

ONLY THE END OF THE WORLD AGAIN™

NEIL GAIMAN

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It was a bad day.

I woke up naked in the bed, with a cramp in my stomach, feeling more or less like hell. Something about the quality of the light, stretched and metallic, like the color of a migraine, told me it was afternoon.

The room was freezing,... literally; there was a thin crust of ice on the inside of the windows. The sheets on the bed around me were ripped and clawed, and there was animal hair in the bed.

It itched.

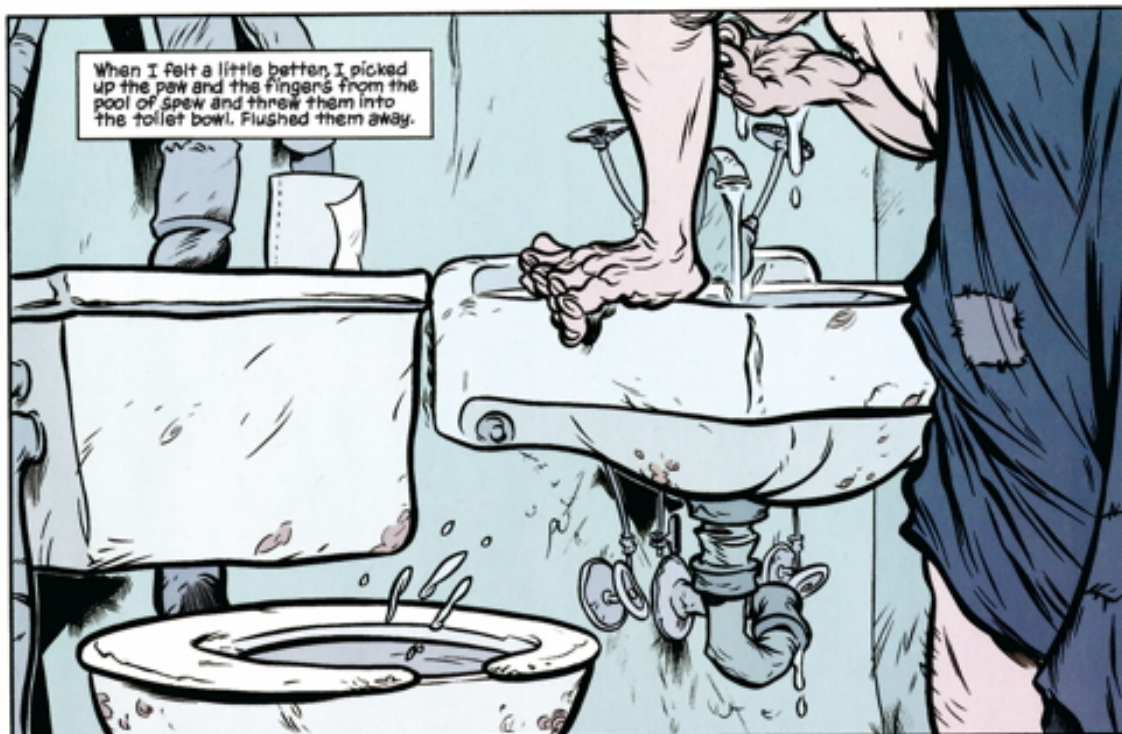


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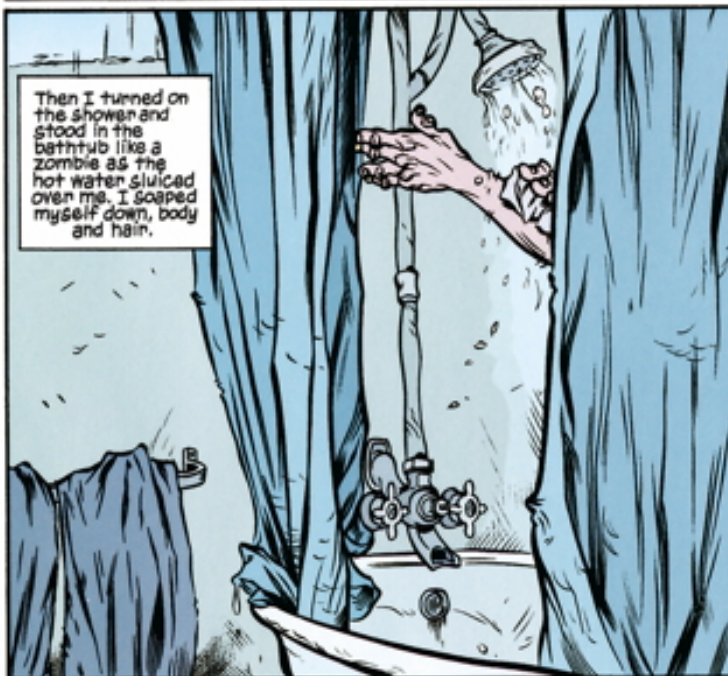


I crumpled to the floor, and before I could manage to raise my head enough to find the toilet bowl...

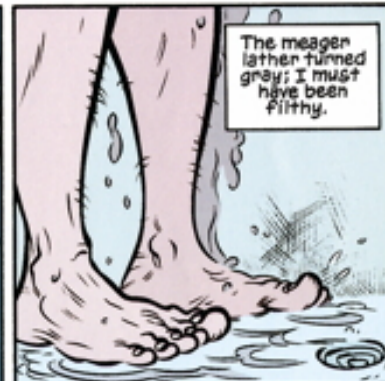




When I felt a little better, I picked up the paw and the fingers from the pool of spew and threw them into the toilet bowl. Flushed them away.



Then I turned on the shower and stood in the bathtub like a zombie as the hot water sluiced over me. I soaped myself down, body and hair.



The meager lather turned gray; I must have been filthy.



My hair was matted with something that felt like dried blood, and I worked at it with the bar of soap until it was gone.

Then I stood under the shower until the water turned icy.





There was a note under the door...

... from my landlady.



It said that I owed her for two weeks' rent.

It said that all the answers were in the Book of Revelations.

It said that I made a lot of noise coming home in the early hours of the morning, and she'd thank me to be quieter in the future.



It said that when the Elder Gods rose up from the ocean, all the scum of the Earth, all the non-believers, all the human garbage and the wastrels and deadbeats would be swept away, and the world would be cleansed by ice and deep waters.



It said that she felt she ought to remind me that she had assigned me a shelf in the refrigerator when I arrived, and she'd thank me if in the future I'd keep to it.



It was time to go to work.



My landlady was nowhere to be seen.



She was a short, pop-eyed woman, who spoke little...

... although she left extensive notes for me pinned to doors and placed where I might see them.



She kept the house filled with the smell of boiling seafood...

... huge pots were always simmering on the kitchen stove...



... filled with things with too many legs...



... and other things...



... with no legs at all.



There were other rooms in the house, but no one else rented them.

No one in their right mind would come to Innsmouth in winter.



Outside the house, it didn't smell much better.