

## ALL OF NATURE ABHORS A VACUUM

By Brian Farrey

*For Catherine*

I can't remember the last time I told the truth.

See? Even that's a lie.

I know the exact day, hour, minute I uttered something that was completely honest and true. That moment is burned in my memory for a lot of reasons. It was so rare for me. Total truth. Being vulnerable.

When you glide minute to minute on a slick surface paved with your own myths, the potholes in the road where you hit the truth tend to stick out. You remember because your shocks are never quite the same again.

And I remember it because you were there.

It was just you and me, in fact. And you know what's beautiful about that? Not the moment we shared, not the intimacy, not any of the words that passed between us that night. The greatest beauty is that I can say anything—*anything*—about what happened and it instantly becomes the truth for anyone who wasn't there.

Which, now, is everyone.

You may not have known this but I knew every time you lied to me. Every. Time. You had two or three tells. Flicking your fingertips. Gnawing your upper lip. Sloppy, really. But, at the same time, it was kind of cute. Especially when you smiled to yourself, thinking you'd gotten away with it.

That was fucking adorable.

I never complained. I loved each and every fib. I wish I had an art gallery where I could put them on display. Masterpieces in and of themselves. Flawless to the untrained eye. I'm the self-proclaimed God of Bullshit but you gave me a run for my money. Elevated you to demigod, at the very least.

*I'm fine, thanks for asking.* An old chestnut, for sure, but you pulled it off.

*I have to work late. Maybe tomorrow?* Said with just enough smile in your voice to convince even the hardest heart.

Seriously, it's like we were meant to be. Two liars with perfect symmetry. Equal and opposite reactions, and all that. Claim one thing and I know another.

That's the thing about lies. They always—*always*—lead to the truth. Like a compass. Tell me a lie and I instantly zero in on what you really feel. I should know. My own lies are practically a roadmap. Too bad you never knew that.

But if you did, you'd have driven off course that night. I tore up the map. I should have known better but no one can say I don't take chances. So I took one.

I told you my one true thing.

*I love you.*

And you said:

*I love you too.*

Jesus, you just had to gnaw your upper lip, didn't you?

It would be hypocritical to blame you for your lies. So I don't.

But I blame you for your truths.

They say the truth hurts. That's *why* we lie. If truth is the wound, lies are the bandages, the sutures that keep everything from splitting open and spilling on the ground like so much gore.

Who hurts more? The giver or receiver? At this point, we'd probably have to agree to disagree.

*God be between you and harm in all the empty places you must walk.* The ancient Egyptians used to say that. It was a blessing. Let me tell you: I've walked in some fucking empty places. The one thing that all those empty places share? The truth.

Truth is hollow. Empty. Once the truth is out there, it drains the world of possibility. Tell the truth and you suck the air out of the room. It's like the vacuum of space. You just implode.

And you know what they say about nature and vacuums.

We had so much possibility, you and me. From that first lie I used to reel you in to that last lie you disguised as truth—See what I mean? Symmetry.—there was hardly anything we couldn't do.

So why did I choose that moment to tell the truth? My one true thing?

I wanted to die inside. Just a little. To see what it was like. I've kept myself going for so long on untruths that I wanted to feel it—like a razor sliding across my body—when I spoke something real.

It took my breath away.

For that instant, I stood at the edge of the abyss. I lived dangerously. Now it's back to lies. Forever and ever.

It's why we tell stories, you know. To fill the void. When we die, fiction keeps us alive. People tell stories about us. Facts degrade little by little over time until we become an amalgam, Frankensteined bits of faulty memory. Nothing we'd have recognized as the truth about ourselves.

We become the perfect version of us. The version no one can ever really know.

Which is why lies are so much easier. If I'm going to end up an amalgam, let it be the very best of all my nothings and my somethings. It's like a little gift to myself. It's a gift I can share with you.

Someday they're going to find this note. Not before I'm long gone, shrouded in however many lies it takes to become so fictitious that people might actually question if I was ever really here.

Don't worry. I've done it before.

They'll call it a confession. They'll call it that because it will bring closure. Because it will—all at once—make sense of things and shatter all sense into oblivion.

Funny how that works. An explanation that explains nothing. A lie made up of an Escher infinity loop.

Someone will dig up the box and find this note clutched in your hand. They might wonder where the rest of you is. Fuck 'em. They can wonder. They can make up stories about where your head is or your legs or your feet. It's better that way. Truer than true.

Your family—or maybe your descendants, who knows by then?—will say it justifies everything they thought about me. Another lie. How could they possibly have formed an opinion about me when nothing they knew was true?

See how good I am at this?

This, here, is what immortality feels like. You're welcome. Because everything that gets said from here on out will venture further from the truth the longer people talk about it. You'll live on as a famous lie, growing more glorious with every retelling.

The opposite of a vacuum.

People will bemoan a life cut short. They'll talk about who you could have become. It'll all be conjecture, a special brand of lie we tell to ease our fear of the unknown. You'll get to be all the

things you never were just because people *thought that's what you'd be*. For as long as you linger in someone's sobbing recollection, you'll always be full of possibilities.

There's a word for that: apotheosis.

I'll think of you. I'll think of all you could have been. I'll think of all *we* could have been. I might even miss you, if I start to believe my own stuff. Until they find me—*if* they find me—I'll fill my life with memories we never had.

A truth made up entirely of lies.

You knew all about that. Didn't you?

Lucky for both of us: so do I.