

Tongue

Samantha Henderson

3/7 – 10421 mi 12.5 g.

3/14 – 10706 mi 11 g.

3/30 – 10945 mi 12.5 g.

God help me. Its tongue is just like a parrot's, like a huge, scaly black worm. It's rubbing it all over the passenger window like it's trying to taste me.

This is the mileage notebook Steve makes me keep in the glove compartment. And a blunt pencil stub. He wants me to make notes whenever I fill it. Something to do with gas mileage. Or engine performance. I used to keep up with it, but now I forget to do it a lot. That's why it's mostly blank.

The tongue's scraping across the glass, the metal. It's a horrible sound. Like

5/2 _ 14671 mi 11.5 g.

5/20 – 14820 mi. 10 g. OIL CHANGE

lapping. A wet sound. Why? It looks so dry, that tongue. I was waiting in the car already, that's why they didn't

waiting

in the car already, waiting for him to stop pottering around, making sure all the lights are off, the gas is off, whatever. When he finally locked the door and hopped down the steps they were there. Looked like they were coming from the back yard. Those impossible things.

Ferry Ferydacti Pteridact

Pterodactyls

I think. They've got that look to their wings, not that I've seen one before except in movies, books, Disneyland, when you take the train Back to the Days of the Dinosaurs, and they're sitting on a cliff with their wings up like Dracula, looking mean and watching the T Rex and the ~~Stegisoris~~ Stegosaurus fighting, about to get covered in lava.

But something's wrong with their heads. They aren't birdlike or pointy at all; they have heads a little like turtles', huge turtles, with a big cruel parrot's beak and later I saw that

tongue.

They came flapping down the driveway, three of them, flying a little like parrots and a little like bats and a little like hummingbirds, weird as it sounds, because they seem to be able to hover in the air.

Something in the street behind the car. Something with a pink dress, pulled to its waist. Red pulp where a head should be.

8/3 - 16034 mi 13 g.

8/14 – 16341

8/21 –

9/1 _

No one else on the street. Did they kill everyone? Maybe they're everywhere. Maybe they're just a weird thing from our backyard, and crawled away underground. Maybe we're a grisly mystery. I've given up hope that I'm dreaming.

Steve froze when he saw them. I've let a dream escape; I've been careless about my subconscious and they'll be gone in a minute. Be gone be gone. But they're not gone.

It's back rubbing the glass, looking at me with that glazed, golden eye. How long before it tries to break the window?

Steve just stood there, and there was a roaring in my ears and I might've been telling him to come on, come *on* into the car *now*, just like I have to tell him to come on and stop poking and poking around the house and *hurry* the hell *up* we're going to be *late*. Or I was just moving my lips and nothing was coming out. That happens a lot, in my dreams.

I had the door, the passenger door, half-way open and my foot on the ground. They didn't see me, not yet. They were flapping in that odd, still way around Steve and he looked at them as if it was the second coming, for crying out loud. As if they were things of beauty and wonder and the angelic music was playing in the background of some sappy movie where the scientific hero and the romantic heroine

just found the nest of dragons or fairies or itty baby dinosaurs. Not us. Not us.

One landed in front of him, about his height, but the knees were bent and springy.

If they were straight it'd be a foot higher.

There are hooks topping the middle wing joint, just like in the movies. That's an observation. That's field notes. I hope it's useful.

9/14 -

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~~YOU DIDN'T THINK I SAW YOU~~

Car wash

Car wash

Steve and the creature are looking into each other's faces and the thing, the teri-
pteri pterodactyl tilts its head like the little baby dragon would, and Steve moves his
head closer, and starts to make soothing, clucking noises, like it's a scared dog.

I could've told him. It ripped his face. Off.

He staggered back, his hands beating at the thing, and a spray of red across the
creature's wings. I screamed as loud as I could. I didn't hear anything.

You didn't think I saw you, did you? Seats tilted back, you kneeling at her altar.

She splayed, lost to the world, pink dress to her waist. Your

tongue.

Lapping.

I can't get the smell out, however much I have them spray with New Car, with Baby Powder, with Spring Fresh, with Christmas Cheer.

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Car wash

Car wash

All I could think of was *bird, bird*, and how those birds at the beach try to draw you away from their nests by pretending to have a broken wing. I got out of the car and staggered away from the door.

The standing, red-spattered thing, and the two hovering things, turned and look at me. They looked as surprised as reptiles could.

One let out a raucous cry, the other flying thing seemed offended, because it flew at it, beating it away with its wings.

I yelled to Steve. "The car! Get over to the car!"

The standing creature was hopping towards me slowly, tilting its head again. Trying to figure out what I was.

I beat the top of the car, hoping Steve could still hear if he couldn't see.

"Steve!" My voice was hoarse, brackish. I sounded a right nag.

He heard, hands held to the red ruin of his face, and he staggered toward the car, to the driver's side.

The second p t e r o d a c t y l succeeded in driving away the third, and tuned back to me. They both looked less puzzled and more inclined to spring. I dove inside the car, slamming and locking my door, and reached across the seats, shoving the driver's door open and grabbing Stevie by the shirt.

I don't know how I did it. Everything was still dreamlike (how did they get out? Ask yourselves *that*). But I hauled him in and crawled across his body, slamming and locking his door too before the creatures could snatch at him.

He was making a sobbing sound, but through a thick burble of blood. The right side of his face was ok, but the left

Stop it. Stop it with the tongue, damn you. It's obscene.

The left was a wet web of muscle and tendon. I could see the sheared sides of the jawbone, with splintered bits sticking to the raw flesh. What's left of the tongue was a mangled stump that moved, piteously, behind jagged, broken teeth. The eye

the right eye

was dangling out of it socket. The other, so kind and brown and whole, looked at

me, pleading.

I struggled not to vomit

(The way your hands gripped her thighs, the way her feet flexed on your shoulders made me sick)

I need a weapon. I keep a claw hammer beneath the seat, just in case I'm stuck alone at night. When I grope for it I find the handle. All sticky. Oil? But the claws are thick with something red. Something black. And so are my hands. ~~Someone's~~ something's leaking.

I have to move him so I can drive out of here. But he's got the keys. I left mine on the dining room table.

He had them in his hand; he locked up.

I look through the windshield and see them on the driveway. Where he dropped them.

I don't know what I can possibly do for him. I keep on thinking I should've had a first aid kit in the car, besides the hammer; I always meant to get one. But I don't know if some Band-Aids and a bottle of Bactine are going to do much for Stevie.

I pat his shoulder.

I say "Try to breathe slowly."

~~What comes out is, "that'll teach you."~~

I didn't say that. "Try not to move. Somebody's got to be coming. Someone'll be here soon."

I don't understand, and maybe if you're reading this you can explain it, but I can't see anyone up or down our street. This time of day there's a ton of kids on scooters, parents watching them, and people walking back and forth with grocery bags. But now, nothing but the headless thing in pink behind us. It looks like a ghost town. I can't hear anything at all out there, except the scrape of the creatures' claws on the cement as they circle the car, tapping the sides sometimes with their wings.

And that tongue.

I'm sure I would've heard about it if pterodactyls had started swooping out of the sky, snatching up the neighborhood kiddies.

Stevie's good eye closes and his breathing is slower. I try to tell myself that's a good thing.

There's blood on the notebook.

I can't hear Stevie's breathing anymore.

I think they figured out the windows can break. One's flying into the windshield again and again. The safety glass is already cracking at the edges. Soon it's going to shatter and how long before it gets through? One minute? Two?

The other one, the one that stayed keeps disappearing around the corner of the house and coming back to see if anything's changed. This time it's got a long pink thing dangling from its beak. I hope it's from the inside of an opossum instead of

It's almost through. It's almost through. I'm going to make a run for it. Maybe it'll get a claw stuck in the glass. I can't do anything for Stevie. His eye lies on his cheek and looks at me reproachfully.

Maybe

God help me

Maybe it'll eat on him a while

The other one's gone around the corner again. Bastard. I'm going to what do I kick the door hard and run but maybe that'll get its attention I'll try slipping out and then running while it eats

The door's jammed

The door's jammed I can't open it

I'll have to kick it open

I'll have to kick it open and run like hell

The Kotter's driveway It's narrow and in the back they have that huge jungle gym

installed for the kids I'll try to make it under that

Or maybe I should go for the keys

I'll put this on the floor under the front seat and take three breaths and I'll do it

I've got my hammer.

I'm sorry Stevie.

It's in

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