

Terrifish
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"TERRIFISH"

INT. MACY'S SHOE DEPARTMENT - DAY

A grumpy OLD MAN scowls at the massive wall of footwear.

No other customers are in sight. No staff either.

He shakes his head and begins pacing.

The word "TERRIFISH" appears on the screen.

The NARRATOR, male, 30's, begins:

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Terrifish. Like a malevolent spell,
that word transports me to another
time, another place, another bad
haircut. Terrifish.

(beat)

Now, in the Macy's shoe department,
that word, once again, shakes me in
its steel jaws. Hopefully for the
last time.

BARRY (44, nerd) spots the Old Man and scurries over.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Barry, the salesclerk, said it. He
was helping an older gentleman find
a pair of boots when it happened.

The Old Man addresses Barry. As he mouths his words, the
Narrator speaks in sync.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

"All I want is a good pair of
winter boots," the old-timer said.

The narrator stops, the Old Man continues.

OLD MAN

And I don't care about the color or the style. I don't even care how much they cost. I just want some bloody boots that'll keep my feet warm and not give me blisters.

BARRY

No problem, General.
(winks)
I've got you covered.

Barry starts for the back room. The old man SQUIRMS.

OLD MAN

But they shouldn't cost too much.

Barry smiles, nods, and disappears behind the curtains.

MOMENTS LATER

The Old Man is already sitting. His shoes are off too.

Barry emerges, carrying a gray shoebox.

BARRY

I think you'll like these. I have a pair of them myself, and I think they're terrifish.

The customer loses patience while watching Barry slowly remove the paper stuffed in the first boot, so he snatches the other boot and angrily removes the paper inside.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Terrifish.
(beat)
It's been twelve years since I last confronted that word.

The old guy brushes Barry away so he can try on the boots.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

It was during a visit to Chicago to see my older brother, Kyle, and his girlfriend, Miranda.

INT. APARTMENT DINING ROOM - NIGHT

NARRATOR'S POV

Note: We never see the narrator. We see only his view from the dinner table.

MIRANDA, 28, a hip, Veronica-Lodge-class bitch, sips a martini and pokes at her salad.

TROY, an intense, musclebound jock, loads his plate with sausages, hamburgers and corn.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

I had used it to describe Troy's
homemade barbecue sauce.

Miranda's eyebrows rise condescendingly. Troy perks up.

TROY

(to Miranda)

Terrifish?

(to Narrator)

Terrifish?

Miranda rolls her eyes and returns to her meal.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Miranda's silence only served to
confirm my blunder.

Troy GIGGLES. . .

NARRATOR (V.O.)

I was shocked. I was certain that
"terrifish" was a word; I'd been
using it for years.

. . . then LAUGHS.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

I thought it meant "kind of
terrific," which made it a useful
word for describing unimportant
things like dish soap, seat covers,
barbecue sauce, and even winter
boots.

And LAUGHS some more.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Up until that day, I had used the word dozens of times, and no one had ever corrected me. Ever.

Troy laughs so hard he FALLS to the floor.

INT. MACY'S SHOE DEPARTMENT - DAY

Old Man tests the boots. He walks one way then the next, scrutinizing the footwear with every step.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Now, twelve years later, that word returns, and I begin believing that it might actually be a real word. I mean, Barry used it, and he seems reasonably intelligent.

The Old Man inspects the boots in the mirror. First he tucks his pants into the boots. Then he pulls his pants over the boots. They look ridiculous pulled over.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

But then I remember all the dictionaries.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT - NARRATOR'S POV

Miranda POUTS in the living room.

The dinner table has been cleared and is now strewn with dictionaries.

INT. APARTMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT

Troy races down the hall with an armload of dictionaries.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT - NARRATOR'S POV

Troy drops 3 more dictionaries onto the table.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

There were at least nine or ten of them.

Troy does a jig for the narrator.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Kyle had an annoying habit of going overboard when making a point. So, he had spent the next fifteen minutes borrowing dictionaries from everyone in his building.

Troy cha-chas into the living room to persuade Miranda to join him in a victory dance.

No chance.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Of course, Kyle only engaged in this level of overkill when he was absolutely certain he was right . . . which he was. The word did not appear in even the thickest of dictionaries.

INSERT - LARGE DICTIONARY

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Including the twenty-pounder that he borrowed from the widow across the hall.

The pages are turned from Z to A.

Note: As each word is discussed, we see the word and its definition highlighted and magnified.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Throughout the book's thin, yellowed pages, words like "xebec"
. . .

XEBEC: A SMALL THREE-MASTED MEDITERRANEAN VESSEL WITH LATEEN AND SOME SQUARE SAILS.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

. . . and "vug" live in virtual anonymity among the other, more popular, words.

VUG: AN OPENING IN A MINERAL VEIN INTO WHICH CRYSTALS OFTEN PROJECT. ALSO VUGG, VUGH.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

I don't think you could find a more hospitable home for my misguided word than this big, dusty book.

We soon near the T's.

We're on the right page.

A finger follows the words down the page: "TERRIER, "TERRIFIC," "TERRIFY," "TERRIGENOUS," "TERRINE."

The finger stops.

BACK TO SCENE

The finger belongs to Troy.

He pokes the Narrator in the chest before performing one last victory dance.

The dance culminates in a well-executed moonwalk.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

But, as it turns out, "terrifish" was simply a product of my poorly-read youth.

INT. MACY'S SHOE DEPARTMENT - DAY - LATER

Boots litter the area.

Barry watches the Old Man furiously remove toe paper from yet another pair of boots.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

So, it's not surprising that, given what I know now, I have this overwhelming urge to intervene and say, "Barry, terrifish is not a real word. Stop using it!"

The Old Man tries on the next pair of boots and, after several steps, performs a little hop test.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Then again, why should the onus be on me to resolve this issue? The old man is sitting right there! Why doesn't he just say something?

The codger stomps over to a wall and kicks it. He's mildly impressed with the boot's strength.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

If I were in the old man's position, I'd simply say, "Terrifish? Why I don't believe that's a real word, my friend," and that would be that. Barry would finally learn the truth about the word, and he could get on with his life.

(beat)

But alas, there's nothing I can do to help.

Nearby, in the corner, LAURA FAWCETT (early 30's, Queen of the Fragrance Department) stands quietly by a display of men's belts.

She pretends to read the label on a belt.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

There's nothing I can do because . . . well . . . I am Laura's gas.

PAN TO THE AREA BEHIND LAURA

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Her flatulence. Her number four.

Laura notices a nearby mirror and examines her legs in various "slimming" poses.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Laura works at the Calvin Klein perfume counter.

INT. CALVIN KLEIN PERFUME COUNTER - DAY - MINUTES EARLIER

Laura arranges her collar in the mirror, but she can't seem to get it perfect.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

She began working there in 1999,
and, since then, she has advanced
from salesclerk to sales associate
to perfume sales representative,
and finally to fragrance
consultant.

She eventually gets her collar perfect. Big SMILE.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

And, remarkably, she did it all
without having any extra
responsibilities added to her
position.

DUANE LASTNAME skittles over to Laura's counter. He's a
nerdy, bow-tie-wearing middle-aged dweeb.

DUANE

Okay, I only have twenty minutes
away from the missus . . . or else
she'll spend all my money!

He WINKS and laughs. Laura smiles politely.

DUANE

Speed is essential.
(robot voice)
Initiate operation "Get Nice
Perfume."

LAURA

So, you'd like to invest in a
fragrance.

DUANE

Yeah, but I don't know what's good.

LAURA

Well, we have this one called Rain.
It's very popular.

She prepares a tester with the scent and, after a few waves,
presents it to Duane.

Duane SMUDGES it against his nose and inhales deeply.

DUANE

Mmm, I like that one.

She passes him another tester.

LAURA

This one is Tropique. It has more
of a citrus scent.

He sniffs it, and then re-smells the other tester.

DUANE

It kind of smells like the first
one.

LAURA

Really?

DUANE

Yeah, but I think I got some
perfume from the first card on my
nose.

LAURA

Oh.

Awkward silence.

LAURA

Well . . . we could wipe your nose
with a wet cloth.

(looks around)

Or maybe you could go to the
bathroom and wash it.

DUANE

No, that's okay. The first one was
nice. I'll get that.

LAURA

Great.

She takes the perfume to the register.

LAURA

Will that be everything?

DUANE

Oh, uh . . . I don't know. What
else is there?

LAURA

Well, to complement the fragrance,
we have a body wash with
exfoliating-

DUANE

No, that's okay, thanks. She's . .
. she doesn't really need anything
else. That'll do.

Laura smiles and rings up the purchase.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Laura's success with Calvin Klein
can be largely attributed to the
company's intensive training
seminars held each year in North
Platte, Nebraska.

Laura SHIFTS her weight, slowly ROCKING as if she has to go
to the bathroom.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

During these seminars, thousands of
fragrance consultants, like Laura,
are consistently reminded of Calvin
Klein's quintessential policy:
Under no circumstances are
employees to break wind within
fifty feet of the fragrance
counter.

Laura's skirt TIGHTENS as she CLENCHES her butt cheeks.

LAURA

Okay, that comes to eighty-one
forty-three. How will you be
paying?

DUANE

Eighty-one forty-three? Really?
(grimaces; sighs)
What else do you have?

Laura tries to hide her agony.

LAURA

Well, we have these soaps.

She leads him to another area of the counter.

INT. BELT DISPLAY - DAY

Laura stands by the belt rack, carefully scanning her
surroundings for other customers.

She spots an old man pacing alone in the shoe department.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

When Laura leaves the counter on these covert missions, her locations of choice are the appliance department and the belt display in menswear. Until recently, the restroom was her preferred destination but, ironically, she now finds the bathroom. . . too smelly.

Barry heads for the old man pacing in the shoe department.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

So, on six of her last seven outings, Laura has chosen to relieve herself by the belt display in Barry's section.

Barry notices Laura hiding behind the belts.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Barry is convinced that Laura has a crush on him.

Barry walks past the belt display and GRINS to himself, while watching Laura from the corner of his eye.

INT. MALL FOOD COURT - ANOTHER DAY

Laura waits in line at Orange Julius.

Several teenagers stand behind her.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Of course there are those occasions --usually due to time constraints-- when Laura must bypass the relative anonymity of restrooms and belt racks.

Laura bites her lip.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

In these situations, she has developed the strategy of . . .
(sigh)
. . . copping an attitude.

The woman ahead of Laura eventually looks back, offended.

Subsequently, to the shift the blame, Laura turns and GLARES at the teenagers behind her.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Once, after passing gas in the Food Court, Laura frowned so condescendingly at the teenagers behind her that she actually began to believe that they were, in fact, the culprits.

FOOD COURT - LATER

Laura enjoys her hotdog and drink.

She shakes her head at the teenagers from the lineup earlier.

They reply with looks that say "What's Your Problem?"

NARRATOR (V.O.)

This is the sad reality of my life.
(scoffs)
If you can call it a life.

Laura stops eating.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

I'm Laura's dirty little secret, an abomination . . . an embarrassment.

INT. RESTROOM STALL - ANOTHER DAY

Laura stands in the stall, fanning her butt.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Apparently, I've become so embarrassing that I'm deemed unworthy of human company altogether. I'm meant to be hidden in the recesses of society, concealed in bathroom stalls . . .

INT. AISLE IN THE AUTOMOTIVE DEPARTMENT - ANOTHER DAY

Laura studies an oil filter then scopes out the area.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 . . . and department stores.

She carefully reviews the information on a package of windshield wiper blades.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 I don't know how it happened.
 Somewhere along the way, Laura and
 I just drifted apart.
 (beat)
 Then came feelings of shame,
 resentment, and finally . . .
 hatred. Actual hatred.
 (beat)
 What kind of existence is that? The
 only person I have in the whole
 world hates me.

An automotive clerk notices Laura and heads over to offer his assistance.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 So, as a way of coping, I spend my
 lonely days escaping reality by
 pretending to be someone I'm not.

Laura spots him and rushes away.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 And in these elaborate fantasy
 worlds, I finally get to be someone
 important, a bigshot.

INT. TROY'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT - NARRATOR'S POV

Troy, Miranda and the Narrator toast glasses.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 Some days I'm a guy with an older
 brother in Chicago . . .

INT. TRUCK CAB - DAY - DRIVER'S POV

The cab is littered with cigarette butts.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
Other days, I'm a trucker named
Lyle, who keeps a pet tarantula on
his dash.

The tarantula lumbers across the dash.

INT. CALVIN KLEIN PERFUME COUNTER - DAY

Laura examines herself in the mirror.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
I do what it takes to gain refuge
from my private nightmare.
(beat)
But life wasn't always like this.
Things used to be a lot different
in the old days.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY - 25 YEARS AGO

Laura, grade two, crawls inside a "fort" made of blankets and
sofa cushions.

Note: The production values are that of a 8mm camera.

INSIDE FORT

Laura sits among her stuffed animal.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
When Laura was seven, we used to
make forts in the living room and
have tea parties.

After sipping her teacup, she WRINKLES her nose, looks around
and then LAUGH.

INT. LAURA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - 25 YEARS AGO

Laura and her best friend jump on Laura's bed.

The friend stops, SNIFFS, then LAUGHS.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

She wasn't embarrassed of me then.

Laura stops and smiles too. They resume their jumping.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

In fact, it was just the opposite.
Laura was genuinely proud of me.
Back then she'd to introduce me to
all of her friends. And you know
why?

Laura and her friend GIGGLE madly as they continue jumping.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Because I made them laugh.

One final jump.

At the zenith of Laura's last leap, TIME STANDS STILL.

SUSPENDED in midair, Laura smiles with the intensity of a
thousand suns.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

I used to make Laura laugh too.

FADE OUT.

FOOTNOTE

The film is over, the lights have been turned on, yet the
entire audience remains seated, keenly aware of the fragility
of their own existence.

Several weep.

David Lynch stands and screams, "I am a hack!" and then
devotes the rest of his life to directing rap videos.