

Ms. Kitty and the Couch of Death by Rich Norman

I am in a unique position: I own her...Ms. Kitty. Ms. Kitty is a sixteen ton D7 caterpillar tractor, vintage 1950's, of just the sort which carved the great Alaska highway, if a few years the newer. She is the most dangerous woman I have ever known. She has caught me on fire—twice, and I still love her. The beast of beasts, she was long dormant, and I was afraid she may never rise again, but a buddy helped, and she is alive! All the forest knows her, and rightly hates her. She smashes trees and crushes them under her tender foot; and I have used her to crush a house, dig its grave, and bury the splinters in the earth. She is amazing, and deadly...the last of a breed which uses cables and gears rather than hydraulics and computer chips. She is evil, the old fashioned way.

The start engine is spinning like a top wound too hard, revving and uneven, the throttle no longer governed by a long deceased governor, and I throw the lever to engage the real diesel, a monstrous heart of power and steady pulse, now stirring without resistance, turning over, readying for the explosion to come. I apply the ether, a dangerous and stupid trick, and then, the other lever and grubrummm...Pow! And in a cloud of ugly black smoke which is as springtime to my eyes—Ha!—She is alive!

Oh how long I have tried to rise above, and become loving and light...but this! It is too much! The seduction is complete—I love her! She is destruction as poetry! Now alive and beating, the diesel is an irresistible force and I do not refuse her—Crushing and wiping the earth of any and all in her path, I am Man! Safe upon my padded black perch, a soft couch bolted to her lovely frame, the clouds of dust rise up and the earth is scraped clean! The trees dance and falter, toppling before her iron teeth, the clouds of butterflies and insects rush into a tumble of plumed color...and all the earth rushes before her...now the earth as butter spread out, smoothed here, cut there, as icing to spread, all of life surrenders before her!

The earth knows, and the forest revenges itself upon her. I cut the tree, and it falls, so slowly, as a lazy day in summer... stretching, but wait! The arc of descent does not follow my notch—the tree sees her, and in its dying act seeks but one thing: Revenge! Closer and closer, falling farther and faster, gaining speed and then—splinters of bark and tearing green confusion yield the happy fact! She is well! The tree has spared my love—by inches!

Now the cloud of black rises and the engine is alight and beating, her heart of lovely evil steady and dull, throbbing and sure. I will take her easy and slow, up and over the ridge and behind my home, so I can build the new bridge, and use her to tow the timbers into place. I raise the blade and decide—today, I shall refuse her. The timbers will be dragged, and no more. My pleasure will have to wait and find another expression. Her angry shrieking gears howl and rage, grinding against each other, shouting, refusing her bulk, denying gravity's pull, holding her against the hill, angry and shrieking, begging me to lower the blade and slow her, and she is furious with me! I hope she will forgive me, because it is a dangerous thing to have such a potent and evil woman armed against one, but I believe she will forgive. I promise to have and hold her, oil her with stinking

sulphured grease and fluid, and be her loving groom, even if I am no fun anymore. Perhaps she will learn to forgive. No beast likes to be tamed, but she may yet learn to love me, and, there are advantages to the slow and steady type, such as I have become. In this thought I find much hope. In time, perhaps the forest too, will notice the change, and may even forgive her.

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