

an origination short story
CORPORA VILIA
(Worthless Body)
written by
Jan C J Jones



sketch by Greg Kimmett

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What I know of myself, I would not have known but for the corpse upon which I had fed.

Prior to, I survived owing to basic senses and primordial instincts. I found food, ate and defecated. Thought - chaotic. Memory - unreliable or nonexistent. I could not speak. I felt pain and remembered the ground-smell where it happened but forgot how it came to be. I could not understand words but sensed their intent. I knew safe scents and innately recognized who and what I should fear. If I pondered my existence, it was in fleeting dreams, forgotten upon waking. Of the least, I was less.

I was born of my father's sin, forcibly perpetrated against his younger sister who kept the secret and hid her shame. During the months after her brother's attack, she attempted to purify her body in ways both conventional and unproven that she might expel the forbidden life that grew within her. All failed.

After giving birth, she vanquished the secret by discarding the unwanted, unwelcomed... *thing*. Upon seeing the grossly misshapen, malformed newborn, she felt no remorse or pity when she disposed of the infant among the refuse at the place where pigs scavenged and corrupt men were hung on wood placed upright in the ground on the highest points to suffer humiliation or die. I would have been devoured and my suffering prevented but Girl-Now-Young (a whore's daughter) mistook me for an orphaned piglet. She hid me and raised me as her pet until she was, herself, taken into service. Without her protection, I was cursed at, kicked, beaten, broken, violated, cut and stabbed. Cruelty and brutality taught me to fear. Fear was a precious gift for which I was thankful as it kept me safe.

Hideously deformed and unable to speak, I suffered countless abuses that caused me to bleed and scar. When my bones were broken, I cried, but had no voice to cry out. Such noise would have lured others who, seeing me agonized and vulnerable, might do more harm to me. I embraced silence. My remaining invisible was the better strategy. I scavenged in the shadows where even the most starved of pigs disdained. There I found and ate dead, decomposing things.

The one place I feared most was the steep abyss formed between mountains of waste where sludge flowed. After a time, men hung on wood would be taken down. The dead could be retrieved by their loved ones for proper burial. Abandoned bodies, near-dying or dead, were thrown into the abyss where they putrefied into a blackened, glutinous, heaving mass infested with maggots and worms. Once in, there was no escape.

I became a creature of the night to avoid those who would hurt me. They called me *Monster* as I lacked a man's full form. I was hideous and people hated to look at me as I reminded them of their own loathsome imperfections.

I spent the day deep within tomb-caves as few came there. I could stay long periods within, eating what crawled upon the stone floor and walls. Occasionally, a winged-one fell from the darkness above. I ate what little there was of the tiny creatures, sucking from their gut, meals of insects, fruit or blood. I began to catch them and knew which ones yielded what flavor. Their numbers were constant and plenty. They sustained me and gave me strength.

I lapped-up sweet water that collected in shallow pools. Warm water springs accepted me; their radiant warmth soothed my wounds and penetrated my body as if healing all that was wrong. But the day's twilight revealed no miracles.

My detestable existence would have continued had I been able to ignore the echoes and torchlight that piqued my curiosity one evening. I quietly crept toward the cave's front chambers to discover a secretive gathering within a side chamber. A small group of men and women intently listened to a Word-Man who spoke in a quiet voice. Among the group was Girl-Now-Grown who had saved me as an infant. I didn't understand Word-Man when he spoke, but I decided he was significant from the reverence given him. So mesmerized and drawn was I by his voice's tone and rhythm, I was surprised by three men who seized and dragged me from my hiding place. I struggled and fought against them as an animal before slaughter. In seeing my hideousness, the people gasped and withdrew from me, but the Word-Man spoke and dispelled their fears.

The Word-Man approached and reached out his hands to my captors; they released me. I longed for the safety of the deeper cave and wanted to run back into that refuge, but they would certainly follow. I had no other choice but to submit myself to their tortures, knowing, once done, they would probably leave me there to bleed and die as others had.

I fell, trembling at the Word-Man's feet anticipating the pain that he would surely inflict upon me. Instead, the Word-Man spoke with a voice that was not angry, frightened or threatening and he gently laid his hand on my malformed shoulder. *Who would dare to touch my pallid, scarred skin?* The hand's warmth was like that of the warming pool and flowed through my entire body. To cover my nakedness, another of the men covered me with a cloth garment that was supple and clean. Recognizing me, Girl-Now-Grown placed a wooden bowl on the ground near me into which a second poured fresh goat's milk. *What was expected of me?* I tried lapping it up and heard the people stir, whisper and... titter.

The Word-Man knelt and gently raised the bowl to my mouth to help me drink. Unsure, I looked into his face and knew compassion for the first time since being a child's pet. *Did he not see I was a scavenging animal?*

As I drank, a young boy ran in with excited words that alarmed the people and caused them to run from the chamber. Left alone, frightened and uncertain, I scrambled back into the cave's depths for safety. Having hidden, I watched as soldiers entered the now vacated chamber. Finding nothing and no one, they left.

The bowl and blanket became precious possessions. From that night forward, I drank water, but only from the bowl as I had been taught. I wore the cloth as all true men do. Wanting to know more about those people, the Girl-Now-Grown, and the Word-Man, I searched for them some nights. I was careful to not be seen by the soldiers whose rage I'd known and who caused so much trouble for these people. On occasion I would find them gathered in different places; sometimes a cave or in a man-made dwelling. I watched how they acted toward one another; they touched and held one another, they smiled and made joyful sounds. I fleetingly recalled moments like those when I was a child's pet.

One night the Word-Man shared food with those who were familiar and always among the various groups who covertly gathered to hear the Word-Man speak. This night, there was sadness as they ate and drank. Upon the Word-Man's invitation, they mimicked his actions; their hunger seemed wholly satisfied by small bits of food. They briefly drank from a shared vessel and their thirst was quenched by just a taste. When this gathering ended, I watched all of them leave in separate directions. I followed the Word-Man and watched him kneel, where he spoke solemn words aloud to... no one. And he cried as I had with injury.

Seeing his pain, I wanted to return the kindness he had once shown me. I quietly approached and tore from my man's-garment a swatch of cloth that he might wipe the tears from his face. Unafraid, the Word-Man accepted my gift with genuine gratitude. He briefly smiled and nodded before leaving that place. He bade me *go away*, but I continued to follow and watched from the shadows as soldiers seized the Word-Man; he remained serene and didn't struggle.

Many, many nights later, as I was scavenging on a hill (within the Gehenna as it was called by men), the sky flashed erratic, blinding light and bellowed angrily. Drenching rain caused the ground to soften. When I gazed up to question the lights' source, I saw many more men had been hung on wood. Suddenly, the sky exploded with countless flashes to reveal the Word-Man was among them. His hands and feet were fastened to the wood with metal sticks. His head and body bled; the blood ran to mix with the mud at my feet. Soldiers stood close by, so I couldn't approach him. His suffering caused me great sorrow and I

wondered what he had done to be so mistreated. He was not deformed. He had shown me kindness. Perhaps *that* was his offense.

Another burst of light was followed by a great noise that shook the ground and caused one of the wood trees to fall. I tried to run, but the mud held firm; the beam landed atop me. A thick splinter pierced my skin, entering my back then quickly exiting, without tearing into muscle. It fastened me to the wood. I heard a bone crack, and felt stabbing pain as the weight pushed me deeper into the mud. I struggled to lift my head from the mud to breathe, but liquid refuse filled my mouth.

I would have died there, but a group of soldiers lifted the wood tree to put it, and its prisoner, upright. The splinter peeled away, broke and remained in me. The mud securely held me. I strained to lift my head to find the Word-Man looking at me through his bruised and black-swollen eyelids. His sideways gaze incited a soldier to angrily grasp his spear and head for me, but a second soldier kicked me hard; once... twice. My ribs cracked. A third blow freed me from the muck and I tumbled into a forcefully flowing refuse stream that had formed far below. The soldiers dared not follow. The stream's current dragged me toward the abyss.

As I fought against the flow, I understood man's loathing for me. But for the first time, I felt hatred for those who would hurt one such as the Word-Man. Knowing where I was headed, I surrendered to my fate. As I neared the precipice, the wood splinter snagged and caused my body to rotate. I grasped onto a low-growing bush and questioned if there was any purpose to save myself, then I remembered the kindness that had been shown to me. *Why had the Word-Man and his following shown me kindness? Did I have worth in this world?*

I pulled myself onto firmer ground.

I returned to the cave and cried for the Word-Man beyond my pain. I wondered how I might help him to escape the damnable wood and incessant torture, but I struggled to help myself. I was so very weak. Immense pain forced me to still myself. I slept and yearned to enter forever-sleep. Days passed, nights lapsed. The cave creatures blanketed me with their filth and awaited my body to rot, but...

I awoke. My disbelief and frustration distressed me more than my body ached. Angry, I sorely felt for the splinter, seized it, and tugged it from its anchor. That place burned; the pain wasn't greater, just different. Given the opportunity, I would destroy those wood trees. If I tried, but failed, the soldiers would certainly grant me a swift death.

I smelled burial incense; its fragrance stimulated my appetite and compelled me to leave the cave. But the entrance had been blocked by a large stone that I could not have moved even with full strength. A new corpse had been entombed and I considered it. Although I had always avoided eating the flesh of man, I knew

this body would sustain me for a time. Rotting flesh was just rotting flesh from a now worthless body. The flavor would change once the crawling-things began to devour it. I could eat those, too.

The corpse was fresh and had been caringly prepared. It was covered in linen cloth anointed with sweet, fragrant oils. I would not disturb the veil that obscured the face as to avoid my recalling this body had once been more in life than what it was to me now.

I pulled back the stained cloth that covered one hand; the wrist held the wound made by metal sticks. He had been hung on wood and had died there. I tasted the fluid that seeped from the gash, then tore away a shred of skin with my teeth. Salty. Sweet. The flesh was tender and assured nourishment. I drew into my mouth congealed blood from the wound and... immediately felt a peculiar warm intensity flow through me. Unexpectedly, my head was suddenly on fire and I could see nothing, but perceived *everything...* shown to me as an explosive rush of concentrated, cold-brilliant light that scorched my eyes from within. The pain was beyond the worst I'd ever experienced.

I struggled to maintain my balance. My body burned and craved cold water. I moved as quickly as I could, but memory of the path I knew to the pools became indistinct. Suddenly, a powerful internal jolt caused me to careen backwards to be slammed against the stone. Piercing pain cut throughout my body. I fell to the floor and a paralyzing sleep overtook me.

Pain gave way to lucid dreams, hallucinations, and nightmares that recounted all of my life, from illicit conception to my current state. King David's wives had birthed numerous sons, but only one daughter had he. She had been defiled by a half-brother and from that disgrace had been born a repugnant creature. I relived the brutal humiliation of my conception, the shameful pain of my birth and every abuse that had caused my injuries which had been more severe than my feeble mind could comprehend. My body began to twist and contort.

Suddenly, I knew and understood *all* things. I recalled the Word-Man's speaking to those who gathered in the cave. I *knew* his words, as they suddenly had *meaning*.

He said, "Fear not. He is a creature of God and means no harm. You see his scars; he has known great pain, rejection and terror, as we have. He is an innocent, injured in all ways, and is in great need. We must help him."

And they covered my nakedness and gave me milk.

As He helped me drink, He said, "Whether you live in light or in dark, God is with you. You are loved."

His absolute, unconditional acceptance of me tortured my soul.

That night, when I saw the Word-Man offered bread and shared a cup with those closest to him, he bade them, "Eat this bread. It is my body. Drink this wine. It is my blood. Do this in remembrance of me and you shall have everlasting life."

This corpse was that of the Word-Man's whose dead body had been taken down from the wood, tenderly prepared for burial, and secured in this cave-tomb. I had committed a great atrocity, yet my actions were innocent. I *knew* I was not evil. It was revealed to me the corpse was the Son of God. I understood my destiny was aligned with the fate of mankind. I would reign until the end of times as a prince of man and disciple of death.

I *had* eaten the Word-Man's flesh. I *had* tasted His blood. For this violation, my soul was torn from my body and I was damned to everlasting life... in *this* world! I would never glimpse divine rapture, nor would I endure the fires of hell. I would exist between those endless, eternal worlds. The instant I *knew* what I had done, a sweltering heat rose from my chest, pierced my throat, and I screamed my first spoken words with excruciating pain, "My God!" as forceful seizures twisted my sinews and caused my bones to break, rejoin, and mend. I would become perfect in His image. Unlike the first was created and perished, I would be extant beyond all that would ever live.

My tortured agony brought gruesome pleasure as my deformities were violently corrected. I was reshaped from repulsive misshapen creature, and transformed into an entity that would be both dreaded and revered. My soul had been extracted and I was immortal. My thoughts became clear, and my mind focused as I was remade perfect by God's hand. I knew it was He whom I would faithfully serve until He, alone, commanded my annihilation. I became a malevolence unholy transgressors would come to fear and was given free will. I could do NO wrong.

My capabilities were unknown and mysterious to mortals; unstoppable power, levitation, transformation, foresight and premonition, knowledge and understanding beyond all-knowing. My senses were heightened beyond imagination. My thoughts manifested reality as I could manipulate any living thing to execute my will. I strode as a god among men.

I wakened from my dream-walk and went to drink. I threw myself, prostrate, onto the stone floor before the pool, drew in the cold water and drank deeply. The intense fire that burned within me would not extinguish; the perpetual thirst could not be quenched. Gazing into the pool, I had no reflection. Yet, I could see and feel my arms and legs; they were straight, strong and proportioned. My skin was smooth, unblemished, translucent and devoid of scars. As I had once endured an insufferable existence, I now had to

accept my new being. I embraced the consequences that had come of my transgression. What I dreamed had come to fruition. I knew myself, absolute; complete.

When I returned to the chamber of the cave-tomb, the Word-Man's corpse was gone. In its place there was fertile earth, dark-laden with his blood. I collected it as I knew it to be precious; it held His life-essence and would ensure my eternal strength.

The stone no longer blocked the entrance. I entered the tranquil night as a man reborn with insight and purpose. I revisited those places that had resulted in pain; the memories were lucid and motivated me. I sought out those who had mistreated and violated me. I avenged myself. At the instance of death, my *victims* realized who I was, and they knew the reason for their slaughter. The terror in their eyes delighted me as much as their blood replenished me; I extracted every drop. I felt no remorse in my savagery. Their souls were forbidden a consecrated close as I returned their sand to the earth, unmarked.

Neither the Girl-Now-Grown nor any of the Word-Man's followers were to be found as they had fled in many directions. In truth, I had no reason to seek them out except to give them thanks. But *they would lack comprehension*. I allowed them to find peace and sought them no more.

The nights that followed were charged with terrified screams from soldiers who had brought misery upon the Word-Man and his following. In fulfilling the obligations of my divine ordination, I desired a better existence and surrounded myself with spoils. Over time, I accumulated my victims' most cherished possessions as mementos. Those tokens became immaterial trinkets that merely occupied empty spaces. *When I could have all, I wanted none*. However, the collection chronicled the progression of history, a somewhat valuable aspect for one unaffected by time.

As to my appearance, I could not guarantee an accurate description. As I have no soul, I have no reflection. A few have constructed my portrait, but my visage manifests from the perceptions of my beholders. *Are portraits true to my likeness, or that of the artists'?* To have looked at me was to view oneself as reflected from a side-show "mirror-of-truth" that exposes horrific fallacies hidden by fabricated façades. (As one would surmise, I had no use for trickery or "smoke and mirrors.") Among the paintings, there were similarities of skin pallor, angular features, and eye color, but no two portraits were the same. Try as they may, anyone who sought me out did not know who, or what, to look for. Such endeavor was as "a dog chasing its tail" or foolishly snatching at mist in prospect of seizing something substantial and real. I was and... I was not.

It gave me the greatest pleasure to watch a man's face fill with terror as he gazed at me. His heart was black, hence his alarm at seeing himself, in truth. Thus, these miscreants gave themselves away to me as my

victims. I never failed them as I delivered swiftly that which they presumed would come. *How many have there been?* Who would, or could, maintain such a count? Church records and government census endeavor to chronicle humans' existence. Registries that survive fire, flood, electronic failure, or human incompetence become untrustworthy after only a few generations. Even graveyards' impressive stones, boldly engraved and constructed of the most durable materials so as to "last throughout eternity," melt away with time. Subsequent generations are harried, disinterested and too self-absorbed to remember souls that preceded their own. *Not even God inventories death. His business is with the living.*

As centuries passed, some knew me as an eccentric, powerful and wealthy man. The focus of my God-deeds varied with events in history. I was harried during war, and there was always war... somewhere. I learned that trying to end war was a fruitless effort as there were always bloodthirsty, unrighteous, greedy men on every side. To prevent war was futile. Choosing a side disinterested me, as I feasted on those who acted with unnecessary cruelty or unjustified brutality especially against the innocent or powerless. War provided the means to rid the world of scores of scoundrels. Never did I see complete goodness within the collective of one side or that of the opposition. I found entertainment in (and excelled at) making their deaths look believably... *natural*. My only regret was that blameless men perished needlessly in war.

I've been called many names; Angel of Death, Malach HaMave, Abaddon, Dark Angel, Spectre of Death, Grim Reaper, Mrtyu, Hel, Yánluó, Giltiné, Nosferatu. Born of royal blood from the sacred house of David, I am the Prince of Darkness... vampire. Any like me who have followed are my sons and daughters, created of my love for, or hatred of, them as human beings. They may wander the earth as solitary, miserable, friendless creatures or administer my schemes as organized assemblies. Although one may glimpse my shadow, no one truly sees my approach. *Pray that we never cross paths as you (your deeds) will be summarily judged and justice will be swift. Be anxious not about dying. Death will assuredly come. Contemplate rather how you live your life to determine the treatment and destiny of your soul.*

Story was inspired by the Biblical account of the rape of Tamar.

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Artist: Canadian-based artist / illustrator Greg Kemmitt's work can be found at www.wonderfunders.com and www.facebook.com/The-Art-of-Greg-Kimmitt-948272585280079/

Jones and Kemmitt have collaborated (along with other creatives) on Wonderfunder comic short stories including "If You Love Me..." an illustrated poem that raises awareness in support of the fight against human trafficking; book available on Indyplanet.