

Sexy Depressed Lady

Tagline:

I want to motorboat the bags under her eyes.

Deathcabcutie: hey

Deathcabcutie: I've been feeling really shitty for the past few days

Deathcabcutie: I still want you to come over on Saturday. but I might not be the usual barrels of laughs.

Lifeonmars: I'm sorry to hear that. Is it contagious?

Deathcabcutie: not that kind of shitty.

Deathcabcutie: miserable, depressed, morose, etcetera

Lifeonmars: Anything you want to talk about? I care about you

Deathcabcutie: I don't really want to talk about it. There's nothing to talk about, really.

Deathcabcutie: I care about you too.

Lifeonmars: Let me try to cheer you up

Deathcabcutie: I think just doing what we do normally might cheer me up.

Lifeonmars: Well, I'll take the compliment. But tell me if there's anything else I can do.

Lifeonmars: And I'll try to think of some stuff as well.

Deathcabcutie: please don't do anything romantic

Deathcabcutie: it would only make me self-conscious

Lifeonmars: I know. But "friend" is also a part of "friends with benefits"

Lifeonmars: If you don't believe me, you can check. It's right there.

Deathcabcutie: I'll take your word for it

Lifeonmars: I promise that there will be no candlelit dinner or trail of rose petals leading to your bedroom

Deathcabcutie: thank you

Lifeonmars: If there is a trail of rose petals it means there is an intruder in your house. But he might be a nice intruder.

Deathcabcutie: lol

Lifeonmars: Underappreciated sub-genre of home invasion movies

That night, Mars went out to dig up a grave.

Mars knew that Deathcab didn't feel the same way about him that he felt about her. And he accepted that fact. He had accepted it over and over, sometimes as many as a dozen times in a day.

But she was still his friend. And a friend with benefits in need is a friend with benefits indeed. And he was not without certain talents, which had oft proved useful in situations just such as these.

One talent specifically: black magic. As a practitioner of the *artes prohibita*e, he knew just the ritual to dispel a dear friend's gloom. And just the place where he could get the necessary ingredient.

It was cold out, but Mars was dressed for it, with long johns, thick wool socks, and a black beanie. No jacket, but the exercise would warm him up soon enough. It was a big job, one that would take hours.

The corpse had to be within a certain age range, that was the one condition of the spell. Not too old and not too recent. He found one with a death date of 1994. Perfect. He sunk his shovel in the dirt and began to dig. Quietly. He did not toss the dirt from the hole he was digging, he set it down gently beside him. Even after fifteen minutes had passed, he did not grunt or wheeze or sputter from the exertion. He just breathed. Something like this was no problem for him. He was in very, very good shape.

Mars had one of those faces which didn't really fit with his intensely muscled physique, and he knew it. His cheeks were too round, the last redoubt of fat on his body. Little baby boy doll head

attached to GI Joe action figure body. But he appreciated the weirdness of the mismatch. It made him feel sort of like Frankenstein's Monster, polymerized and powerful, undying and unstoppable.

The dirt from the hole was starting to pile up. If someone came upon him now while he was digging, if someone crossed his path, it wouldn't be good. He'd have to scamper off home, and the ritual to banish Deathcab's depression would go uncompleted. He'd maybe have to leave the shovel and the duffel with the rest of the stuff for the ritual behind too. But aside from that everything would be fine. Even if the person who spotted him decided to give chase, it would be fine. Because anyone fast enough to catch him would be too lean to tackle him. Not that Mars had ever had the occasion to test that theory, but it made sense. And if they got in their car that was even easier, he'd just hop some fences and break pursuit that way.

Mars had no fear of the police, no fear of punishment, no fear of anything at all. But at times like these he felt very acutely the absence of fear. The void where fear would be, if it existed. A vast and imposing vacuum that drew Mars into itself, compelling him to action.

It was a facet of his psyche that Mars had pondered from time to time, and in his thoughts he had often analogized the feeling to being an astronaut in a spaceship with a blown airlock. Sucked out into space, shot right out into the star-studded expanse like a bullet. Retaining all momentum, no atmosphere to slow him down, tumbling, tumbling, tumbling, feeling his heart beating faster and faster in his chest, and still he was tumbling through the infinite majesty of space, a realm of breathtaking beauty.

As he dug, Mars took a moment to appreciate his surroundings. Big trees and autumn leaves. He was feeling the cold less now, and the air was crisp and clear.

Six feet is a short distance to walk, but it's a long way going straight down. Even for a workhorse like Mars. As the shoveling began to take the slightest bit of a toll on his body, he directed his mind back to Deathcab. She was his purpose tonight, and thoughts of who this labor was in aid of would give him strength.

If he was Frankenstein's Monster, then she would be The Bride. Eyes wide in a permanent state of shock from the bolt that gave her life, a streak of white down her hair. The greatest creation of a genius scientist. Mars paused in his digging to catch his breath, and tried to remember what clothes the Bride of Frankenstein wore. He attempted to picture her in his mind's eye. He had never seen the movie, but seemed to remember seeing her wearing white on a poster or something. But not a wedding dress. Perhaps one of the Doctor's extra lab coats. And he pictured Deathcab wearing one, a tight white vinyl smock, not as The Bride but as a mad scientist, her eyes gleaming with a maniacal desire for creating life, hand gripped tightly on the rubber-wrapped handle of that iconic switch from the film. And if anyone was around, they would have seen a smile on Mars's face as he sunk his shovel back into the dirt.

His other fantasy, the one about the astronaut floating in space, did not lend itself to the subject of Deathcab as easily. It was sort of a one-man show, there just weren't any other roles for Mars to project her onto. Mars thought about how to resolve this conundrum as he continued to dig. The hole was getting deeper now, deep enough that Mars now needed to dig while standing inside it to get the proper leverage.

He eventually settled on casting Deathcab as the personification of the night sky that surrounded the astronaut. A woman holding a vast blanket of starlit darkness in her hands, big enough to tuck the universe into bed.

Of course, too much bed rest could be too much of a good thing. Mars thought back to Deathcab's prior struggles with depression, years ago. It was a bad time. This was before the two of them were friends with benefits, but that's not what made it bad. Bouts of irrational self-criticism and aimless grief which seemed to pop up out of nowhere, like a masked killer in a horror movie. Tears streaming down her face at the water park, strange outbursts at karaoke night. He reminded himself that she had made a lot of progress since then. And she deserved all the credit for that, it was her triumph. But if during that period he had helped her just 1%, if he had managed to give her just the smallest bit

of assistance, then that was something he took immense personal pride in. A great honor and a precious treasure, for all time.

And now the devils of her brain chemistry were threatening to return, if they hadn't already. Mars thought he had maybe almost sensed it the last time he saw her, something in the way her eyes drifted repeatedly to the corners of the room after breaking off eye contact, or the way her nose scrunched up more than usual when she breathed through it, as if it were fighting the air. But the hypothesis hadn't quite risen to the level of conscious observation, not until their text conversation the other day.

And he thought back to his cherished memories of her, the two of them sitting across from each other at Dave's Cafe, her working on her grant application, him working on a short story. Staying up and talking about The Doors until late. The less private memories shared among their larger circle of friends, the people who constituted what Mars thought of as "the Mars and Deathcab Expanded Universe". Like that time they'd all been walking across the bridge to the city at the exact right moment to witness a guerrilla protester climb to the top and unfurl a giant banner which warned of boiling oceans and ecological collapse. That weird historical tea party LARP thing she had invited him and the others to. The dress she had worn to it, some absurdly ornate thing which looked like the most natural thing in the world when it was on her body. Which brought him back to the benefits night a few weeks ago when he had imagined her name in a special font as they were making love, a series of increasingly ornate fonts with each iteration having more and more serifs, serifs growing out of serifs, countless little horns and thorns, and this chain of thought was what finally pushed him over the edge, in a good way.

And like the ecology in the warning on the activist's poster, as he continued to empty out the pit, as his muscles began to strain in earnest, all these wonderful memories inevitably collapsed in on themselves, plunging him back into the realm of fantasy.

She's the President of the United States, and it's that auditorium where the President answers questions from journalists, and I am a Secret Service agent diving in front of a bullet meant for her

The hole was getting deep now. As he got closer to the coffin, the dirt was different, or more like the pebbles that were in the dirt were different in some way, but Mars couldn't really put it into words. He took a deep breath, and slowed his digging to a snail's pace for a moment or two, but did not stop.

Diving in front of a bullet meant for her, and someone, maybe a different agent in her security detail, is shouting

If the pebbles were indicators of anything, then there was really only one thing they could be indicating, and it was good. He was getting close to the coffin.

Shouting "Get down, Mrs. President!"

Mars could feel it now, he really was getting close.

Taking the bullet for her, but not in my vest

Panting from the effort, but smiling widely, knowing that any shovelful of dirt could be the last.

My blood getting all over her, all over her sexy tight presidential pantsuit

Beneath his feet there was the sharp sound of metal chipping into wood, and it was a good sound indeed.

And she looks so incredibly hot in red.

Not wanting to try to extract the entire coffin from the grave, he tipped it onto its side. The coffin wasn't locked, but the latches had rusted shut long ago. Prepared for this eventuality, Mars got the crowbar out of the duffel and wedged it into the seam, popping it open with a little *ca-chunk* noise.

Even after the hours of digging, the corpse felt oddly light. So light it was hard to believe it had once been human. As he tried to think of exactly what song or sound effect the *ca-chunk* reminded him

of, he put his arms under the arms of the corpse like he was carrying a drunk friend and tried to lift it out of the hole.

The hole turned out to be a little bit too deep to extract the corpse from without assistance. For a minute or two Mars tried to slide the head over the top and push the rest up after it, but it just wasn't happening. So he vaulted himself out of the hole, got his rope, and tied it to the corpse. It wasn't easy getting out of the hole for the second time while holding the end of the rope in one hand, but he managed. What followed was a quick round of graveyard tug-of-war played vertically, at the conclusion of which he had his ingredient. Backbreaking though the digging had been, in some ways it was the easy part. The next stage would require two things the digging hadn't: artistry and precision. Mars was aware he wasn't in quite the right head space for it. But it would be fine. Slow and steady.

Mars dragged the corpse to the closest mausoleum, and sat it up against the wall. It was sort of a mixture of rotting flesh and exposed bone. The patchwork reminded Mars of a classical depiction of a cyborg. Robot part there, man part there, mixed together haphazardly. It didn't smell great, but not nearly as bad as one might imagine.

He retrieved his spray can from the duffel and shook it up. Keeping his finger off the actuator at the top of the can until he was ready, Mars took a moment to prepare himself mentally. It was imperative that he visualize the lines before he made them. It was a question of calligraphy, not to mention the simple fact that one spelling mistake would be one too many. He wrote the word SHITHEAD in bright red letters on the wall of the mausoleum. The spray can hissed like a snake. One fluid motion. Pretty much legible. Then he made a little arrow from the word to the corpse.

With the ritual done, Mars looked back at the tombstone that was now at the edge of a pit. Reginald Hemming. 1959-1994. It was odd how 1994 felt so recent, but 1959 felt like such a long time ago. But he was only 35 when he died. Mars wondered how it happened.

He crossed himself absentmindedly, barely realizing he was doing it. Then he got his stuff and split. Just out through the front gate this time, since it didn't lock from the inside.

Mars went home on foot. His pre-planned route was tangled and untraceable, a trail to exhaust any pursuer. After a few minutes, an unpleasant thought came to him. What he had just done, the ritual for Deathcab, it was like he was a dumb cat bringing a dead bird to its owner as a gift. Not that he would ever bring the man's corpse to her doorstep, but the principle was the same.

And he thought: *Why, why, why did I just do that, I'm insane.*

The thought was a strange one. It felt too whiny, too uncertain. It didn't seem to fit anywhere in Mars' head. So he just let the thought float along with him on his walk, turning it over and over as he went. Sooner or later, through the turns and double-backs, it began to transform into something else. It became rhythmic, it took on a melody, it changed its tune.

And every note was beautiful, so beautiful that Mars felt like he was falling in love for the first time. By all rights he should be utterly exhausted from the digging, aching all over, without even the strength to crawl, but when the drums opened up it filled him with such an energy that he felt not even the slightest bit tired, enough energy to run all the rest of the way home, and he did.

When he got there, Mars wiped himself off as much as he could with paper towels. He had too much of the graveyard still on him to go straight to the shower, if he had it would have clogged the drain. Mars' muscles were sore and his feet hurt pretty bad but he still wasn't quite all-the-way tired yet, so he read his fighter pilot book for a while in bed until the words starting to blur together and he caught himself reading the same sentence over and over and over, and he let that be his cue that it was time to turn off the light and go to sleep at last.

Lifeonmars: I'm thinking to bring over some ingredients and make some chicken soup at your house when I come over this Saturday

Lifeonmars: Chicken soup isn't romantic. It's nurturing

Deathcabcutie: thank you.

Deathcabcutie: sorry I'm so fucking on edge about everything

Deathcabcutie: all these rules.

Lifeonmars: You don't have to apologize. I also feel on edge a lot.

Lifeonmars: I want the best for my friends, but at the same time it makes me feel better to know that other people are struggling with the same things that I am.

Deathcabcutie: well, that's something at least

Deathcabcutie: I'll see you on saturday, looking forward to it.

List of Hygienic Tasks to Complete Before Going Out

1. Shower. (And give hair a comb)
2. Shave.
3. Brush teeth.
4. Apply deodorant.
5. Trim fingernails. Actually, do this first, so fingernails have time to settle and lose "freshly trimmed fingernail feeling" afterward.
6. Double-check list to see if forgotten anything.

Deathcab's house sat right alongside a creek. In spring, the soothing sound of running water could be heard throughout her house, and the air was purified by little droplets of humidity that the river kicked up along its path. Even in late fall, when the riverbed was dry, just to look at it and think back to the months when it was flowing never failed to fill Mars with tranquility.

And then there was the perfume the house wore all year round. Pine needles and decomposing bark. Scents that brought Mars back to his childhood, when his dad used to take him birdwatching. All of these memories and details about her home and its surroundings, which were at best superficial facts

about the woman Mars loved if they connected to her at all, nevertheless seemed to be deeply intertwined with Deathcab in his mind.

But today the house was not its usual peaceful, homey self. Tapping into his *true sight*, Mars could see a dark aura tainting every square foot. It was as if the paint itself was angry, threatening to peel at any second. Which meant that his ritual hadn't cured her problem, at least not completely. But as a warlock, Mars well knew that the thing about magic was that you couldn't expect it to do everything for you.

He got the bag of stuff he had bought for the soup and headed in. His heart was clenched with anticipation, the good kind of clench, but even so Mars elected to take a few deep breaths before he rang the bell. The door opened a few moments after, making a funny sort of sound as it did, but he paid it no mind because there *she* was, right there, standing in the doorway, and it was so good to see her, and he told her so.

"Good to see you too," she said softly, and they embraced, with Mars resting his chin on her shoulder for just a moment before she broke off the hug.

Her eyes were the eyes of a seriously underslept woman on this particular day, and the eyes of a leopard stalking its prey on every day. Almond-shaped, with hints of a ferocious intelligence directing their every glance. The sleek eyes of a predator, intimidating to some perhaps, but not to one such as him. And he saw that the brilliant blue fire in her eyes was now partially obscured by the gray shroud of depression. But he was pleased to see that it was a shroud that left little to the imagination, more like the bawdy veil of a belly dancer than a shroud, growing more and more threadbare by the day, with salacious intimations of a rip in its future.

Mars always felt a hundred pounds lighter when he saw her. But here and now, after not having seen her for an entire week, and having only conversed with her online very briefly, it was more like ten million pounds. It was as if upon crossing the threshold of her house he had set down an immense burden he didn't realize he was carrying, discarded on her doorstep. And after he'd done so, it came to

him that that's just what the two of them together would do to her current bout with depression. They weren't going to "defeat" her depression because that wasn't the right *word*; it was a grander word than their enemy *deserved*. Instead they would just *discard* her illness; they were just going to toss it onto the sidewalk like a bubblegum wrapper and skip right off into the sunset together.

"Want some chicken soup, or would you rather pork first?" It was a joke that he thought of earlier that very day. "Or we could just sit and talk for a bit."

"Let's pork," she said, staring at him with hollow eyes, "we can talk later."

They adjourned to Deathcab's room. Her bed was unmade and there was a small pile of unopened mail on her desk. She lay back on her bed with her legs dangling off it for a moment, then swiveled them on. Her short printer ink-black hair pooled on the bed behind her. Today her hair was perhaps a bit disheveled, with a few chaotic strands sticking out wildly, as if they had been electrified by the sheer sex appeal radiating out of her every pore. She stared at him vacantly.

"I'm very fragile right now," she said, "so I'd like you to shatter me into a million pieces."
Deadpan.

He stood across the room from her and unbuttoned his shirt, slowly. Then he undid his belt. It was cold in her room, but they would be warm soon enough. For a moment, with his shirt off and his pants still on, he looked just like a man on the cover of a steamy romance novel. Then he disrobed completely and crossed the floor to her in a few quick strides.

And he reached under her black t-shirt and she could feel his cold hands on her body and he lifted it off over her head and for a second with the shirt inverted and being pulled upward over her face she looked like a dog wearing a cone to stop it from scratching itself, and then the shirt was off and they looked in each others eyes and he saw the depths of her despair and she saw the depths of his love for her and then he kissed her lips, her neck, he held her head in his rapidly warming hands and he massaged her temples and when he did she felt the pressure in her head relax a little as he went back to

kissing her lips and then he brought his kisses lower, and lower, trying to slow down, trying to keep a steady pace even as his perception of time started to become strange, when the moments ceased to be sequenced, listening to her breathing starting to get a little bit heightened, and just before he made it to her sex she said

“The world is such a—*aah*—lump of shit,” interrupting herself with a little gasp of pleasure.

And then her cunt had his full attention and he was worshiping it with his tongue, and for a second Mars couldn't *believe* she wouldn't go out with him, not because he was willing to go down on her but because they had done this so many times that he knew her all her most sensitive spots, like—*aah*—right there, but also other places like the small of her back, but only for a second before Mars banished the thought with his secret warlock magic and went back to living in the moment, and it was a good moment with his hands on her thighs and her gripping the blanket with one hand, bunching it up like a twist in the fabric of spacetime, and with her other hand she was grabbing his long dirty blond hair which hurt a little but it was fine, it was fine even when she moaned loudly and said

“I'm worthless. Stupid fucking *bitch!*”

and she sounded so matter-of-fact when she called herself worthless and so angry in that beautiful feminine way of hers when she called herself a bitch that Mars asked if she was okay and if she wanted to take a break and she said no, no, no, finish me off, impale me with your cock, and so he starting really laying into her, still pacing himself, finding other things to think about, but it wasn't easy because all roads led to her in his mind, moonlit romantic roads, just like all roads seemed to lead to misery and apocalypse in hers, fear and disaster, and he kissed her so she could taste herself on his breath and not long after that she

and she was making her sweet sounds of exultation in time with his thrusting and when they starting dying down and she was gasping for breath he flipped her over in mid-gasp for some perpendicular action, just for fun, and she started crying which was normal for her afterwards but then she started

sobbing and he was thrusting into her, savoring the sensation of slapping her against his hips, while he said

“Let me know if you want to stop.”

THWAP

“Or take a break.”

THWAP

And she didn't say anything, she just kept sobbing, those horrible choked up noises which he still loved because he loved everything about her, and he'd do absolutely anything to help her, jump in front of a bullet if it would take her pain away, but *she said* she didn't want him to do anything romantic, she made that *very clear*, so instead he just said

“Well, let me know.”

And he said it quite casually, which was a bit boorish, perhaps regrettably so,

THWAP

and then she starting *singing*, as best she could through the sobs, and she sang

There is

A house

And Mars was in disbelief, she'd never done this before, he'd never heard of this happening to *anyone* in bed, but he didn't stop

In New Orleans

THWAP

They call

The Rising Sun

THWAP

So beautiful, and so strange, and he was so in love he felt like his heart might burst

And it's been

THWAP

the ruin

THWAP

Of many a poor soul

And he was thinking that someday they could tell this story to their grandchildren

And God

I know

THWAP

I'm one

And then she let out a big sob, sobbing and wailing

THWAP

followed by these big gasps for air that sounded almost painful, like she was racking her lungs

THWAP

And Mars thought about saying something, but before he could she managed to catch her breath

THWAP

And in that sexy voice of hers she said, wretched and wry

“Do me a favor.” **THWAP** “Shoot me in the mouth.” **THWAP**

And he pulled out of her, flipped her over, and locked eyes with her while he said “as you wish”, which she replied to with a cocked eyebrow, because she’s the woman of Mars’ dreams and nothing slips past her, but cocked eyebrow or no Mars got in range, got his angle, and came.

And Deathcab thought to herself that there were probably worse movies he could have quoted, like the ending of *There Will Be Blood*, although come to think of it that wasn’t very likely, because she had tried to show it to Mars at one point and he turned it off much less than halfway through because he got bored.

Afterwards the two of them laid in bed and snuggled for a few minutes, until Deathcab's stomach made a rumbling noise and Mars suddenly held her tightly and said "*What was that?! Did you hear that?*" as if he had gotten spooked by a scary noise he heard outside. He got a good laugh out of her with that one, and a good grope too, and the jolt of energy from the triumph of it all sprung him out of her bed and into her kitchen where the stuff for soup was waiting, and she joined him there so they could chat while he got everything ready to eat.

In times past they had sometimes cooked together, but this time Mars wanted to do everything himself. Maybe a little bit out of generosity, but mostly just for the sake of simplicity. They say that it's as easy to cook for two as it is for one, and it's likewise true that for a simple recipe it's as easy for one person to *cook* as it is for two. And as the soup was simmering Deathcab told him again that the world was such a big lump of shit, and then she asked him how he did it. And Mars told her that he didn't really know what she meant.

"You have a career, plus you write those stories..."

Wait, she thinks my fitness instructor job counts as a career?

What's the career path supposed to be, fitness instructor to fitness instructor for really rich people?

"I think you're pretty impressive yourself. Those sculptures you make."

"It's not like what you do. That short story you wrote about the grave desecration is like a real polished piece of art."

What? When did I show her that?

"Well, it's apples and oranges. But I'm glad you liked it."

Years later, Mars would regret not complimenting her art more when she was putting herself down. He should have insisted it was just as good as his, or better. Even later than that, he would

remember the other times and places where he hadn't failed to compliment her and her works properly, and his regret was partly assuaged.

"I'm actually writing a new short story. First one in a long time."

"Can you tell me what it's about? Or is it a secret?"

Mars loved the way Deathcab asked questions. Her style, her sensibility, the way she put sentences together, it was better than sex.

"It's about a boyfriend and a girlfriend. And the girlfriend doesn't hate the boyfriend, but he gets on her nerves sometimes. So she's getting ready to break up with him. But before she gets the opportunity, he dies. But then he comes back as a ghost. Or more like a spirit. And he makes contact with her. At first she thinks she's hallucinating. Then when she realizes she isn't, she gets sad, or pissed off or frustrated or whatever, because it's not like she can break up with him *now*. He's dead and following her around, it would be too brutal, plus she doesn't want to risk a vengeful ghost situation."

"Sounds like a situation where a liberated 21st century woman would make a discrete call to an exorcist," interjected Deathcab, with mock seriousness.

Mars raised a finger as he told her the end of it. "But get this: in the end she doesn't have to. It turns out that the things that annoyed her about him when he was alive don't apply to this ghost version of him. So now he's her disembodied guardian angel, who protects her with his various powers, and their relationship is saved."

"You're such a fucking genius." She said it flatly and dispassionately, and to his ears it sounded almost more like a complaint than a compliment. "But that plot is a little bit more romantic than I can handle right now."

"Just a story," said Mars, and as he said it he broke out into a smile, a smile that started in his lips and spread out across his entire face, seeping into his teeth and from there into his bones, using up so much energy as it traveled that Mars suddenly felt very, very tired.