

# Disgusted

By Pete Malicki

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Contact:

[petemalicki@gmail.com](mailto:petemalicki@gmail.com)

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[www.petemalicki.com](http://www.petemalicki.com)

## Disgusted

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Cast – Male, 40s. Ordinary build. Quiet and introspective but in an emotional state.

I hate cruelty. If there's one thing I've always hated, it's cruelty. I'm a peaceful person. I keep to myself, and I'm polite, and I never hurt others. By *others*, I extend my definition to all living creatures. Obviously I eat plants, because you have to survive, but I won't cut down trees because they're dropping leaves or whatever. I just want to tread lightly and be kind to others.

My hatred for cruelty started young. I was a small kid growing up. Others used to pick on me. When you're young, manners get you nowhere. The only thing that matters is your size and strength. Parents and teachers tell you to be polite and watch your language, but we're really just cavemen at that age. All kids want to do is dominate each other. It's a complex dynamic, but you watch kids play and there's always the bigger ones and the smaller ones and that's all that really matters to them. You only start caring about things like tact and decorum when you get older, and while I was the definite exception to this rule, it didn't stop me getting beaten up.

I was – and still am – the anomaly. I always hated cruelty. It disgusted me, right from when I was a kid. I was a small kid, and the bullies picked on me all the time. I took it on the chin, mostly, except this one time when I fought back. See, they say shy people are firecrackers in bed, and that still waters run deep, but all of this is really about repression. I'd repressed a lot of anger when I was a kid and those bullies squeezed it all out of me one day. I've even forgotten his name but he was two grades above me and he called me a pussy and pushed me every time we were near each other. He fed off my weakness, I suppose you'd say. One ordinary day he pushed me and I flew off the rails. Bam! I hit him in the face, his cheek tearing open like wet meat. I hit him three more times and he lost teeth.

Funnily enough, we didn't stay in touch. I'm sure he wears a beard now. As much as he deserved it, violence begets violence and I was disgusted by what I did. I don't know why I never looked up his name and apologised to him. Fear, I guess.

Being a victim, I was always sympathetic to the weak and vulnerable. So it was fitting that at sixteen I stopped eating meat. One day I was looking at a chicken breast and thought, 'This is the flesh of a chicken.' I was eating something's breast! It was like eating a human breast. I imagined my own ribs being torn apart and the flesh cooked. I am meat myself. Meat eating meat. It seemed so, so cannibalistic. I said to my dad, 'Dad, I don't want to eat chicken any more.' Dad looked at me funny. 'Why not?' he asked, tearing at his drumstick. 'I just don't,' I replied. 'I don't think I have to.' Dad frowned at me. 'Son, let me tell you something. Our God is a cruel one. He made life to be sustained by other life. That chicken eats worms and bugs and we eat the chicken. It's all part of a cycle.'

As compelling as dad's speech was, I didn't eat any more chicken, and this quickly extended to cows, pigs and even fish. I didn't sustain myself by eating animals. They're helpless and we can survive without them. Decades later it amazes me there's anyone left in the world who would still eat meat. Why willingly choose to kill when you could do otherwise? It sickens me, honestly. But I'm a kind person and I don't want to impose my beliefs on others. My dad never liked it, but he was good enough to let me go vego in a place where this was completely unheard of. Live and let live, he said, and that's how I live today. We can live and let live.

But I didn't agree with all of dad's philosophies. I didn't agree that God was cruel. God is the dictionary opposite of cruel. He is all about peace and togetherness. What I never liked was a hypocrite, like those madmen who blow up abortion clinics. You can't save a life that way. But what's even worse than a mere hypocrite is a monster. A disgusting creature that would hurt something for its own pleasure. Killing for food because you have to eat is one thing, hurting for pleasure is another thing altogether let me assure you. Violence, aggression, sexual crimes: they make me sick. I don't like to hear about this stuff, I really don't. It just upsets me.

I wanted to avoid being exposed to humans acting like they're still animals. I took up work in a shopping mall, selling clothes. It was all pretty reasonable there, you know, but the food court was right opposite our store, and I got so sick of seeing kids eating meat. They'd come in from their Pixar animation films filled with lovable animals then gorge themselves on burgers and fish 'n' chips. How deliciously ironic that they'd cry over Nemo then eat a fish sandwich.

It gets to me, you know. We stuff living creatures in boxes and cages, feed them poisons, let them drown in their own piss and shit, then hack at them until they die. Meat is not *murder* as they say. The meat business is something *far* more horrific than mere murder. It's the height of callousness and the worst of crimes and it *disgusts* me. It utterly disgusts me how we could turn a blind eye to this industry and live guilt-free.

I suppose then what happened was my own fault. I mean, of course I did it, but I was inviting it on by being there. Bringing someone like me to a seafood restaurant is like asking a feminist to watch a football team rape a couple teenagers. But it was mum's seventieth and sometimes you have to forget what repulses you and do something for your family. We were at Dr Gills Seafood Emporium and I was well-prepared to eat a few plates of chips and a green salad. I could cope with that, right?

The smell hit me like a hammer when I walked in the door. The whole family was there – mum, dad, my two sisters, the cousin – so I put on my game face and joined them. Everywhere I looked was crab and lobster and bream and salmon. It felt like a war scene; friends were dying around me. There was so much horror. These poor things, having their shells torn apart by ugly women.

It's mum's birthday. Suck it up. Game face. I sat down and joined the family. I was doing everything I could to follow along. The cracking sound of crabs' knees kept distracting me. The kitchen was raucous. Flames and laughter and knives on chopping boards. It was so noisy. And the smell was disgusting. I have to go to the bathroom, I say, and I push my chair back and cross the restaurant.

The bathrooms are just past the kitchen. I hold my breath and walk a little faster. A woman and her husband are there. They're laughing. I squeeze past them, my head exploding from lack of oxygen and the stench that's sneaking into my nostrils. The woman's voice comes to me. She's saying it's a crime to serve a lobster that hasn't been boiled alive. It makes the meat harder if it's killed first. Disgusted, I go to the bathroom and vomit in the urinal. There's no way to flush it so I wipe my mouth and wash my hands and pretend it had nothing to do with me. I head back to my table. The woman and her husband are still in front of the kitchen. They're still talking about the same thing. It's hilarious, she says, watching the way they twitch around in oil before they die. Hilarious, she says. Hilarious. Being boiled alive is *hilarious*.

'That's a bit much, honey,' says the husband.

'Oh, don't be silly, dear,' she replies dismissively. 'It's nature. Life feeds off life.'

I had a moment, like I was back in primary school and bullies were picking on me, except this bully was nothing but a cruel bitch with no humanity, not a boy calling another boy names. No one was expecting what I did – least of all me! – so I wasn't stopped when I dragged her across the kitchen by the wrist. Standing behind and to the side of her, I shoved her arm deep into the vat of boiling oil. She screamed so loud every other noise was drowned out, then everything *making* noise stopped. I wanted to scream right back. 'Hilarious, isn't it, bitch?' I wanted to scream. 'Isn't this so *fucking* funny? I haven't laughed this hard in years, bitch. I'm going to put your fucking face in next, bitch, and laugh as you boil alive. You'll *taste better* that way, bitch. Hilarious isn't it, you horrid, disgusting...'

I didn't say any of that. I didn't say a word. I pulled her arm out of the vat, the skin blistered and hanging loose and the oil splashing down to burn both our legs. The adrenaline left my body as quickly as it arrived and the full enormity of what I'd done practically drowned me right there. This would be the end of me. My life would be ruined.

On that day, I was the man who killed the doctor at the abortion clinic. I dropped the bomb on tens of thousands of innocent civilians to stop a war. I used cruelty to punish cruelty, and no matter what sentence the judge hands down I can never be forgiven.

I am thoroughly appalled with myself. I'm everything I despise in others. All of my virtue is nothing after what I did to that woman. I am as callous and cruel as those who would torture any animal.

I am disgusting.