes, carelessly scattered along the hardwood floor. Although I anticipate seeing them, I still feel anxious and unnerved when I catch sight of the three individuals who remain tied to chairs with gags in their mouths and blindfolds over their eyes.



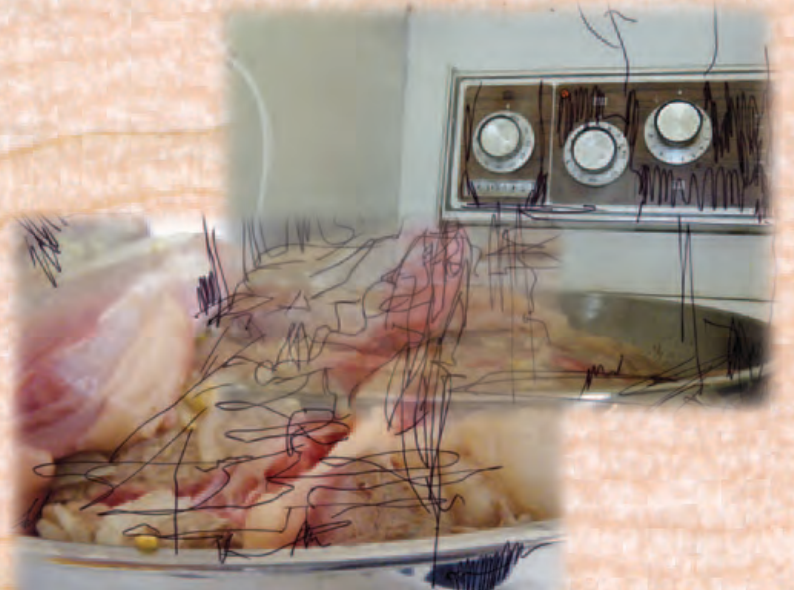
Following routine, I say not a word. I head toward the kitchen counter and place the plastic bags containing my meat bundles next to the stove. All of the cooking utensils and ingredients are already set in place. I sense a major tension between my guests and me. Something feels odd. They remain quiet as my toiling and kitchen-noise ricochets off the yellow walls of my apartment, creating volume to the previously silent space.

After I unfold the butcher's neatly taped up packages to reveal my meat bundles, I reach for a clove of garlic. I place it on the cutting board and begin to remove the outer skin; I then proceed to cut the ends off. Eventually when I have four gleaming, smooth pieces of garlic, I start dice them up into fine pieces. I pour in half a tablespoon of glistening gold cooking oil into the frying pan. As the heat from the element increases, I stare over towards my guests. There is the man with the dark hair, the woman with the blond hair, and the tall fellow with the fancy sweatshirt.



I begin to peel an onion and then I dice it up into fine pieces. The process is painful and pleasurable; the tears sting my eyes but it takes my mind off my stomach pains. The intoxicating smell of onions elevates my consciousness to a state of euphoria. When the onions are chopped, I toss them into the frying pan and mix them around with the garlic for a few minutes. As these ingredients synthesize as a powerful and seductive aroma, I toss in three juicy, dark red strip loins into the pan. As soon as the meat touches the surface, a sound so sharp and unforgiving, demands the attention of everyone in the apartment. The meat looks so handsome bunched together in the frying pan. I make sure to smother the meat in juicy yellow butter. I observe that I have captured the attention of my guests and they are now all sitting up straight as pencils appearing tense with a sense of anticipation. I let the meat soak in the flavor, periodically nudging it, pressing the garlic and onion onto the surface of my handsome, dancing meat hunks. All of my guests are sweating quite profusely. As I catch a reflection of myself on the door of my broken microwave, I notice that I too am experiencing perspiration, my forehead glistening with beads of sweat.





The scent of body odor is potent and synthesizes with the smell of the cooking and I am forced back into a state of sickness. The bubbling in my stomach begins again. Staring down at the shiny dancing flesh cuts I fear I may have another vomiting episode. I grab my stomach and pray for this to be over. It feels like the worst carsickness combined with a horrible hangover while mixed with considerable paranoia. I stare at the red sizzling, gradually browning meat cuts embellished in strong flavours. As a sharp crackle of oil spits up toward my arm, I feel an urge to run to the bathroom but I fear I won't make it. My wrists begin to shake and just before I attempt to exit the kitchen, my alarm clock goes off.

“Beeeeeeeeeeep”.

The feeling of sickness subsides and I feel relief at last. A few silent moments pass while I catch my breath and gather my head. I rise to my feet and pick up the mask from the top of the fridge. I put in on.



I speak aloud to my guests: "That's all the time for today. I will untie you and then you have to leave my apartment immediately. If you want to book another appointment, please do it by phone or e-mail."

Each person nods politely. The tall man with the fancy sweatshirt responds: "Okay". His voice is muffled from the gag.

I make my way over to stand behind where they are seated. As I untie them, I can smell the excitement on their necks. I pay close attention to the way it feels to loosen the rope on the wrists of the man with the dark hair. Each person remains quiet as I take off their handcuffs and feed my fingers through the rope knots. The smell of cooked meat and strong garlic drifts through the apartment.

Soon I am watching them rise to their feet, put on their shoes, and make their way towards the exit.

One by one, my guests quietly leave my home. I stand in the hallway for several moments after they leave.



I anxiously looked forward to getting this over with and to be alone in my space. Now that I am alone, I feel like the ghost of a ghost. I stare at the empty chairs and loose rope on the floor. I feel as if I could walk through my kitchen wall and disappear. No one would ever know that I lived here. As I clean up the kitchen, I peer outside of the window and notice a young couple walking side by side, holding hands. This reinforces my sense of being alone. The sun will soon be setting and the day has met its plateau. I light a cigarette and open a bottle of ale. I can't remember the last time I drank a glass of water. After my smoke I walk over to the chalkboard to make note of the groceries I would require for my next client.



I smell awful. I walk into my bedroom and stand still for just a moment. The room is very humid. I notice my precious red blanket sprawled across the bed. I pick it up and crawl inside. As I vanish within its folds, I curl up into a bundle, basking in my own fragile state of existence.







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## A few meditations on meat

Writing this book forced me to confront my preoccupation and fascination with meat.

I view the meat as a metaphor for the insecurities, intimacy and private nature of human lives. Meat is a personal and intimate part of living things, a biological reality that is specific to all living mammals. Recently I have initiated several conversations with different people about their relationships with meat and their experiences purchasing it. Some people seemed very particular and detailed in how they arrive on their choice 'cuts' at the butcher shop or supermarket, others not so much. Although when we look at a large variety of beef or pork in the grocery store we may just see a bounty of red and pink commodities packaged up, each piece of meat has its own specific details and characteristics. These characteristics include the cuts, lumps, skin, veins, and fat that is particular to each piece. When we look at the insides of someone or something, we become voyeurs into their flesh and body as their physical intimacies are revealed.

I view meat as a metaphor for *'the personal'*. In different situations 'meat' may appear grotesque, desirable, proud, dismal or violently displaced. The unique caverns, bumps and textures of 'meat' remind me of the fragility and vulnerability of living things.

Evan Tyler

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“Meat Bundles”

Written by Evan Tyler

All images are photographs with drawings on them.

All drawings by Evan Tyler

Photography by: Chris Bridge, Evan Tyler, Rod Tyler and Ryan Arnott.

Cast

Butcher - Butcher from “Felinger’s Meat Market”

The Customer - Evan Tyler

Mrs. Saunders - Rose Cicansky

The Woman with the Blond Hair - Steph Campbell

The Man with the Dark Hair - David Brass

The Tall Fellow with the Fancy Sweatshirt - Filmon Ogbay

A great thank you goes out to the following people who helped, supported and contributed to this project:

All of the cast, Chrystene Ells, Chris Bridge, Greg Wilkins, “Felinger’s Meat Market”, Mom and Dad, Ryan Arnott and Eva Verity.

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