

For the Love of the Gamer: A Short Story

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Disclaimer

This story was not written to critique games or gamers and is meant for mature audiences only. Contains language and sexual themes.

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I

Larisa couldn't remember the last time she and her brother Roy had actually gotten along. Presently, she was searching for several games from the massive collection Roy had. Larisa knew Roy would never give the games to her if she asked, so she decided now was the perfect opportunity to steal them. After all, spoiled 17 year old Roy was currently having a temper tantrum. Roy hated when their mother tried to make him attend family get togethers, or do his calculus homework, or chores, or really anything. It was a surprise to Larisa that her brother had any friends with the way he behaved. Thinking about it more, Larisa realized that in fact all his friends were from childhood tag football. Unsurprisingly, the only other thing he did besides play games these days was, lo and behold, play football. Being the older sister, Larisa had observed Roy's progressive decline into douche-bag status. He only liked the most mindless and misogynistic games. Plus, Larisa reassured herself, Roy would never notice if a few of the

neglected ones were missing.

Roy must have sensed that she was mentally dissing him. Before Larisa could hide the games in her hand, his shaggy dark head appeared from behind the shelf, glaring at her. Her heart braced itself for the impact of his temper, but she didn't have enough time to wipe the smile off her face. His rage was even more pronounced than she had expected.

“What the hell are you doing in my room?” He impatiently looked her over for an answer to his question, and his eyes got wide when he discovered her guilty burden.

“You bitch, were you trying to steal my games?”

Larisa rolled her eyes, unwilling to reveal the hurt his words caused her. “Whatever, you don't even play these games. At least I'm not a jackass that sits on his ass all day getting fat off of stale cheetos.”

“Oh, fuck you! You were trying to steal my games. If dad was still here-” His eyes were flared up as he shouted into Larisa's face, exposing his surprisingly sharp incisors. Larisa took a step back, almost tripping on a CD on the floor. Roy laughed loudly at her, forgetting his train of thought. “You and mom are just like twin bitches to me. Now give me back my games and get out of my fucking room.”

He grabbed Larisa's arm roughly and spun her around, twisting it and making Larisa shout in pain. “Let go, you bastard!”

But Roy merely smirked as he pulled her arm further around, his strong fingers clenched around Larisa's small, pale wrist. “Give me the games.”

“Fuck you!”

“How charming..” Roy had Larisa's arm twisted to the point of dislocating, and tears were beginning to form in her eyes against her will.

“Okay, fuck, take them!” She dropped the game into his outstretched hand. “Happy now?” She shouted, her voice cracking.

“Not quite, but since you did what I asked...” Roy guided her to the door and used his unoccupied arm to push Larisa forward, letting her go at the same time so that she fell on her knees in the corridor. He then slammed and locked his door behind her, laughing.

Larisa groaned on the floor, sure that she would have to wear long sleeved shirts for at least a week so that her teachers didn't get suspicious and send her to the counselor's office. “Bastard, you're such a bastard,” Larisa muttered into the shaggy beige carpet. “I can't believe that little

shit is my brother. Thank god I'm graduating soon.” She pictured college in all its independent, far-away-from-asshole-brother glory, but the glorious image began to fade as her mother's sad face invaded the vision. It would be almost unbearable to leave her. She thought about how much she would miss her and how she would have to deal with that bastard all by herself. I can't condemn her to that.

Slowly she picked herself off the ground and walked to her room, two doors away from her brother's. Her arm ached tremendously and all she wanted to do was lay on her bed and brood. Only a closet sized bathroom separated them, which barely acted as a sound barrier from machine gunshots and death screams. Her mom had tried to forbid him from buying those games, but Roy had thrown such a terrifying fit that she had quickly given in.

Slamming her door as loudly as she could, Larisa tried to clear her mind from the encounter. The way Roy treated her would have been unacceptable in most families, but her mom turned a blind eye. Larisa knew that despite all the work she did to win her mom's heart, she would never be able to get away with all the shit that Roy did. She lay on her bed and began staring listlessly at the glowing stars that she had glued on her ceiling in childhood. Roy was her mother's baby boy, and no matter how many times he treated them like shit, her mother would still love him. For a moment Larisa thought she might hate her mother for it. “Damn you, Roy, why do you have to be such a bastard?” she asked the ceiling, then rolled onto her side and closed her eyes. His angry mouth and sharp incisors appeared involuntarily, and she twitched at the memory.

Larisa woke up when she heard Roy's door open and footsteps approaching. She sprang up and ran toward her door, locking it just as the footsteps stopped in front of her door.

“Oh, I see how it is. I was just going to tell you that it's dinner time, but okay, if you want to be anorexic in your room that's cool. Whatever,” Roy drawled through the door before walking away.

Larisa chose to wait until he went downstairs before she let out a slow sigh and unlocked the door.

Her hand slid down the smooth mahogany rail and turned at the corner as she padded downstairs. In front of her was the dining room, beyond that the kitchen. A dim chandelier hung over a table that was set for three with a white doily tablecloth, porcelain plates, and glass cups. Larisa usually helped her mother with setting the table, but not today. Roy was already seated, completely absorbed in his handheld when her mother placed the casserole down on the table. As

Larisa hesitantly sat down, she glanced over at her mother and noticed her concerned expression. There was something sticking out of her floral apron pocket, and Larisa made out an envelope with her private school's address printed in large letters on the front. Up close, her mother looked more distressed than ever. She just stared down into her lap, avoiding Larisa's questioning gaze.

“Hey, mom is everything okay?” The words seemed to come involuntarily but softly out of Larisa's mouth.

Not hearing her, Larisa's mother instead looked at Roy. “Honey, could you please stop playing your game now? Let's say grace.”

“I need to finish this level,” Roy grumbled, frowning his eyebrows at the miniature screen.

“Roy, please!” Larisa sensed urgency in her mother's tone that she didn't normally hear and glared harshly at her little brother, but Roy didn't look at either of them.

There was a moment of quiet where the mother seemed to struggle for words, her lip quivering. Then she burst into wails and hid her face in her hands.

“You love your games more than me and your sister. You love them more than anything. This is why you're failing all your classes.”

Their mother had gotten Roy's attention, but he was neither apologetic nor pleading. He just stared at her as if her distress confused him. “I told you, my teachers are douche-bags. They hate me, that's why I failed. I worked just as hard as any of my friends.”

Larisa had lost her patience a long time ago, but now she slammed her hands on the table, shaking the glass cups precariously. “Your friends go to public school, you idiot. You don't do any fucking work. Mom pays 5,000 dollars a year for you to go to an amazing fancy ass school and this is how you thank her? You're literally throwing Mom's money down the toilet. You fucking ungrateful shit.”

“Larisa, stop.” Her mother was wiping away tears, but also looking sternly at her daughter.

“Mom, you can't keep paying for Roy to go to private school if he's failing everything. We can't afford that.” Larisa looked pleadingly into her mother's eyes, but the strict treatment continued.

“Stop.”

When Larisa fell silent, her mother continued to address Roy. “I've spoken to your teachers and they told me that you've been neglecting your after school tutoring and that you never ask them for help. I can't help but think you could be working harder.”

“Oh, so you're siding with the teachers are you? They're lying. It's just because Larisa's a goody two shoes straight A student that you think I'm not working hard enough.” Larisa was sure she would punch him in the face.

“You're hurting me, Roy. I'm only worried about you.” This was the classic pleading phrase that their mother spoke right before she gave up, and both her children were aware of it. If Roy had anything but selfishness in him he might have felt bad, but Larisa knew better.

“Well, stop worrying,” Roy muttered and stood up from his seat.

“Roy, you're my son. How can you say that? Where are you going? ”

“Outside.”

“But honey, what about dinner? Please don't go.” Big tears began welling up in the mother's eyes again. Larisa didn't want to look at her. It was too pathetic.

“I'll just eat leftovers when I get back. I would rather eat in peace without you two bitching at me.” Without another word Roy began to walk away, miraculously making it through the kitchen even while both eyes maintained their focus on the handheld.

No amount of hugging or reassurance from Larisa could prevent the mother from wailing uncontrollably into her apron after such an abrupt departure.

“I-I just want the b-best for him, but he's always f-fighting me. I'm s-so worried about him.” The mother managed to sputter between sobs.

“I will go get him, mom. Don't worry,” Larisa whispered into her mother's ear while her arms were still wrapped tightly around her. She made to move, but she felt her mother desperately grab at her sleeve.

“B-but Larisa, he w-won't listen to you. H-he's so stubborn.”

Larisa gritted her teeth at these words and narrowed her eyes. “I'll make him listen.” Before her mother could say anything, she was charging outside after Roy.

Though part of her wished she could lock Roy up in a cage and beat him every time he disobeyed her, she knew that her mother would only approve of the kindest tactics.

Having reached the front door, Larisa glanced through the screen just in time to see Roy's dirty converse disappear into the woods behind their neighbor's house. It was getting dark outside and she would have to hurry if she wanted to catch him.

“Fuck him, fuck him, fuck him,” she muttered over and over as she ran in the direction of the woods. Winter was nearing, and goosebumps were forming all over her body. She ran faster.

Within a few seconds, the hard concrete beneath Larisa's feet was replaced with plush grass. The dirt trail into the woods lay before her. Roy was nowhere to be seen.

Looking warily about her, Larisa thought through her options: come back empty handed, or continue into the forest searching for Roy. Coming back would mean admitting failure and dealing with an upset mother. Continuing her search might lead her to discover her brother and coax him back home at best, or lose a lot of time and possibly have an unpleasant encounter at worst. A lot of strange people spent time in the woods around her neighborhood, especially druggies and rebels who considered it a convenient hiding spot. Larisa knew this and therefore avoided the place. Yet she was so angry with her brother that even before Larisa began weighing the possibilities, she already knew what her decision would be.

She walked straight into the darkness of the forest as the sun became consumed by the horizon.

II

Larisa lost track of time as she wandered further into the forest. Every sound hinted at Roy's presence, from the chirping of a lone cricket to a rustling leaf. Larisa was getting colder with every minute, but her fuming rage at Roy warmed her blood and pushed her forward. She kept imagining how Roy would appear and how she would chastise him until he came back with her. Then there was a strange bird call to her left, and Larisa turned to see a small clearing. In the center, someone had recently put out a fire. Smoke invaded Larisa's nostrils and eyes. She began to cough and blink rapidly but approached the clearing anyway, trying to make out any hint that Roy might have been there.

Before she could gather her breath or examine the fire, Larisa felt something powerful grab at both her arms. She tried to scream as she fell backwards, but the force covered her mouth. Her spine hit the ground, and Larisa felt rocks dig into her skin. She grimaced in pain, trying to stand, but something heavy was on top of her.

“Hey, Roy. I think we found your sister.”

Larisa did not recognize the deep voice over her, but her eyes went wide at the words. She started to struggle with all her might, but her arms wouldn't move an inch under the weight.

“Woah, woah, woah. Calm down. Damn, Roy, is your sister always this feisty?”

Larisa froze when the sound of laughter erupted behind her. She recognized Roy's sneer instantly. She couldn't believe he had planned this. What the hell was he thinking?

“Feisty? You sure it's her, Clark? Larisa's a pussy.”

Hearing this, Larisa writhed, twisting her hips and trying her best to knee the enemy in the crotch.

“No, man. I bet you 500 dollars she's always on top.”

“Okay. I hope you have enough on you because you already lost.”

“Haha. Wait, what?”

“You're on top of her now, dipshit.”

The teenagers' loud laughter mixed with her own panic gave Larisa a splitting headache. Sweat was forming on her chest from the heat of Roy's friend on top of her, and cooling the moment his weight shifted. Besides that, the adrenaline was making her feel like a chained feral dog. Larisa didn't care anymore about bringing Roy back. She took her chance when her attacker's hand slipped slightly from her mouth. Before Clark could correct his mistake, Larisa had her teeth clamped tightly around his flesh.

For a moment, Clark's friends couldn't tell if the scream had come from his or Larisa's mouth. They heard a struggle, Larisa's shrill voice shouting to *let go* of her, the dull sound of fist hitting flesh, several muffled yelps, enraged threats from Clark, and screams of pain from both parties. Everything remained confused until Roy's other friend brought out a mini flashlight from the crevices of his jean pocket.

“That fucking bitch *bit* my hand!” Clark was shouting in horror as the light fell upon his bleeding extremity. The defeated silhouette of Larisa was lying on the ground at his feet. There was blood on her nose and mouth, but it was hard to tell whose blood it was. Newly formed bruises covered her body. Larisa felt sore and cold everywhere. The adrenaline had been beaten out of her. When the flashlight shined into her eyes, she couldn't even move her arm to shield herself. She felt violated.

“You're going to pay for what you just did to Clark.” The anonymous third friend of Roy's loomed over Larisa while Clark continued to shriek. She tried to glare at him, but her swollen cheeks made it far too painful.

“Don't you dare come near me, you bastard.”

“Oh, still have some fight in you I see. I'll take care of that. You can't just go around biting people, you know. If you're going to act like an animal then fine, I'll treat you like one.”

“Show that bitch, James! Fucking whore.” Larisa heard Clark cheer him on from the sidelines. Every muscle was telling her to run, but no matter how hard she willed herself to stand her body remained immobile.

James didn't waste time in satisfying Clark's wishes. He kneeled to the ground and began crawling on all fours towards her, growling like a tiger. Larisa tried in vain to prop her body up with her arms and push herself away. James's face was frightening with thin smirking lips, flared nostrils, and narrowed eyes focused intently on her. His fingers clasped around her wrists like handcuffs and pushed her arms into the dirt. With his teeth, he grabbed onto the bottom of Larisa's dirty tank top and began to slowly unveil her naked stomach.

“You can't do this, please. Stop! I'm begging you.” James's touch made her shudder with repulsion. “Anything but this, I'll give you whatever you want. Roy, I'll never forgive you!”

At this James sniggered, pausing just as he was reaching her breasts. “All we wanted was for you to leave Roy alone, but no, you had to follow him into the forest. We were just going to beat you up a little, but then you had to go and bite Clark's hand.”

Suddenly, Larisa heard Roy's voice interrupt from the darkness, calm as ever. “Stop, James. This wasn't part of the plan.”

“What? Roy, you were the one who wanted us to grab her. She bit my fucking hand. She's totally fucking asking for it!” Clark was shouting at the top of his lungs, almost reaching the pitch of a soprano. “I'm not going to let you stop us.”

Before Roy could respond, Larisa could hear from the scuffles and shouts that Clark was already attacking him. Then there was a resolute thud. Larisa held her breath, prayed.

“Okay, James. You can keep going. Roy's just taking a little nap.”

She couldn't keep the tears away any longer. The humiliation coupled with the pain might have been enough to kill her.

When James had pulled her shirt up to her shoulders and her bra had been removed Larisa's body became a corpse. The insults she endured afterward were mere needles poking into a gaping stab wound.

“Shit, I think she was hotter with her clothes on.”

“I've met preteens with bigger boobs than yours.”

“Her nipples are like ten times harder than my dick.”

After what felt like years, Roy's friends got bored with Larisa's punishment. Clark's wound was getting worse so, after receiving several more kicks to the stomach, Larisa was left alone in the clearing. Moving like an old woman on the verge of death, Larisa slowly stood and put her clothing back on. Never before had both her mind and body experienced so much pain. She limped back in a daze of hatred. If someone had given her a gun she would have shot herself, her brother, and everyone else without hesitation.

When Larisa reached the house, her mouth fell open upon seeing through the window that it had only been half an hour since she left. The sound of the television emanating from the living room snapped her out of it, and she opened the unlocked front door as slowly as possible. A splitting pain seared through her wrist as she twisted the handle, but the warmth of the house drew her in. Less pleasant was the slow return of sensation to her skin. Resisting the urge to groan, Larisa half snuck, half limped into the house and went straight upstairs. Only one thought repeated itself through her mind: it was all because of *Roy*.

Upstairs, Larisa headed to the bathroom and emptied the hamper basket big enough that if she wanted she could climb into it. The splinters didn't bother her at all as she carried the monstrosity to Roy's room, setting it at the foot of his shelf of games. Without any hesitation Larisa threw them in first one by one, then in bulk with swipes of her arm. The hamper was wide enough to catch all the games in their fall, and within minutes Larisa was finished. It was fairly simple pushing it across the carpet toward the stairs, but the decline proved more challenging. Larisa had to guide it very carefully and slowly in front of her, wincing with every bump it made against the steps. With the hamper positioned before the back door, Larisa tip toed through the kitchen, searching for the last tool for her revenge.

She found it in the drawer by the sink, looking as innocent as any other kitchen utensil. Just as Larisa was leaving, she heard her mother's footsteps. Pushing the door wide open, she used all her strength to throw the hamper outside and dove out of sight herself. She heard her mother pacing around and then the sound of a window sliding open.

“Roy! Larisa! Are you kids out there?!”

For a moment the sound of her mother's worried voice snapped Larisa out of her fury. But it wasn't enough. When the TV came back on, she pushed the hamper into the clearing. Larisa took a deep breath and lit the hamper on fire. Watching the hungry orange flames rise brought a

feeling of joy unlike any other she had felt. It was a sadistic, exhausted kind of joy, but it rejuvenated her. The warmth of the flames snapped her mind back into the present. Inhaling the smell of burnt plastic like a rich perfume, Larisa felt alive. She smiled.

Unbeknownst to her, Roy had awakened from his comatose state. Not wanting to make a dramatic entrance, he chose to come in from the back door. When he saw Larisa and her deranged smile as she stood in front of his precious burning belongings, he curled his fists and lost all sense of self control.

Before Larisa could realize what had happened she was unconscious.

III

When Larisa opened her eyes it took a few seconds for her to realize she was in her bedroom. Seeing her mother packing her things into boxes, Larisa jolted awake.

“Mom. What are you doing?”

“Oh, sweetie, I'm so glad you're awake. How are you feeling? You had so many bruises. Oh thank god, thank god you're awake.” Her mother fell on Larisa, drenching her in tears. In a rush Larisa remembered with horror the past events. She could feel her pulse quicken, felt suddenly claustrophobic. When her mother finally gave her space to breathe, she had almost forgotten what had woken her.

“I'm fine, don't worry. But why are you packing my stuff?”

“Honey, please. I didn't want to do this but your brother is so angry. It's not safe for you here.” There was a long, tense pause. “Why did you burn his games, Larisa? Why?”

Larisa didn't notice she was crying until the mother handed her a tissue. “Because, mom. He.. his friends.. they...” But she couldn't bring herself to say it.

“What did they do, honey? Tell me.”

“He...” Larisa had not anticipated her shame being so great that she couldn't tell the mother, but words were failing her. She swallowed, but still no words came.

“Larisa, if they only hit you.” She sighed. “I never took you to have a temper.”

Larisa stared at the mother, wide eyed. “No. No. That's not it.”

“Then what, Larisa? You realize what you've done now, don't you? Roy's been making threats all day.”

Larisa closed her eyes. What the mother said opened a chasm in her soul that made Larisa want to disappear.

“Where are you making me go?”

“Don't say it like that.”

“Just tell me.”

“I'm not making you go anywhere specific. I just need you to leave this house. You've disturbed the peace enough here. ”

The mother ignored the tears that Larisa now shed shamelessly on her comforter. She was too busy crying herself.

“Larisa, this upsets me as much as it upsets you.”

“I don't understand. Are you just kicking me onto the street? You can't do that. None of this is my fault. You're spoiling Roy, mom. He's like this because of you. If you'd been more strict with him Roy wouldn't have turned out like this.”

“That's a horrible thing to say. You just don't understand Roy like I do. And please don't overdramatize this. You were the one who burned Roy's games, Larisa.”

“Like hell I don't understand Roy! Where will I go? I hardly have any money.” Panic was beginning to set into Larisa's mind. She couldn't fathom living on the street. It was too much.

“Well, that's your problem now isn't it? My mistake was that I should have been stricter with you, not Roy. What you did was an act of complete disrespect to Roy and me. I spent hundreds of dollars on those games, and you burn it all for what? Because you got pushed around a little by some boys?”

“His friends abused me! They sexually abused me!”

“Don't try to use that jargon on me. These days people can call sexual abuse on someone just for touching them, but that does not excuse what you did.”

“Mom, how can you say that? Y-you don't understand.” Larisa could no longer look into the mother's eyes, because the complete lack of sympathy inside them terrified her. It was like looking into the eyes of a statue. Never had she been completely unable to persuade the mother. “Please, Mom, just don't kick me out. I promise I'll never do anything like it again.”

“You know I always trusted you Larisa, but after what you did, I have half a mind to send

you to a clinic.”

“Anywhere is better than on the street!”

“You can go to the clinic yourself.”

“Mom, please. I'll do anything. I'll buy all of R-Roy's games back even.” Larisa let the words out in a flood, knowing she wouldn't be able to say them otherwise. Her desperation had reached the breaking point. Tears covered her cheeks, chin, and lap. Larisa knew this was her last hope.

“No, Larisa. It's too late for all of that. It's unsafe for you, too. You have to leave.”

“No. No. No. No.” Larisa couldn't accept it, didn't even realize what she was saying out loud anymore.

“Please, Larisa. Don't make this any harder than it already is.”

“This can't be happening. I knew you always loved Roy more than me. This only proves it. All you can do is beg Roy to do what you ask, and you crumble every time he complains. Can't you tell what a jackass he is? He treats you like shit! How can you tolerate it? I've always been a good student; I've always helped you and worried about you and loved you. How can you do this to me? You're not going to solve anything by kicking me out.”

“I can't listen to this. I had no idea you hated Roy this much. You've crossed the line, Larisa.” Frown lines creased her mother's face, and there were bags under her eyes. She gazed listlessly at something that sat at the foot of Larisa's bed, as if looking at her daughter did not interest her in the least.

“It's definitely best for you to leave this house. I'm sending all your stuff to our storage locker. You should remember the combination. Have your bags packed by tonight. I'll check at midnight to make sure you're gone.” The mother stood up to leave.

“No! Mom, please, you can't do this to me. If you love me at all please hear me out! I'm your daughter! I can't just live out on the street like that! I could get killed! Mom!”

But the door had already closed. For a second Larisa gazed at it in astonishment. Unable to process what had just happened, she let out a guttural wail that scraped at her throat and terrified even her. She rolled onto her back and stared without seeing at the stars on her ceiling. When she finally comprehended them, they filled her with hate. Standing up on her bed, in her fierce misery she decided to tear them off. The glue was stubborn. Even all the pent up aggression wasn't enough to remove them from the ceiling. Larisa didn't realize she had broken her nail until

she smeared one of the stars with her blood. The flood of sharp pain calmed her enough that she was able to lie down. Larisa then stared from her bleeding finger up to the red star and back again. Then she started packing her things.

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