

MICHAEL BAZZETT

The Monster

They didn't notice it at first
because of the adrenaline
coursing through their bodies
but the monster was too old.
Its muzzle had gone grey
and a number of its claws
were cracked and broken.
It even trembled with a bit
of palsy when it settled
back on its fat haunches.
And every time it put
somebody's head into its
mouth and tried to shred it
clean as a plum from a stem,
one of its teeth broke and it
howled in pain and spit
the person out with splinters
of brittle enamel clinging
to their sodden clothing
and then they too began
to scream or possibly moan,
if they hadn't already begun
to slip from consciousness.

Strictly half-assed, said Steve
and he dropped the sword
he'd received upon arrival
at the refurbished warehouse
painted to look like a cave
with a coupon for himself
and five guests to do battle
with a bona fide monster
of "cannibalistic mettle &
unequivocal medieval rage."™

Fluorescent lights flicked on
when the manager entered
wiping sweat from his head
and apologizing profusely.
He wore a navy polo shirt
with the company logo

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as did the chagrined trainer
who was attempting to lure
the monster back inside
its chain-link enclosure
by offering it a rank knot
of chickens tied to a pole.
It mostly just seemed tired.

Brian climbed unsteadily
into the unmarked Ford van
they used as an ambulance
and Paul held a wash cloth
to the puncture wound
in his neck with one hand
but he had a beer in the other
and already he and Steve
were beginning to laugh
about how half-assed it was
and the manager promised
that next time would be
better, that a new one was
en route from Arkansas
and still mostly feral, so
next time they might see
what it felt like to be alive.