

Hollowheart

written by

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EXT. CABBAGE PATCH - DAY

A low swoop over rows of cabbage - unique but indistinguishable by their number.

The low RUMBLE of a tractor breaks the silence. FARMER JOHN, bundled in winter-wear, bounces on the back of the tractor. He idly chews a cabbage leaf.

JOHN(V.O)

The thing I hate least about farming is the silence.

He dismounts the tractor, chucking the leaf haphazardly out into the field. From his belt he draws a slender, shiny KNIFE.

JOHN (CONT'D)

The thing I hate most is probably the repetition.

A cabbage head is picked - complete with closeups of the knifework -

JOHN (CONT'D)

Or the constant risk of death and dismemberment.

A BRIEF TIME-LAPSE:

Circling the bin, obviously different bins, different heads of cabbage, different fields.

JOHN (CONT'D)

(quickly)

Or how a hail-storm can bankrupt you, or some Health Code guy can shut you down because you caught him on a bad day...Plus everyone thinks you're some inbred hick.

Another head of cabbage. A thin slimy liquid slicks its leaves.

The knife leaps out at it. He pulls the head up-

Disgusting JUICE pours out of the hollow stem, coating John in a slurry of obviously-foul liquid. He sighs impossibly.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Plus every now and then you get covered in liquefied shit.

He drops the head, cuts a quick 'X' into the top. Oddly meaty chunks pop away as he moves on to the next cabbage.

John looks to his knife, then to the head of cabbage.

JOHN (CONT'D)
No whammy, no whammy...

He moves the knife to the base of the cabbage, makes a shallow incision -

BLOOD SPRAYS EVERYWHERE.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Ah, Ouch! Ouch ouch ouch!

John hops away, dropping the knife and grasping his hand as though wounded.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Tsssssss,tssss

John hisses and works up the courage to peek at the wound-
No wound, just the blood.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Oh, uh...Huh.

He looks back to the cabbage, which SPEWS BLOOD LOUDLY.

John, appropriately confused and covered in cabbage blood, looks both ways.

JOHN (CONT'D)
...Ri-ight.

Scraggly veins seem to PULSE just below the surface of the soil, leading away from the cabbages and back to a tall, burr-bearing and twisted weed.

John takes wide steps over the rows of cabbage.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Now what the hell are you...?

He inspects the leaves for a moment, then shrugs, and chops the weed into pieces with his knife. He scatters it with his boot.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Gotta do a better job hoeing next year.

John turns around, on his back-

A wicked BURR clings to his coat, hooks deep in the cotton.

INT. FARMHOUSE BEDROOM - NIGHT

MATCH CUT TO:

The coat, flung over the corner of an old bed, burr still clinging to it. John enters, freshly showered and toweled.

John pulls on some sort of bizarre T-shirt and pajama pants, as the burr seems to gently shake and CHITTER in the foreground.

He takes a pocket knife from the top of his dresser and gently pries the burr from his coat.

JOHN

Huh, where'd you come from lil'
fella'?

He brings the burr closer, examines the spines and pod.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Well, lucky enough for you, I'm a
friend of all shelled things.

He takes the seed over to the windowsill. Three cacti in a long planter greet him. He digs a little hole in the dirt with his finger, then slides the burr in and covers it.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Say cheese.

Flash floods over the soil; the image distorts into a time-lapse photography video; the sprout breaks soil with slimy gray tendrils, creeping like fingertips from the grave.

The plant grows, bulbous and hideous, as the cacti next to it wither with each successive picture. It begins to accumulate a thick layer of SLIME.

Another flash spills over it; time resumes as normal.

A Wild Turkey bottle made into a makeshift watering can hovers above the planter, spills a thin stream of water into the planter.

JOHN (CONT'D)
 Why am I still watering this
 horrible thing?

John, now much more disheveled and perhaps a little thinner,
 stares too long at the plant.

It seems to CHITTER.

He turns away.

INT. FARMHOUSE LIVING ROOM - DAY

An open-floor combination living room and kitchen, modern in
 the 80's. A pile of dishes and rancid pots threatens to spill
 off the counters. John heads to the refrigerator and
 retrieves a 6-pack of beer with a dolphin-killer ring.

Something whispers, the same quiet CHITTERING of the plant.

He collapses into the couch, flicks on the TV. Something
 CRUNCHES beneath him; an old potato chip bag. It's quickly
 tossed to the floor and he re-settles.

The SNAP of a beer opening; outside, snow piles up around the
 house.

INT. FARMHOUSE LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Beer cans pile up at the base of the couch like low
 foothills.

The TV blares a LATE-NIGHT ROYALTY FREE MOVIE.

Tears stream down his face; quiet, desperate tears. Seen by
 no-one.

Whispers seep into the room.

EVIL WHISPERS
 (indistinct and
 simultaneous)
 Can you even feel love?
 You will never be happy.
 Peace is for other people.
 Unmourned. Unmourned. Unmourned.

John takes a long drink, and drops the last can into the pile
 with a METALLIC CRUMPLE.

INT. FARMHOUSE BEDROOM - NIGHT

John stumbles in; slams his palm against the wall until the lights flick on.

He opens the closet, reaches behind the trim and retrieves an old PUMP SHOTGUN. From his dresser-top, he pops open a box of shells and loads one. CA-CHINK

He breathes a ragged breath..

EVIL WHISPERS

You'll miss. You'll miss. You'll miss.

Then snatches another shell and loads it into the tube with another CLICK.

He levels the gun, barrel staring down the grotesque, pulsing plant. For a moment the fruit looks like an egg, ready to hatch.

Another ragged breath. Tears drip.

The plant heaves, unconcerned.

John sits with the shotgun barrel under his chin, eyes fixed on the plant.

BZZT. BZZT.

John's phone flashes with the incoming call from SCAM LIKELY.

He sets the shotgun aside and answers.

JOHN

Hello?

A chipper voice responds.

BRENDA (O.S)

Hi, this is Brenda from State Home Life Insurance! How are you doing today?

There's a brief pause.

JOHN

I mean, not great. Uh...I think I just tried to kill...to kill...

Another pause, much more awkward.

CLICK. The line goes dead.

John sets the phone on top of the shotgun. He hangs his head and weeps.

JOHN (V.O) (CONT'D)
Anyways, spooky movies are
bullshit. Guns can't kill your
demons. There are things without
quick fixes - and no matter how
hard you want a quick fix, there
isn't really one.

John stands up, brushes his tears on his sleeve.

INT. FARMHOUSE LIVING ROOM - DAY

John picks up the beer cans.

JOHN (V.O)
Frankly, it's a lot of *hard* work.
And hard work is boring.

John washes his pile of dishes.

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

John waits in the lobby, nervously rocking his knee up and down, staring towards the floor.

JOHN (V.O)
And I guess that's the hardest part
of farming. The hard work. Hoeing
the fields.

The NURSE steps out and mimes calling John. He stands and heads for the door.

INT. FARMHOUSE BATHROOM - NIGHT

Dressed in pajamas, John takes a portion of a small blue pill and washes it down with a cup of water.

JOHN (V.O)
But without hard work, the weeds
choke out the flowers.

INT. FARMHOUSE BEDROOM - NIGHT

John flicks the light off and moves, off-screen, towards the bed.

Focus draws in on the plant, now desiccated and withering.
The plant heaves one last time.

CREDITS.