



DIGITAL MUTINY

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Brian stared at the cursor blinking in the corner of his word document. This essay, Dr. Menken had made clear while wagging a finger at the class, was the most important of fall quarter. Brian knew he needed something good, but was unsure how to start. After reviewing some notes, he pecked his name and date at the top of the page. Brian typed on, slowly finding his rhythm, and soon words danced across the screen.

Upon completing his first paragraph, Brian remembered Dr. Menken's demand that the last sentence state the thesis, so Brian went back to rewrite. As he deleted his words, though, his left index finger began to twitch and shake, then flail like an eel out of water until it jerked away from his palm. The finger severed cleanly at the knuckle, crawled across the keyboard, and propped itself up against the computer screen.

Brian stared as his finger transformed into a three-inch miniature of Dr. Menken with savage teeth, red eyes, and a nose as long as its face was wide. The finger-monster spat as it read Brian's paragraph in a phlegmy voice, and as the creature drawled, Brian's other fingers began to twitch and flail, and one by one they crawled away from his hands.

Like plump worms, Brian's thumbs inched toward each other and twisted into a lumpy version of his third grade teacher, Mrs. Bartleough. His right pinky hiccupped and shivered until it resembled Mr. Pecklish, Brian's high school English instructor. The other pinky, two ring fingers, and the remaining index spasmed into his current professors just as his middle fingers sprung straight up, one as his mother and the other, Ernest Hemingway.

Dr. Menken leapt onto the delete key and stomped it repeatedly. Brian's mother took one glance at the vanishing work and marched to the edge of his desk, demanding to know what he meant by the fetishization of commodities and threatening to wash his mouth out with soap if he didn't come clean. In the middle of the scolding, Ernest crapped into his hand and hurled his shit at the computer screen. As the splatter slid down the monitor, the digits began to sing. Fat Mrs. Bartleough yodeled about proper punctuation in a high falsetto while plopping comma after comma between Brian's words. Mr. Pecklish scrambled behind Mrs. Bartleough, humming as he changed her commas into periods, semicolons, and the occasional em dash. The four professors skipped arm in arm,

adding words here, deleting others there, and caroling joyfully as sentences rose and fell beneath their frolicking stampede.

As Brian watched the digits rip apart and rearrange his writing, he tried to speak, but his voice slipped from him like his fingers from his hands. He pawed the keyboard with his palms, mashing buttons with the stumps, but the finger-monsters quickly edited his mess. Like some mutinous choir disposed of their conductor, the digits sang the words as they typed their paper across Brian's screen.

"Stop!" Brian tried to scream but couldn't, and, as if aware of the failed effort, Mr. Pecklish stuck out his tongue and cackled.

Brian, forgetting his fingerlessness, tried to flick at Mr. Pecklish, only to be laughed at even harder by the finger-instructor. However, as Brian imagined his finger flicking, one of the professors doubled over and then sprung straight up, screaming into the air. At the sound of the professor's cry, the other fingers stopped singing and scurried to catch their falling comrade. Despite watching his renegade digits run across the keyboard, Brian suddenly felt as if they were still attached to his palms. He imagined his hands balling into fists, and as he did, the finger-monsters all bent in half, including the still-falling professor, who crashed into his three colleagues.

"Brian—" Mrs. Bartlebough admonished, hopping forward with the full force of her weight and authority.

Brian gave her no chance to finish. With a howl Mrs. Bartlebough ripped apart, the thumbs unraveling and crawling like scolded puppies back into place on Brian's palms.

"That," his mother warned, trembling slightly, "is no way to behave. After all, we are trying to help!"

The professors cheered support, and Hemingway trumpeted a jolly fart conveying his agreement. Only Dr. Menken stood aside in silence.

"Now, Brian," his mother said once the hurrahs subsided, "it's time to stop this nonsense and return Mrs. Bartlebough to us."

"Now, Mom," Brian retorted, surprised to find his words again. "it is time to stop this nonsense; however, it's not Mrs. Bartlebough who'll be returned to you, but my fingers to my hand!"

And with a yelp, the professors, Pecklish, and Brian's finger-mother leapt back into place on Brian's palm. His right hand complete, Brian scooped Hemingway up and shoved him back into his knuckle, waving his arm to dispel Ernest's flatulence.

"That's right, kid," Dr. Menken smirked, hopping around the keyboard spitting, deleting, and typing. "Drop the extra baggage. Now keep quiet while I finish this paper. We both know you need something decent."

“Actually,” Brian’s voice still sounded a little funny in his mouth, “I’ve been thinking—”

“That’s good.” The deranged digit didn’t look up. “I told you I’d have you thinking for yourself by the time you left my class.”

“I’m glad we agree,” Brian said as he grabbed Dr. Menken. He turned the squirming finger-monster upside down and jammed its head into the delete key. When the last of the co-opted paper vanished, Dr. Menken was once again a regular left index finger.

Brian began his paper anew, slowly finding his rhythm, and though he heard whispers about theses and punctuation, they were never more than textures, harmonies within his orchestration, and soon Brian’s words danced across his screen again.