

Cross Section Dissection

A one act

By

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EDMOND (ED)an eccentric eremite entomologist of 60 years
MELISSA.... A lonely secretary in her late 20s to early 30s

Place: the basement of a research facility

Time: Mondays in winter

Authors Note: Neither character is to be played as “creepy”
Their interactions are fueled by the curiosity of the other

“You are the knife I turn inside myself; that is love. That, my dear, is love.”
— Franz Kafka

Scene 1

A basement lab/filing room, a big lab table with specimens and microscopes and a terrarium with a chrysalis on it, a large back wall with pinned up bugs, a door to the left that leads to a small office and a row of filing cabinets filled with bugs.

MELISSA walks in looking lost

MELISSA

Hi? Hello?..... Hello? Mr. Edmond?

ED

Huh? Hello? Crystal?

ED comes from office and checks the butterfly chrysalis

Oh no,

Oh! Hi!

Yes, yes ! That's me!

They looks at each other

MELISSA

Great well um I was told to come down here and get this week's data?

ED

You?

MELISSA

Um... yes

I'm sorry if im in the wrong place Im new to the research center and this is my first day actually and I was told to come down here and get the data from a Mr.Edmond in the bug classifying and collection department

I'm starting the new project of digitizing all the research files

ED

Oh yes you're in the right place then

MELISSA

Great!

He doesn't move

Is something wrong?

ED

Oh yes

Well i suppose maybe not it's just that normally the old woman did it every week,
kira, carmen.

MELISSA

Kathrine, yes she retired last week, i'm the new secretary

MELISSA

Melissa holds out her hand to shake

Ed sees this and puts on gloves

They shake hands, its awkward

ED

You can call me Ed

MELISSA

Hi, Ed

So um the files?

ED

Oh yes, right

He goes back into the office

MELISSA

thanks

She picks up a jar with a beetle in it, rattles it around

So how long have you been working here?

He comes back in and sees her holding the jar

ED

Ah! Don't touch that please he doesn't like to be rattled

MELISSA

Oh sorry, sorry

ED

37 years

MELISSA

What?

ED

I've been working here for 37 years, you asked me

MELISSA

Oh yes sorry, that's impressive

ED

Hmm yes, thank you, I enjoy my work

MELISSA

Is it just you down here?

ED

Oh no

MELISSA

Oh!

Who else works in the department?

ED

Well my thousands of friends of course

He chuckles and gestures to the cabinets of bugs

MELISSA

Ohhhh I see

ED

And of course we have crystal, she's set to be a beautiful luna moth here in a week or so.

They look at the chrysalis in its terrarium

Well, here is that data

He goes to hand her the papers and gives her a paper cut and a drop of blood lands on the floor

MELISSA

Ow? Geez I cut myself

Oh gosh i'm so sorry I got a drop of blood on your floor

ED

Oh it's no problem, im sorry

MELISSA

Alright well I better go get bandaid, but i'll see you next week ED

ED

See you next week

MELISSA leaves and ED takes off his gloves wipes up the blood with his finger and looks at it and walks into his office

Scene 2

ED

Oh hi there! Hello again!

MELISSA

Hi yes i'm back for this weeks data

ED

Why yes of course

You know it gonna take a few minute im waiting for the computer to finish up on imagine I took why don't you come in I can give you a tour

If if you'd like

MELISSA

Oh um alright

I have to admit i've been curious about your work

ED

Oh really?

That is incredible to hear

Bugs tend to freak most people out they just don't understand them like I do

MELISSA

Yes my sister is terrified of anything that crawls she would always beg me to kill them like her life depended on it

She laughs at the memory

ED stares at her, she notices

Oh!, sorry uhh sorry I guess that's a sensitive topic

He stares

I mean just that ya know I don't kill them to be cruel

Awkward silence

ED

Their guts splattered on the underbelly of your shoe

How disappointing

MELISSA

I'm sorry I didn't mean it like that

But also aren't you surrounded by dead bugs everyday

ED

Yes but I respect them they are so beautiful

Here look at them with me

He picks up two huge magnifying glasses and hands her one, they look at the wall of pinned up bugs

There look at the long horned beetle, it has a iridescent glimmer to its shell, a shell meant to keep away evil birds of prey

And there a look at the cicada with its wings stretched out, so beautifully placed, it no longer looks like the type insect everyone despises for some reason

And my friend chrystal here, she will be absolutely magnificent when she emerges

MELISSA

The magnified glass is making my eyes hurt

ED

Sighs

Well yes it takes some getting used to but its my normal now

Almost feels weird to look at you without it

Now that I have a good look, what is it you do Melissa?

MELISSA

Oh I'm the secretary for archives department, on the 12th floor

ED

Well I know that but what is it you DO

MELISSA

Well I don't know I collect data from all the departments and make errands and spend a lot of time on excel

ED

He looks at her

You know in my field there is this idea of undetermined species behavior, why do praying mantises practice sexual cannibalism, or termites like rock music?

MELISSA

Why?

ED

We don't know, but they do anyways

MELISSA

Hm

ED

So what is your undetermined species behavior Melissa?

MELISSA

well I don't know

ED

Surely you're not just a secretary

MELISSA

No no, but I promise I don't practice sexual cannibalism either

ED

A relief to hear

He looks at her expectantly

MELISSA

Oh uh I don't know

I guess I like to steal things,

Small things i'm not some kleptomaniac

Just little precious things

Like the caps of peoples pens

Or fridge magnets when I find myself at a friends house

ED

Not from stores then?

MELISSA

No nothing pointless like that, my husband would be more be furious not just annoyed if it was stuff from stores

Just things that have life in them I suppose

ED

a unspecified species behavior indeed

MELISSA

Yes

ED

I can understand it though

MELISSA

Oh?

ED

Oh yes

You like the things people have poured life into

She nods

that's how I feel about my friends here

He gestures around at the wall of pinned bugs and the filing cabinets filled with more

They have such a life to them, despite the obvious, I like to pour my life back into their little bodies

That sentence sits for a bit until a alarm goes off

Oh! That's your data

He goes and gets it and hands the pages to her

Well here you go

MELISSA

Thank you

ED

Anytime

See you next week, MELISSA

MELISSA

Yes see you

She starts to walk out the office

ED
Oh and MELISSA ?

MELISSA
Yes?

ED
My magnifying glass

MELISSA
Oh! Yes

She takes it out of her pocket and places it on the counter

Bye ED

ED
Goodbye

Scene 3

MELISSA
Ed?

ED
Oh! Hello!
This is unexpected!

MELISSA
Oh yes i'm sorry i just had a question but i can come back later if you want

ED
Oh no not at all i've just never had someone come down here when they aren't required to that's all

MELISSA
Oh well, glad to be the first i suppose

ED
Me too

What was your question?

MELISSA

Oh well, you mentioned the other day that you believe these bugs all have feelings yes

ED

Oh yes, not just believe i know it

MELISSA

How tough?

ED

The same way you know that you have feelings, they exist and you understand and believe them

MELISSA

Hmm

I don't know if i've even got that far if i'm being honest but thanks for indulging my silly questions, I can let you get back to your work, I just squashed a fly without thinking about it, and I couldn't stop thinking about it.

Alright well see you monday, have a good weekend

ED

No no wait it's a slow day after all here. Let me show you something first

He pulls out a dissected and pinned bug

This was the first creature I ever examined. It's a ladybug, I did it when I was 13, you see I was always on the outside growing up, I was the weird kid the oddball. They bullied me, the classic teasing, lockers, lunch money, the usual. But one day we had to dissect a frog in class and i couldn't do it. I cried and cried and cried, begging the teacher not to. They all called me teddy from that day forth because I needed a "teddy bear" like a baby. For some reason that was always the one to get under my skin, because how could they just do that to another living creature, no questions asked just because they were told to.

I learned I wanted to toughen up. I wanted to be like them, and I was thinking this when this here ladybug landed on my shirt during the walk home from the bus stop.

SO i captured it in my hands, and walked home with it where I then put it in the fridge in a jar to help it go to sleep.

I got out the dissection kit the teacher gave us from class and my mothers sewing pins and I went to work, understanding it.

How it's hard exoskeleton kept it protected

How its dots were unique and beautiful

Of course I was crying the whole way through but in the end she gave me back so much, and led me to be here today because I know they have feelings, and by trusting me to understand them I have had empathy for this process and the sacrifice they are making to the work.

So i keep lady here to remind me of that lesson that day, lest i ever forget it

He puts her back in the drawer

Well sorry for that long story i just thought i'd help you understand a bit

MELISSA

No no, I think maybe it did

Either way it was beautiful

I'll try not to squish any flies so mindlessly anymore

ED

I think they'd appreciate it

MELISSA

Right

Okay well

I better get by to my desk

ED

right, the digital revolution awaits I suppose

MELISSA

yes , ok

Bye ed

ED

Goodbye

Scene 4

MELISSA

Knock knock?

She knocks on the door way

ED

Oh hello Melissa, come in

MELISSA

Hi Ed, back again for the data

ED

Oh oh oh yes yes yes of course I will get started printing now

MELISSA

Thanks

How is Crystal doing, has she hatched yet?

ED

The term is eclose not hatch but no, im getting worried she won't

MELISSA

Oh, well I have hope that she'll "elcose"

She examines the species he's working on

MELISSA

Wow

ED

It's beautiful isn't it

MELISSA

I guess

I don't really know what i'm looking at if i'm being honest

ED

Most people don't,

It's a type of millipede, "Eumillipes persephone"

He's in his own world, less eccentric and quieter than usual

MELISSA

Everything okay?

ED

Mm yes

MELISSA

My moms a fifth grade teacher and she told me worms have five hearts

Kinda ridiculous if you ask me, doesn't even seem like they should need one, they're just a tube

ED smiles at this but he's still in his slump, she keeps trying to connect to him

I didn't believe her for the longest time, and one day it was summer and it had just rained so all the earthworms had come up to the surface, and i went outside and

I just was fascinated by them

What was their head and what was their butt and why they were just wiggling there on the ground

I don't but I sat there watching them for long enough that I picked one up and
God

I was holding this worm between my two fingers and it just didn't feel.... Real?

Its lack of face or eyes? I don't know but something

And so i just started to pinch it

And like really hard

Until it sorta just like split

Right down the center

It started to bleed everywhere

And I just watched the two halves writhe away

I don't think i even felt bad

I think I felt a sense of obligation to feel bad though

If that counts for anything

She gets embarrassed that she told him this story

EDs fully engaged

Oh god sorry, i didnt think id ever tell anyone that story again, when i told my husband he thought i was a psychopath or something

ED

Well i dont think your a psychopath, not at all

MELISSA

Oh well that's a relief

ED

How *is* your husband?

MELISSA

Oh um

Were actually separated right now,

worms have five hearts on me apparently

ED

Oh

Silence

MELISSA

Well id better get back to my desk, if the papers are done printing

ED

Yes yes of course

He gets them but doesn't let go as he hands them to her

You're not a psychopath, you just wanted to understand him

MELISSA nods, shaken

She leaves

Scene 5

ED is sitting at the lab table crying, crystal is crumpled in his hands, dead., melissa is seen in the doorway watching him, he is unaware

ED

Oh my beautiful girl, i'm so so sorry, you are so beautiful

You do not deserve to go this way.

To never have stretched your wings and only know this terrarium of yours, what a waste
I wanted to watch you fly

Maybe I would've even set you free
 Oh chrissy
 I can pin you up if you'd like, I wont mess that up i promise
 You're all cold
 If i could just warm you up yes
 I wanted to care for you
 I love you
 So pretty
 Here here ill warm you up
 I'll warm you up

He puts the crumpled moth in his shirt pocket near his heart

There there you are
 I'll protect you better this time chris
 i promise

MELISSA backs away from this scene, ed never sees her

Scene 6

MELISSA walks in

ED
 Melissa!! I missed you last week!

Melissa
 Ah yes sorry I had to call out sick but i brought you chinese food!

ED
 Oh fantastic splendid yes thank you!

MELISSA
 Haha of course

You uh seemed kind of down last week, I mean the week before

ED
 Oh yes well frankly I was but never more, I have started a new project

MELISSA

Oh

ED

Oh indeed Mel!

If I can call you Mel?

She nods

Well Mel I am on a mission you have shown me that if only I could get more people to understand how I see my friends here, the everything would be so much easier, for them and well for me

They are just so beautiful I want to share that

MEL

Oh wow! Ed that's amazing I am happy for you

ED

Oh me too Mel

MEL

So how do you plan to do that

ED

Well you see this this is the hard part,

I have an idea

I just, oh neverminds

MEL

No, what? I wanna hear it!

ED

Well, ok let me show you this first

They head over to wear a beautiful big moth is pinned up on the center wall, he turns the blue lights on and it glows

so so incredibly beautiful

Look at patrice's wing in the light

How intricate the lattice of her veins are

The grooves of her exoskeleton unique to her and only her

outstanding

Like my finger tips

They are perfectly sterile and clean

And yet they are filled with the ridges and grooves

A landscape that could be another just another insect in the microscope

Our nails even are so similar to that of the shell of a whirligig beetle or the much misunderstood american cockroach.

They are not so hard to understand you see

I get to come here to my cool and dark basement and study the beauty of my friends

The patterns in their wings, the distance of their mandibles

Much more simple than what takes place above my head.

I take great care for them you know

I love them

I think they know

In their own way

MEL

Thats so beautiful Ed

Really.

ED

I need your help for my project though but its a bit of a large ask

MEL

What is it?

ED

Well you've helped me so much actually realize this idea and well um well i want to take your picture

MEL

Oh that's it?

ED

Well yes I suppose, just of the human form,

And your so beautiful mel and you've helped so much already i just thought-

MEL

No of course

ED

You'll do it

MEL

Yes, when?

ED

Well the museum is about to close so,,,
now?

If you want

MEL

Oh... okay sure

Where do you need me

ED

Well um if you could take your shoes and coat off

She does

Um okay and then stand there, il go get my camera

He leaves the room

*She hesitates and then takes her sweater off, she's in a bra and skirt
He comes back in and startles at the sight of her*

ED

Oh!

MEL

I'm sorry I can put it back on I just thought that you're trying to capture the human form and and
my sweater is really baggy-

ED

No it's perfect, thank you

She nods. He starts to take some pictures with the blue light still on. He looks up

Um well i'm not really sure how to ask you this but um

MEL

Oh, no I can it's really no problem

She takes off her skirt and she's standing there in her underwear. ED locks the door while this is happening

ED

You are beautiful melissa.

Thank you for this

MEL

Thank you

He goes back to taking pictures

She takes her hair down.

He takes pictures really close up

It's so quiet

It's funny though I don't really feel awkward

I just feel still

And beautiful, you make me feel beautiful ed

She takes off her bra

You see things so beautifully

And i haven't felt that way in a long time,
haven't felt anything in a long time

My husband and i separated because he wanted me to go to a psychiatrist and i didnt want to

But i think it's because if i go, they're going to tell me what I already know

ED

And what is that

MEL

Thatt

I don't feel anything at all

ED

I dont think thats true

MEL

I could kill you right now and it wouldn't phase me Ed

ED

You wouldn't do that

MEL

But I could

ED

I disagree

You have a heart, and a warm body,

He puts his hand over her heart

I can feel it

And you have showed care towards me, more than anyone ever has

You know i have never had anyone take interest in my work and life as much as you have Mel

I am forced to put love into the creatures because I have so much left over.

I am 60 years old and I have never been with anyone,

My parents are long gone

I have no children

If i could give all my excess

I would in a heartbeat

Besides if you were to kill me and got my blood on your hands it would look no different than your own

She kisses him, and bites his lip

MEL

I wish it could work like that

EDmond

Me too

MELISSA, puts her sweater on and her pants and shoes and hurries out- her bra and socks still on the floor

EDmond sits at the lab table

He pulls the luna moth out from his shirt pocket and hold it to his lips

He puts it in his mouth

blackout

Scene 7

The last monday

ED

MELISSA MELISSA! Come in come in, I have something I want to show you!

MEL

Alright but I can't stay for long today

ED

Oh yes yes I wont keep you but i just have my project i've been working on that i really think you'll like//

MEL

ED//

ED

It's just over here i've compiled the images you um well you know

MEL

Yes.. I know. but ED i've really gotta tell you something

This finally gets his attention and he stops jabbering

ED

Oh sorry... What is it?

MEL

I thought you'd like.. Well I thought I'd tell you that my husband and I are getting back together!

Silence

He um reached out to me a couple weeks ago and asked to meet with me and we did, a few times actually and he just seemed to be really sincere this time and to really value me now and he you know just got a new promotion at the bank so he said i wouldn't even have to really work, I could quit working here which is a pro ya know who wants to be a secretary anyways, but but yeah we talked and I just know that this time will be different and we love each other of course and yeah! He even brought me some beautiful lilies too, they're in full bloom right now on my nightstand
They smell so sweet,

He's a sweet guy Ed.

ED

I know you have always been attracted to the sweeter things

MEL

(laughs softly) yes well

Silence

Is that all you have to say?

ED

I am confident that is all you would want me to say, Melissa.

MEL

Say something

ED

Does he make you feel beautiful

MEL

In a way

ED

And what way is that

MEL

We look good together

Like a real couple

ED

Like a moth in a venus flytrap right before it closes its jaws

Silence

MEL

I have something for you

I sure you knew I had it but well you know, I just couldn't help myself

You see things so beautifully Ed

She hands him his magnified glass she stole

ED

Thank you Melissa but it's yours

MEL

Are you sure?

ED

Yes

I only hope you can see yourself through its lens

She smiles, this sits in the air

MEL

What was it you wanted to show me?

ED

Oh um it's nothing really you had the bigger news I suppose

And congratulations on that by the way

MEL

No no Ed I wanna see what was it

ED

Nothing really

Are you moving back in with him?

MELISSA

No its that project you've been working on you've been so excited to show me im sure its amazing, although I might not understand the science

ED

Nonsense you always understand more than you think, don't forget that but really i just am getting cold feet

MEL

Ed I wanna see!

ED

Drop it Melissa christ!!!!!!!!!!

Sorry but I can't

MEL

Oh okay.... sorry

Also I put my resignation in so this is also meant to be a goodbye

You've been a great um... colleague, thank you for teaching me about your work

ED

Oh MELISSA (*exasperated he puts on the same pleasant face MELISSA is giving him*)\

Yes it's been a pleasure

She reaches out to shake his hand

He stares at it

He walks into her slowly pulling her into a hug

They pull apart slightly he stares at her

You have such beautiful eyes, has anyone ever told you that?

She shakes her head

He kisses her cheek softly

They pull apart the pleasantries face is back on they shake hands

See you around Melissa

MEL

Goodbye Ed

She leaves, ED is left alone, he reveals his project is a beautiful massive piece. It's the images of MELISSA that he took, pieces of her naked body, miss matched with pieces of insect images like the wings of a moth and bits of iridescent shell. It's beautiful. We see the way he sees her. It's not creepy but beautiful and full of care.

He looks at it before covering it and turning off the light and exiting

Scene 7 part 2

At few seconds later MELISSA comes comes in with a folder of papers and a small container with a live luna moth in it

MELISSA

ED? ED are you still here?

She switches on the light

ED?

I forgot to give you back you data, and I have a gift for you

She sets the moth on the table

She sees the covered art piece and looks to see if eds there

She unveiled it

She drops the papers and gasps

She stares at it a second before black out
End of play