

"Sleep Tight"

A creeping, melodramatic, psychological horror about a woman, in angst and heartbreak, stepping into a new world of unanswerable, devious phenomena. She attempts to live a normal life, but mysterious forces; large, blood-sucking bedbugs; and odd, secretive characters draw her into a universe of conspiracy, genetic mutation, anthropomorphism, live DNA experimentation, cross-species reproduction, and grisly murder; she is faced with the question, "is this nightmare or grim reality?" Or does it even make a difference?

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Settings:

A two-bedroom apartment in a 4-story building.
A large Victorian villa.
An underground laboratory and cavernous maze.

Main Characters:

Madison Boyd - Our star. A good-hearted and trusting young woman.
Hadley Bradley - Competitive and smart, yet petty and greedy.
Involved with Madison at the start.
Beatrice Ettinosho - Elderly resident and owner of "Ettinosho Manor".
Arturo Ettinosho - Grandson to Beatrice. Lives at the Manor.
Gordonton Applewood - Local exterminator and general lout.
Orin Mendelssohn - Businessman and friend to Beatrice.
Grant Parker - Another friend of Beatrice. Partner to Orin.

Secondary Characters:

Carrie - Madison's manager at the restaurant
Mora - Madison's coworker
Stacia - Hadley's New Girlfriend
Madison's old friend 1
Madison's old friend 2
The Detective
Lab Assistant

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Fade in. Spirals and fractals of houses, streets, and suburban neighborhoods from the eye of a satellite, spinning like tops. Bugs creep and crawl over the camera lens, while the city-scape fractals spin below. Pulsing outlines of heads, veins and capillaries cross the screen like silhouettes in the James Bond intros. "SLEEP TIGHT" hits the screen with a crescendo.

A young, twenty-something girl, Madison, sits alone, dressed in

evening wear at the kitchen counter. Her fingers tap the table: clickety-clack. She is nervous, restless. She checks out the window and starts with each sound outside. She paces the kitchen, checking her phone, waiting. She produces a cigarette and lights it. She gets some wine from the cupboard.

"Oh well," she says.

But just as she twists the corkscrew- the door swings open. Her live-in boyfriend, Hadley, enters. He takes off his nametag.

"Sorry, I-" he begins.

"I've been waiting for two hours!"

"Listen, listen, okay? It was a long day, I had to get Paul back, he was sick and he covered me before."

Madison wants to go to the restaurant like they'd planned, but Hadley insists it's too late. Things start to get heated. But they quiet with a commotion outside.

"But I made a few calls..." he says.

The door opens and people flood inside with bottles and trays of food.

They all yell. "Madison! Happy birthday!"

They all cheer and cry out. Madison is agape with surprise. She looks to Hadley, smiling. The party rages: dancing, speeches, drinking, fornicating. Madison is swimming. She is flying higher than ever before. She rises for a speech. She slurs her words, but everyone listens and laughs, and parties on.

The morning comes. She lies on the couch, disheveled, shoeless, cradling a half-gone bottle of champagne.

"I left some coffee in the pot," says Hadley, leaving for work.

She asks what happened the night before, and he makes a snide comment about her exposing herself. She asks what the problem is, why he's frustrated. They squabble slightly, and Hadley leaves with a slam of the door.

Madison has a terrible case of drymouth, her clothes are torn, she's covered with dried champagne, her eyes are tight (contacts still in from before), and her head aches. She showers. Goes to the laundromat and reads a magazine. She sees a friend and they chat briefly.

Back home, she clicks around on her computer, searching for work and writing emails. She prints a few sheets of paper and spreads them on the kitchen table. She is tired and looks at the clock: 9:30 pm. She calls a friend and hangs up at the voicemail. She turns on the radio and starts making dinner. She eats alone.

Later that night, Madison sleeps on her stomach. The outside door shuts loudly, and she hears the rustling of Hadley's return. The rustling continues, and she flinches with a sudden bang. She shuts her eyes and focuses on her breathing. The bedroom door creaks open from the dark, as Madison clenches her fists, tensing up. Hadley

walks in slowly. Shadows cover his face, we see enough in the fleeting light to know his intentions.

Madison shivers slightly, her eyes, peering toward the closet. Hadley takes hard steps as he undresses. Madison closes her eyes like she's asleep. He throws his clothes on top of her.

"What're you doing?" she says. "Can't you see me?"

"Sorry, I didn't mean it. I don't know where you are, it's dark as hell. I can't see you, it's dark, you know?"

"You could still act like I'm here. And this is my side of the bed.""

"Act like you're here? I didn't even know you were home. And I sure as hell don't know what *side* you're on!"

"Who's fault is that?"

"So what? I forgot."

Madison gets out of bed and flips on the light. She pulls her arms around her chest tightly. She paces a bit, thinking, and then looks at him closely.

"What's the deal, why are you so weird? Was it last night? I don't remember, okay? What did I do?"

"It's not about last night! So what? You were a drunk. You think I care about that shit? It's more than that."

Hadley pauses dramatically. He gathers his thoughts a bit too obviously. He is acting.

"I've been working my ass off. We're together because of me. Because of what I do. You're not a given! What do you do besides blow me? It's not good enough. What do you contribute? Nothing! You sit around and laugh, you loaf around and you do nothing! I'm at work but I know that you don't do shit! What do you get good things for? You didn't deserve it--"

"Didn't deserve- I'm trying to make something, I'm trying- stop being an asshole!"

"I want to be an asshole! And that's it. That's all. I'm sick of you. Take your things and go. That's what I want. What's wrong? You suck. That's it.

Madison composes herself for a minute and looks to the ground, shaking her head. She chuckles.

"What do you expect me to do? Have you even thought? Are you thinking now? Look, look Hadley. If you want to break up... fine. What a loss! I can live with that, but you can't kick me out! I live here.

"Not anymore you don't. You got a week. I'm renting it out. There's people coming in. And you're not signed."

"A week? Oh, so you're a landlord now? This is hilarious! Grand lord Hadley now? Stroking your beard and *evicting* your girlfriend.

Why didn't you say so? No concern whatever, huh? Two years! And you don't give one shit enough to- my god![sarcastically] I did something terrible. I stole from your wallet. 20 bucks. That must've been it! I think I understand now..."

Again, they pause. Madison waits for Hadley's response, which comes slowly.

"No, you know, it's just that, ahh, I don't like you anymore. [chuckling] I don't like you anymore."

Slap

"Fuck you and everything you ever said. Like a third-grader, 'I don't like you anymore,' you're pathetic. It was a sham! You're a bastard!"

Hadley sits motionless, slightly drooping. Trying to find the breath to say something. But he can't think of anything. The only sign of emotion is his slight grin. Madison stares at him, and Hadley looks away. She moves around the room following his eyes. He keeps looking away. She slaps him again. He hardly notices.

"Wake up, wake up! Are you alive in there? Where are your balls? What about your dick? I thought I saw them once."

"I want you out." Madison slaps him again.

"Get out! Get your shit and get out of my house. Pack your bags, put them in your piece of shit car, and park it somewhere else. Get out of here. Get out. Get out now. I don't want you around. I don't want you in my house. I don't want to look at you. Two years, they were pretty good. They were great. And guess what? They're over. [smiling] Incredible, right? Doesn't that feel good? Didn't you see something wrong? Yeah, you were clueless. Don't give me that bullshit, innocent. I don't love you."

"Love? Love?! Really? What love? Suddenly you're romantic!"

"That's right! And it's not gonna get any better. Take what you came with and get out, because we need someone better, at least someone different!"

"I don't care about that! But you can't kick me out! It's cruel and probably... probably illegal! How about I sue, you son of a bitch!"

"HA! Sue? With what? You couldn't afford the paper!"

Madison inhales sharply. She takes quick breaths.

"Okay, okay."

Red-faced, eyes welling up. She calmly walks away, then down the hall toward the entryway. She picks up to a gallop and reaches the door. She tears at it, clawing at the knob, clawing at the lock. Looks back. Claws it, finally opening. She goes on the porch, then to the lawn and gazes in different directions with each sound: leaves rustling in a tree, a distant train, a door shutting a few houses down. She runs, but there's nothing out there to help her. She runs

aimlessly for a bit, crossing yards with a few skipping steps until she hears nothing; she finds no answers, and she screams at the top of her lungs. Such a scream she has not uttered in ages.

Back at the house, Hadley hears her. He runs out. He tackles her to the ground. He tries to convince her to shut up, but she's not listening anymore. He grabs one of her feet and begins dragging her back to the house. She claws at the ground. He drags her, hand over foot. She kicks at him. He gets a good hold, and he drags her home, kicking and screaming. Finally, he gets her back inside. As the door shuts, we fade out.

Though not exceptionally cold, Madison wakes up shivering in sweat the next day. It's a spring morning, and the birds chirp outside. The sun shines through Venetian blinds. She opens her eyes with a blink. Hadley walks out, snidely telling her to drink some coffee. Madison waits for the door to close. She watches his car leave the driveway, then goes to her room. She boxes her things and takes them to her car, stuffing it from door to door.

Her moving done, she stands in the kitchen for a few minutes, thinking. She calmly walks to the coffee pot, switches the machine off, and smashes it to the floor. She leaves by the front porch, setting her key on the railing.

The inside of the bank is empty when Madison walks in. Her and the teller have a short, curt exchange. The teller counts a stack of bills. As she leaves, the register dings once.

Inside a busy coffee shop, she hangs up her phone in frustration. She flips through a newspaper, highlighting jobs and apartments. She makes another call and hangs up at the machine. Her eyes stop at an ad that reads:

Live-in Housekeeper:

Small bedroom on first floor of old Victorian home. 1-3 other occasional occupants. Room and board provided. Call 555-8924.

Madison calls the number and talks politely with the raspy voice on the other end.

"Yes. Now? Absolutely. I can be there in 20 minutes."

She sweeps her belongings from the table into her arms, dumps them into her bag, knocking over a cup. It hits the floor with a crash. She stands awkward for a moment, then slaps a dollar bill on the counter. "Sorry!" The patrons shrug in unison.

ACT II:

Madison parks her car in an intersection, takes out a pad of paper, reads the street signs, and starts down a path. "Old Victorian home..." she mumbles. She alternates between searching the houses and reading the note. She passes the manor at first, but returns to it, walking slowly, eyes agape. She checks the note again and walks to the door.

She is greeted by the owner and matron of the house, Beatrice. Beatrice is old but lively, full of energy, and welcomes Madison with great familiarity, like an old friend.

"You look great!" she says.

Madison smiles cheekily and introduces herself. She compliments the house and asks where it came from and how long it's been there, with great curiosity. Beatrice runs her hands along the railing of a massive staircase that curves around the main atrium. She picks up objects and hands them to Madison, points at paintings, and soon ushers her to the second floor, all the while giving a full history of the house. Built by her grandfather 120 years prior. Beatrice's parents grew up there, along with her and her sister. It's been in the family since then. Her and her older sister had a spat over who would inherit it some time ago, as there was little besides it to pass on. Her sister left town bitterly some time later.

As Beatrice goes through the story, Madison asks about a number of interesting objects, some of which were thrust into her hands to begin with. A table clock with a pair of jokers on the sides, a raven atop it. A snow globe contains a giant lizard crushing buildings, tiny people on the ground, and flame-licked snowflakes.

Suddenly, the conversation turns to Madison. Where she is from, how old, education, reason for coming. She composes herself before answering, but as she starts responding, Beatrice cuts her off with an "uh huh", and the next question. Madison laughs slightly at the quirk.

Back on the first floor, Beatrice outlines Madison's duties as housekeeper.

"We use real mops, not those sticky things with the disposable pads. Know how to run a mop? Good, because if it ever gets dirtier than it is right now, you're fired."

Madison stifles a chuckle, and then asks about the other possible residents. Beatrice waves it off, but says that her grandson will sometimes stay for a few weeks, along with some older friends of hers.

"They're kind of fruity".

Beatrice sends Madison to get settled in, and that work starts on the next day.

Madison stretches out on the large bed. Her boxes lay about haphazard. She takes out a stuffed dolphin and cradles it in her arms.

The next morning, Beatrice leaves early.

"I always have breakfast at Mary's".

Madison takes to work with gusto, whistling and dancing with the mop, headphones blaring music. Dusting behind all the crevices, discovering new rooms, staring at the beautiful china, and following the woodwork with a dusting wand. [√ theme throughout objects found in the house, i.e. see figures] Beatrice returns home at the end of the day, and Madison is there to greet her, all smiles, with the implements of cleanliness in her hands. Beatrice is unimpressed, but thanks her for the hard work. She glances at the house, the floor, the railings [just for show], and is content with Madison's cleaning job.

Beatrice tells Madison to take whatever she wants for dinner from the fridge and pantry and heads to bed. Madison, all smiles,

finds a sandwich [or some other easily edible meal] in the fridge. She eats it in her room, now dressed up with all of her things, boxes unpacked, etc. She lays into bed with the same contentedness she had the night before.

The days and the nights pass by for Madison. She enjoys her work; it is not too stressful, she feels she is doing something important, and Beatrice is a good boss.

One morning, Madison wakes up. She scratches at her legs just slightly, but she doesn't investigate any further. She speaks to Beatrice about having little else to clean.

Beatrice says, "Doing a good job sometimes means you'll get bored. Next time, do a shitty one."

The next morning, Madison awakes and scratches her whole body. She wonders what the matter is, and looks closely. There are bites: large red welts. She attributes it to mosquitoes, cusses a bit, and continues with her day. Beatrice eats brunch with a couple friends Orin Mendelssohn and Grant Parker. They are quite excited to meet Madison, claiming that they have heard many good things. They embellish greatly, and ask many questions: how she got there, where she was from, does she have any friends, how old she is, and her blood type (this elicits a laugh). Madison is a bit put-off by them, and she ends the conversation.

"I need to get to work," she says, putting in her earphones.

She walks about the house and scrubs a few spots that had already been cleaned. Though fully decked-out with utensils and liquids, she cannot find anything to clean. She finds herself quite bored. Orin and Grant prepare to leave, and even then, she tries to ignore them and busy herself elsewhere. But there is nothing else to do. She takes a newspaper from the kitchen to the bathroom. She reads the classified ads and circles one:

"Waitress needed at local bar and grill. Must be attractive, quick, and precise, with attention to detail. Call 555-7978. Experience preferred but training provided."

Madison calls and sets up an interview for the next day. After cleaning, she drives to work, noticing some blemishes on her face in the rear-view mirror. She meets her new boss, Carrie. It goes well, and she begins working evenings, 8 pm to 2 am. She begins working six hours each night. Beatrice, more or less, approves. More likely, she doesn't care. But truly, she does not care one way or the other.

"Fair enough," Madison says. She begins working and meets Mora, and they strike up a friendship. They find themselves working together each night. They're around the same age, and live in roughly the same conditions. Mora is sweet to Madison, giving her tips on how to approach the customers, how to present herself well, and how to get the most out of every interaction. Madison is happy to meet her, and when they work together, everything seems to come out well.

Madison mentions the bites to Beatrice, but she is rebuffed, told to ignore the bites, and keep up with her cleaning duties, which, according to Beatrice, 'have been lacking, as of late'.

The next night, Madison has a dream: she is in bed, in her old

bedroom, somewhere from her past, perhaps where she grew up. She tosses and turns, though she is smiling. Light shifts from outside; it turns from dark blue to pale silver. She suddenly wakes, and her eyes open slowly. She tilts her head toward the door, at the far end of the bedroom. It is slanted, at an angle. As she watches, it opens slowly. A creature peeks its head in, then shambles slowly toward her bed. Madison pulls the covers toward her head, tightening them around her body, but a force pulls them away from her. The same force pulls off her clothes, one by one. Her pajamas, her bra, then her underwear and anything left. She tries to breath quickly, but the air does not come. She tries to scream, but nothing comes out. The creature ambles closer. It is a huge insect, a bed bug the size of a large dog. It creeps toward her. One of its legs touches hers, then the next. Madison is splayed out on the bed, nothing protecting her. The creature mounts her, and rears an insectoid penis. It stabs her in the gut. Again it stabs her, and again. With each successive thrust she flinches up, and she tries to yell that much more. Finally she finds her voice, and with a shout, she awakes.

Madison is tired and strung out when she walks into the kitchen that morning. So it is with great surprise that she finds someone new, Arturo Ettinosh, Beatrice's grandson, eating cereal like it is any normal day. He says hello and they introduce each other. He seems to know a lot about her. One of the first things he asks is about the marks on her body.

"What? Where are they?" says Madison.

"Those. Here and here," Arturo says.

Arturo points at Madison's face, arms, legs, and other exposed skin. She runs to the bathroom, checks the mirror, and sure enough, she is covered from head to toe with bed bug bites. By this point, she had gotten quite used to the itching and the feeling of having them on her body. There was little she could do about it, besides building some sort of tolerance for the irritation. She would put her mind on other things: work, particularly.

Madison walks back to the kitchen and finishes her muffin. Arturo realizes how much he startled her with his observations, and he keeps quiet. But Madison gives him the third degree, even though they'd just met, about getting an exterminator at the house to get rid of the bed bugs or mosquitoes or whatever the hell it is that is biting her each night. Arturo claims that he knows nothing, and that he has never had any problems in the time that he has stayed there. Madison begins talking irrationally:

"You think this is nothing? Get someone over here or I'll call the police! It's not a joke! Look!" she says.

Arturo excuses himself, but Madison follows his exit. He walks to the basement and Madison tries to follow in behind him. They argue for a bit and she shuts and locks the door behind him. Madison sets to her cleaning duties emotionally and a bit angrily, lacking the joy of the days before.

Arturo calls an exterminator, Gordonton Applewood, about the infestation. They talk gingerly on the phone, and Gordonton makes his way to the house, taking his sweet time. He pokes through every little crevice in the building and her room, spouting obscenities and threats toward any creepy-crawly critter in earshot. He carries a

tank and sprayer with him, attached to his back.

Later that night, after much makeup application, Madison leaves for her waitress job. When she arrives, she is immediately ushered to the back. Her boss points out the obvious flaws in her appearance, the numerous bite marks, and tells her to take the night off. Flustered and a bit angry, Madison takes to her normal duties and begins serving the customers. She receives many strange looks and one guy at the bar tells her to "fix her face". She takes it out on him, Carrie steps up to relieve the situation, and Madison is sent, again, to the back of the restaurant. She waits in frustration for a few moments. Carrie returns and tells her to take her things. She is fired.

Back at the house, Madison returns to find Gordonton clearing out her room. She steps in, and they exchange glances.

"It's about time," she says and immediately roundabouts to one of the main rooms.

He responds after she leaves, cursing the girl, and continues his work.

Madison notices a line, an inconsistency in the hardwood floor, something like a mole tunnel in earth. She follows it to a small grating that leads to the basement, the door to which, and the contents of, had always been locked. She puts her ear to the grate and hears popping and sizzling sounds, like someone cooking a steak. She slides back and sees reflection of lights off the steel interior.

"What's going on down there?" she wonders.

She is about to open the grate with a nickel when she gets a text message on her phone. It is an old friend of hers. This friend and two others are meeting for lunch the next day. They want her to come. She hadn't seen any of them in at least a year.

"Yeah, why not?" she thinks.

She replies in the affirmative. Just then, Gordonton steps out of her room.

"I didn't find shit. You got any other crazy bitch requests?" he says, jokingly.

Madison argues with him, claiming that her bites are indications enough, that he didn't look hard enough, that he's terrible at his job, that he's purposefully trying to ruin her, and that he's a horrible human being. Gordonton laughs like it's just a normal day. Thanks her for her time, tips his hat, and walks out. Madison makes a slip-shod bed on the floor of the main room near the vent. She walks to the kitchen and takes a knife. She jabs it at the line across the floor, and slips into sleep.

The next day, Madison meets her friends for lunch. She's a bit harried and quite angry about what's been going on. She arrives and the first thing out of her mouth is bile. She lost a job, there's bed bugs eating her every night, the exterminator was full of shit, Beatrice doesn't care one bit, Arturo is a weirdo who lives in the basement, and on and on.

The friends introduce themselves: one she lived with, and the others were friends of hers that Madison hardly knew. She asks the names of the other two, a guy and a girl. They claim that they'd spent many nights together, barbecues, football games, and the like. Madison listens. The conversation pauses at one point. Little is said, and heads seem hung. Her friend (old roommate) smiles with a sudden good, solid, lively question.

"So how're you and Hadley doing?"

Madison proceeds to tell the whole story with great enthusiasm, as if it were the best thing to ever happen to her. She belittles Hadley in every way, scorches his name, and then moves seamlessly into the problems of her new life.

"Two weeks ago?" her friend says.

With dropped jaws and an awkward silence, Madison has a realization. Without skipping a beat, she articulates the idea that popped into her head with sudden ferocity.

"Why am I the one talking?" she says.

With that, the meal is over. They all rise from their chairs and leave. Little for goodbyes are said.

When Madison returns to the manor, she heads straight for her room, for her things. She begins ripping her place to pieces, bit by bit. She tears open what few boxes she has left, empties the drawers of her desk and wardrobe. Spills out her clothes and leafs through everything. She finds nothing. Finally nothing is left but the bed itself. She rips off the covers. Nothing. She rips off the sheets. Nothing. Then she flips the mattress. Against a white boxspring, she sees one tiny bug, walking about in the middle. She leans in closer, adjusting her glasses, and watches as it crawls down some hole, some crevice into the boxspring. She tries to grab it, but she's a bit too late; it got away.

She immediately takes out her phone and calls the exterminator, Gordonton. A terse conversation ensues, but he agrees to come back.

Madison stalks the house looking for Beatrice or Arturo. The basement door is still locked, and Beatrice has been gone for days. "Where is everybody? There's some bullshit going on." she thinks. She tries to unscrew the vent to the basement, but she can't find the right size screwdriver.

Gordonton arrives and sets about the room, just barely astounded by the mess inside. Madison instructs him in depth and explains what she saw, slightly exaggerated of course. Gordonton's patience is waning. He can hardly hold back from strangling her. He storms out the door and says roughly:

"I don't work for stupid, crazy bitches."

With Gordonton's exit, Madison is stunned. "What a lazy, uncaring bastard," she thinks. She spends the rest of the day poking at the basement door, sneaking around Beatrice's room, picking through her things, trying in vain to open the vent. While searching Beatrice's room, she follows a sticky substance to a bottom drawer of a chest. Deep within the drawer, behind clothing, she finds an object, innocuous at first. It's a box with mirrors. Each side can be

slid, revealing a figure, with a different one from each opening: a jester, a queen, a hunter, a priest, a magician, and a peasant. She toys with the sliding mirrors, and finds that when they are all opened, and there is only one configuration that allows it, the figure, though still humanoid, becomes faceless and undefined. At that moment, she notices a tiny bug walking along her arm. She swats it away. Two more appear on her hand, holding the glass cube. She drops it, and it crashes to the floor, a thousand pieces. Madison races to find a broom and pan. She gets back to Beatrice's room and sees the shattered glass now coated with a mass of writhing, swarming, blood-red insects.

Madison runs out of the room and shuts the door. She sits, leaning against it as she calls 911, and she speaks in nearly incomprehensible terms with the operator. Nevertheless, the operator says they will send a policeman to the house to investigate. She is relieved, but she feels some itching around her back. She turns and is horrified to see the mass of insects creeping out of the bottom of the door, crawling up and around her. She runs down the stairs, straight into Arturo's arms, recently returned.

Madison screams of what happened upstairs, and Arturo tries to calm her down. To him, she is hysterical and talking nonsense. After a few exchanges of sympathy, he asks what the real problem is. Madison notices his doubt immediately, and pulls away from him, then saying that she called the police. With that, there is a knock at the door.

Arturo opens it to a detective, who steps in out of the rain. Madison rushes to him and begins her entire story again, this time with Arturo as the major villain. Arturo chuckles slightly at some of her accusations. The detective plays it coy with Madison, and continues her train of thought.

"Yes, don't worry Miss. We've had our eyes on these folks for a long time. We've had complaints before, but nothing this detailed. You shouldn't stay here anymore. How about you get your things and take them away? We'll help you..." says the detective.

Madison agrees totally and thanks him for his help. But when Arturo lends a hand, she goes back on her tangent, and gazes with shock at the both of them.

"You should arrest *him*! Why are you doing this to me?" Madison says.

Arturo and the detective try to calm her down, saying she needs rest, that she is far too stressed to be in a place that makes her feel so. They take her back to her car with her possessions. They leave her there. She watches them go, watches from afar, in the rain, as they shake hands at the front door. The sun is low in the sky, just beneath a layer of clouds, illuminating the rain and the ground. She runs back to her car, out of the rain, and lies, staring out the window as the sun sets.

ACT III:

Later that night, Madison wakes. It is still night and she

itches everywhere. The exterminator lied to her, and the detective didn't believe a word she said, and got fooled by Arturo himself. She thinks on everything that was upsetting to her: why didn't Beatrice and Arturo ever get bitten? What was with the leaking fluid? Why were her things disappearing? What was in that basement? Why wouldn't anyone give her an answer?

Madison feels used and abused. And still, even in her own vehicle, her most secure place, she's still getting bitten. It must have all been in her mind. Like they were all telling her.

"Madison! You're doing it to yourself!"

She puts her face into her hands and weeps slightly. She looks outside for a moment, then feels the terrible, burning itching. She screams in frustration, gets out of her car, and screams again. She looks closely at one of the bites.

"They're real! They are real!" she says.

She opens up the car doors and begins tossing around her things, ripping them out of the car, throwing them on the curb. She digs through each object: flips each article of clothing, rips open boxes, spilling papers and knick-knacks. She slows to a stop when she finds an old stuffed dolphin, one that she made a point to take with her. Her most nostalgic, most secure little toy, from as long as she remembered. She wells up, and spins it around in her hands.

But she notices a tear along the underside. She pokes at it. There is a slight crunch, and she drops it suddenly. A small trickle of blood comes out. She grabs it and rips it open: a shower of fat, blood-engorged bugs spill out to the ground. She stomps them angrily.

The sun is starting to go down. She walks the street, single-minded. The house looms up ahead, clouds are brewing through the rays of the setting sun. A strong wind blows against her as she nears the house. She carries a crowbar and speaks to herself.

"I'm going to find what's in there if it kills me."

She opens the house with a key she stole and copied. She yells for Arturo, but he is nowhere to be seen and the house is empty. She hears the familiar noise coming from a grate, and sees the reflections of lights when she inspects it. She tears the grate from the wall, but can't get a good look. The basement door is beside it and she tries her key but it doesn't work. She rips it open with the crowbar.

The lights are on. There is a laboratory with a stretcher in the corner. Small vials of liquid, pink, stand in rows behind a centrifuge. Hypodermic needles lie strewn about and an IV bag hangs on a steel stand. There is a camera in the corner. She looks deeper into the room, seeing cages and a large artificial beehive. A tube leads from the hive into the wall.

"My room was right above."

"The subject must be unknowing," he says.

Gordonton, the exterminator, sits in the corner, drinking a beer. He laughs.

"You're a sweet one."

Madison grits her teeth. She yells about doing such terrible things to an innocent person. About how everything is wrong, what they're doing is wrong. Beatrice scoffs.

"I was like you once," she begins.

They argue for a few moments, Gordonton laughing and Arturo working on a new injection. Madison is strapped against the wall. Gordonton steps up close to her. She turns her head at his breath.

"You are our peach, open up," he says.

She is about to spit, but he covers her mouth with his hand. She kicks him, and he doubles over with a groan. He's about to beat her but Arturo stops him.

There's some discussion of the plot. Arturo is going to take Beatrice's modified bedbug DNA, and inject it into his own blood while inside an incubator of sorts. Beatrice and Gordonton watch as he does this. They then make a few calls to some folks.

Madison's boss and coworkers show up with champagne. "This is your final moment," they say. She screams at them. More shouting while Arturo and another doctor work away.

"Stop him!" Madison yells.

But they dance and drink instead. Others join in, including Orin and Grant, Beatrice's partners. They join her and open wine bottles, passing around drugs. They give some to Madison.

"All you need to do now is watch, and you won't need to worry any more," they say.

Madison was getting quite tired, but she perks up with the cocaine.

"So you knew me? You picked me?" she says.

They all respond in the affirmative, derisively. She asks for reasons. No one answers. Madison thinks to herself, running through possibilities. She thinks about her entire life up to this point, everything she had ever gone through, and all of the strange things she had seen and done. She stops at Hadley for a moment, and figures that he had some part in it all too.

Still the work rages on. And Madison is still helpless. She ignores the taunts and threats around her, as she feels about her restraints. She's heard their plans and whatever will come out of that incubator, whatever wicked, wretched creature is created, whatever future is being built, here, she must end. Her crowbar is still on the floor, and she sees a few other implements around she could use. She's still feeling about the restraints, hiding that fact as well, even as she screams at them, and they yell in return.

Arturo yells for her to shut up, as he and the doctor step into the incubator. Gordonton puts a strip of duct tape over her mouth. She waits until they all turn away, slips out of one of her restraints, undoes the rest, grabs the crowbar.

"What now bitches!"

She swings the claw straight into Gordonton's cheek, rips it

out, grabs the bloody end, and stabs him straight in the gut. Carrie and the other girls scream. Madison pulls it out, smacks them both with the blunt side. Beatrice flings a vile of acid at her, it hits Carrie in the back of the head, splattering her and the other girl. They scream and hit the floor.

Madison turns to Beatrice, who runs down a hallway. Orin and Grant block the door to the incubator. Grant takes a gun out of his pocket clumsily, fires one shot before Madison knocks it out of his hand, stabbing it with the sharpened claw, as well. He falls, writhing in agony. Orin punches Madison solid in the face and Grant, on the floor, stabs her in the calf with a pen knife.

She falls, grabs the gun, and tries to fire at them both, but it jams. She pistol-whips Orin in side of the knee. Then beats on Grant with the gun until he stops moving.

Madison edges away from the door. The emergency siren wails. Reflections of red lights bounce around the room. Shadows move from within, darting quickly. A yell, turns to a gurgling sound. Steam issues from the opening door, as the seals release. Madison pushes up against the back of the room and scans for a hiding place. Another door was locked by Beatrice as she hurriedly left the lab. The door opens, and the doctor who entered with Arturo slumps to the floor, mangled.

"YES! HAAAAHA," Arturo says, or whatever it is that he has become.

He is shrouded in mist as he exits the incubator.

"Beatrice was the breeder. She's been cross-breeding variations into bigger, stronger, more resistant strains, since before we were even born. A thousand transients have come through these doors, bringing better and stronger bugs every day. When there was such a push, long ago, to eradicate the little critters, she had pity upon them, and saw such potential in their vampirism and method of reproduction. Somebody had to keep them alive, and she did it! I was one of those wayward transients. I never felt comfortable in my own skin, and when I found out about her research, I knew I had found my destiny. And here I stand, the fruit of that labor! A wonder of modern medicine, gene therapy, and DNA manipulation."

"Oh, I'm sorry. Am I boring you? No? You just don't believe me, do you? Maybe a game is more to your liking. How about it. Let's play "Doctor"! You show me yours and I'll show you my proboscis. Oh, you'd rather go second? I'll start..."

As he removes his clothing, bit by bit, he reveals sectional bits of a carapace, hard outer shell pushing against his skin, starting at his chest, moving down to the groin, where a large, sharpened insectoid penis pulses beneath a layer of skin on his thigh. Madison yelps and turns away at the sight.

"What's the matter? Are you scared of what might happen when I ram this insect cock inside you? It probably won't hurt much; the semen functions as an anaesthetic and blood coagulant. Who knows what will happen? That's the beauty of it! Hundreds of hybrids could burst from your body, the spawn on man, insect, and knowledge."

Madison pushes up against the far door, but it is locked. She looks through the window and she sees Beatrice grinning from the other side. Madison pounds on the door, and Beatrice smiles and laughs excitedly.

Beatrice mouths the words, "You are chosen."

Madison turns back around.

Arturo says, "What am I convincing you for? An experiment of such grand importance does not need the validation of your consent. I'll just lock this door--"

Right as he is about to turn the lock, Hadley bursts through.

"Madison! I always knew, and I couldn't let it keep going- what the fuck?!"

There is a struggle and Arturo fucks Hadley to death, blowing his load in the process. Madison beats on Arturo with the crowbar, but she can't seem to hurt him, and the claw cannot puncture his exoskeleton. She ends up scraping off bits of his skin. By that point, he is unaffected, however. The sexual force pervading him is so all-enthraling, and his body is nigh-impenetrable, that she can do nothing but watch. But she tries to break out the other door, though it is blocked by the copulating two. She eventually opens it enough to squeeze out, but only after she had been forced to watch a half-man, half-bedbug rape the insides of her ex-boyfriend.

Arturo lays atop the mangled Hadley, catching his breath. Madison limps out the door and shuts it behind her. She searches through the other lab and finds vials of liquids. She sniffs through a few of them and finds a few with harsh vapors. She hears pounding at the door behind her and throws the vials at the ground. She turns on a Bunson-burner and cranks the flame up high. She takes a flat piece of cardboard and pushes the liquid underneath, all the while he bashes on the door, denting it.

"Second wind, baby. I know you've been waiting and wanting," he yells, in an inhuman voice.

"Wanting you to die!" Madison yells.

She steps back and ignites the liquid. Glass pops, vials break on the other side. The monster lets out a scream of pain. The pounding on the door stops. Madison takes the crowbar and looks for a way out. She climbs the stairs and finds that a large, metal, vault-like door now blocks the exit. She tries a few times with the crowbar, but no luck. She rushes back down and looks into the prison cells. She knocks over the bedbug hive and begins stabbing at the walls, to little avail. Time is running out. She hears the groans of the monster waking, and the flames die down. She looks back to the vials, but cannot find a flammable one. She sets up a sort of defensive position with the table and the vials behind her.

"Even if they're not flammable, maybe they can still hurt him," she says.

The flames have shrunk, and the pounding on the door begins anew. The dents get bigger, and a hand finally punches through. The monster rips out the door at the hinges.

"Just stay still," it says.

Almost all of Arturo's skin has been either scraped away or burned off by this point. Antennae trail behind it like a bride's wedding train. It's mouth has become mandible jaws, with a single sucking straw that flicks out like a snake's forked tongue. The legs are long and sinewy, but covered with large scales, red, organic, flexible, medieval plate armor. Its eyes are beady and set deep inside the skull, all black. Its back is flanged out, extending past the legs, like a fat, pointed cape. Its waist narrows thin to the backbone. Hairs, or thick, hollow extensions, cover its body, spaced 4 inches apart, each 6 inches long.

Madison screams obscenities at the creature and flings the vials one at a time. They don't even break against the monster's pliable exoskeleton. She tosses out liquid at it, adrenaline rushing. The liquid splashes, but does nothing. The creature laughs deep and slow, and advances ponderously, though it is evidently quite dextrous.

But nothing stops the monster. Madison rushes to one a prison cell, and slams the gate behind her. She trembles with the crowbar in her clutches. Through her eyes, there is no escape, no way to stop the creature. She consigns herself, in a moment, to accept her fate, to receive whatever horrible end awaits her, to accept death in the present form or to perform the act herself soon, in the face of a fate all the more horrific.

But there is a rumble. A shaking. A continuous crash, like a freight train thundering by. The house shakes, shudders back and forth. The crashing gets louder, the house begins to rip from its bearings. The ceiling boards, once so stout, flutter and lift from the bolts, one by one, swept up into a torrential whirlwind. Madison feels the wind pulling her, but the bars of the prison hold her in, and the weight of the surrounding bedrock holds the door tight.

The creature laughs mockingly at the storm, at first, daring the natural catastrophe to stop his progress. But as it rages closer, the monster's concern rises. Its beady eyes widen and it grasps at the prison door that swings to the inside. The storm whips every object, ripping apart the laboratory as if it were made of paper. The monster grasps the bars of the prison cell, and its feet lift from the ground. Madison, pressed against the bars, still grips her crowbar tightly, and through the raging wind, smashes the finger of each claw, until one last remains.

With a final strike, the monster loses his grip, smashes against the remains of the lab like a pinball, before finally flying off into the great turmoil above.

The whirlwind ends and Madison steps out of the cell, still shaking. Everything is gone, all that was not tied down. The roof, or floor above, is gone. So many dead people and bits of everything, scattered everywhere. Beatrice hangs dead, squeezed through the jagged glass window of a door, swinging back and forth.

Madison still grips the crowbar, but her pace is slow, walking back up to the ground level, wading through mounds of busted wood and broken everything. She steps on the clock with the jokers and the raven, now broken. As she climbs to the surface, the clouds part, and the sun's rays peek through. She drops the crowbar and walks away, loose.