

*Creature from the Little Miami River* by Morgan E. Elswick

Characters

James: Man, late twenties, naturally irritated

Margie: Woman, mid-twenties, easy-going

Creature: Gender neutral, four feet tall, green leathery skin, webbed appendages

Setting

Clean, organized living room. Major components include sofa with a blanket and large screen television. The table is laid up with snacks and a movie is playing while muted.

*JAMES enters, throwing his bag and jacket on the ground. He flips his shoes off so they fly across the room. MARGIE, sitting on the couch, stands as he kicks his bag and jacket and slams the door.*

MARGIE

What are you doing?

JAMES

Do you know what happened to me today?

MARGIE

Something great?

JAMES

I got another parking ticket. Another one. This one they hid so goddamn well, I didn't notice until I was driving over here.

MARGIE

A parking ticket for what?

JAMES

It says my tag wasn't visible.

MARGIE

Where was it?

JAMES

I don't remember where it was. I can tell you where it is. Crumpled and crying in the back seat.

MARGIE

We can hold off if you don't feel like—

JAMES

Let's watch the stupid whatever so I distract myself from the stupid, festering ticket in my bag.

MARGIE

Are you sure?

JAMES

Did you make popcorn?

MARGIE

Yes, with the jalapeño cheese powder.

JAMES

Yes, I'm sure.

*JAMES enters the living room and frowns at the TV.*

MARGIE

Are you really, really sure you wanna—?

*JAMES throws himself on the couch, grabbing the bowl of popcorn. He wraps his feet in the blanket and begins eating.*

JAMES

Yes.

MARGIE

Is it my turn or yours?

JAMES

Yours. I chose last time. Infomercial channel, remember?

*MARGIE picks up the remote, closes her eyes, and scrolls through the channels. She stops, raises the remote, and opens her eyes. The TV features scenes with large wildlife animals. A few moments of silence, then—*

JAMES

Nature documentaries?

MARGIE

The remote has chosen.

JAMES

Better than my last one, I guess.

MARGIE

Two more hours of bracelet showings (*showy arm motions*), I would kill you then myself.

JAMES

Thanks for taking me out first.

MARGIE

My pleasure.

*A few beats of silence. Lions/elephants/tigers roaring from the TV.*

JAMES

I know it was visible.

I'm sure it was.

MARGIE

They just wanted to bust my balls.

JAMES

It happens.

MARGIE

I don't have the money for another ticket.

JAMES

*The documentary continues. There may be a narrator or just animal noises. A nice herd shot or lone carnivore profile. MARGIE is immersed in the action. Neither of them hear the light knocking at the door.*

I had to stop in the middle of the road, Marge.

JAMES

Why?

MARGIE

I didn't see it until I turned my wipers on.

JAMES

You could've kept going until you got here.

MARGIE

I didn't want it to blow off.

JAMES

I'm—

MARGIE

I had to stop on that shady road with the river right next to it. What's it called?

JAMES

The river or the road?

MARGIE

It was the Little Miami River, but the road was—uh, the three M's. Marlboro—

JAMES

Mason Morrow Millgrove Road?

MARGIE

JAMES

Yes, and it was sketchy. I got out, heard all that water, and got right back in.

MARGIE

Well, you're fine now, right? So—

JAMES

Those stupid offbrand meter maids.

*MARGIE doesn't respond, instead turning back to the movie. Hyenas are cackling or owls hooting. There is a scratching at the window.*

JAMES

Oh, Marge, I didn't even tell you the strangest part.

MARGIE

Yes?

JAMES

As I was driving back, I saw this huge something, I don't know. It looked like a garbage bag or a deer or—it was decent sized—on the side of the road. I swerved around it, and when I looked back—

MARGIE

You didn't turn around in your seat, did you?

JAMES

No, I looked back through my mirror, and it was gone.

MARGIE

Maybe it was the lights playing tricks. You know your eyes do that, ever since you got—

JAMES

No, I know it was something.

MARGIE

Playing dead and then running away?

JAMES

Yes.

MARGIE

Why?

JAMES

How would I know?

MARGIE

Why don't we just watch the documentary? The remote chose.

JAMES

This is stupid.

MARGIE

It's getting good. And we've watched dumber things.

*They watch the TV. The action is significantly louder. Maybe a zebra is being eaten or ants are devouring a grasshopper. Loud thumps are heard against the living room window.*

JAMES

Did you hear that?

MARGIE

No.

JAMES

Was it the movie?

MARGIE

Probably. I can't hear anything over the screams of that poor animal.

JAMES

They're really going at it.

MARGIE

I know, it's so graphic. How is this allowed on television?

JAMES

Educational value.

MARGIE

It's not such a bad show, is it?

JAMES

No, it's fine.

MARGIE

I'm sorry about the ticket.

JAMES

It's fine.

MARGIE

I'm surprised you stopped the car when it's so dark out.

JAMES

No one was coming either way. I was safe.

MARGIE

A murderer could've been hiding in the bushes.

JAMES

Or a monster.

MARGIE

It could've dragged you straight down into the river.

JAMES

And I would've become one of them.

MARGIE

I wouldn't let you in if you were sopping wet.

JAMES

Or green and slimy?

*Another loud bout of noise from the television. Perhaps a rampage or natural disaster. Thunderous knocking is heard from the front door. Both JAMES and MARGIE jump up. After a moment, MARGIE mutes the TV.*

MARGIE

Okay, that I heard.

JAMES

Answer it.

MARGIE

Why?

JAMES

It's late. They might need help or something.

MARGIE

Not from me they don't.

JAMES

Just answer it. I'm right here.

Coward.

MARGIE

*MARGIE opens the front door, revealing the CREATURE. There is a tense moment of silence. MARGIE, shocked, stays still while JAMES hurries backward toward the couch. He vaults it and cowers.*

*(faintly)* Hello?

MARGIE

CREATURE

Good evening. I'm sorry to bother you, but—

JAMES

*(nearly screaming)* Get out, get out, get out!

CREATURE

Excuse me, but I—

JAMES

Get out! Marge, call the police.

MARGIE

Am I high?

CREATURE

Unfortunately not. You see, my tongue got caught on that man's car. He, well—

JAMES

What?

CREATURE

I snuck out to grab a bite, and your car was hosting a prime dragonfly, and my tongue, it—

MARGIE

What's going on?

CREATURE

I'm sorry, really, I know you're busy. I've been knocking. Could I—catch a ride back? My mom is probably looking for me.

MARGIE

What—

JAMES

*(still screaming)* What are you?

CREATURE

Do you want my family lineage, place of birth, blood type?

JAMES

What *are* you?

MARGIE

James!

CREATURE

Species then. I'm a frogperson. Typically called frogman.

MARGIE

Typically?

CREATURE

Yes, well, journalists always get it wrong. What can you do? (*pause*) Can I catch a ride or should I call an Uber? Although last time I tried, it—

JAMES

Leave!

MARGIE

James, he's a kid. (*grabbing her keys and jacket*) I'll drive you.

JAMES

Margie!

MARGIE

It's your fault! I might as well help out.

CREATURE

Thank you! You know, humans are such an odd group. My mother, she always told me never to talk to your kind, and I was keen to believe her, you know? She told me a story about her and her two brothers hanging out one day when out of the blue this man approached them, and my mom, she's a tough one—a real badass, totally not afraid of fire—so she lights a sparkler, one of those big ones, you know, and she waves it at him and he just takes off—

*MARGIE and the CREATURE exit at any time during the CREATURE's story. The sound of a car is heard, headlines flashing through the living room window. JAMES sits, wraps himself in the blanket, and turns the TV volume up high.*

*Fade out.*

Morgan E. Elswick is a writer living in Cleveland, OH. She is pursuing her MFA in Playwriting.