

# Four-Letter-Word

Connor Roberson

If you have never seen a pear, it would be impossible to describe the appearance of the man sitting at the park bench; if you have seen a pear, you know his appearance already. He was relatively short, relatively plump, with an unusually small and unusually bald head and a propensity for the color green.

The park bench was a regular shade of green, and the sky was a regular shade of blue, but most interesting things were afoot. For this man had a terrible, terrible curse, the curse of the four-letter-word. He had been seeing the word everywhere he went for nearly a year now, so that it had become merely part of his routine. Supposedly, most people saw several different words in the course of a year, but not The Pear. The Pear saw only one little four-letter-word, in every conceivable place.

Today, watching his ten-year-old daughter in the park, he saw the word as much as ever. In fact, today he saw the word more than ever before. He watched her small form skip around the playground, and saw patterns begin to emerge among the leaves of the trees, the woodchips in the playground, even the folds of her clothing. Everywhere he turned his gaze, one four-letter-word. He tilted his head back and watched the sky overhead. The first three letters hung mutely above him, forming from converging banks of white cloud; as he watched, the fourth letter, the E, slowly shifted into being, and he looked back at his young daughter. Soon they left the park, his large hand folded around his daughter's as they walked home, her other hand wrapped around her little doll.

The Pear had invented many different types of the four-letter-word. There was the type of letters, where he saw it spelled out in written or typed text. These were relatively rare. One day, three months ago, he had come across a newspaper in which every word had been the four-letter-word. This of course made it impossible to read, made the pictures rather confusing, and intrigued him to no end; he saved the paper, but found that he could read the text just fine the next morning.

A woman passed them, walking in the opposite direction, and he noticed the knit of her sweater clearly contained the forms of four different letters. These were the second type, the spotted type. His daughter had quickly taught him that, when one thing eclipses the rest of your thoughts, the mind sees that word spelled out in every seemingly random pattern. He squeezed her hand and smiled reassuringly down at her. She smiled back.

That day, the crossword was made up entirely of four-letter-words. All of the clues were the same as well. Absently, The Pear filled out the puzzle; it did not take very long. He finished the last E and then folded the paper, placing it back on the coffee table. Even though he delighted in accomplishing nothing on Sundays, today he resolved to get something done. He decided to use his stationary bike, a terribly ugly thing that sat in the corner of the garage. The Pear had burned more calories unboxing the darn thing than he had using it.

Every time that he swiped his hand across the smooth metal to dust it, the floating motes left in the air seemed to spell the four-letter-word. He clambered atop the bike and forcibly grabbed both handles, pressing down on them hard. When they struggled into motion, he planted his feet squarely and began to pedal, at first slowly then faster. He thought about many things as the sweat streaming down his body began to spell words on his legs.

In the dark garage, exercising, alone, The Pear talked to himself. He thought about his finances, or lack thereof. He thought of his daughter, and now the word crossed his lips, at first timidly then more firmly than before, then repeatedly.

The Pear, of course, was not a man built for exercise, and quickly stopped. He lumbered back into the house, ignoring the four-letter-word visible in the weave of the carpet, ignoring the drops of water in the sink that seemed suspiciously like they spelled words. He tried to shower the grime off his body, but could never quite get it all off. The Pear hated exercise.

That night, after all the lights in the house were off, The Pear slowly rose from bed and silently walked down the hall. In the dark, every shadow looked like the four-letter-word, spelled out in intimidating angles. He stepped into his daughter's room.

He thought about a lot of things, watching her sleeping form. Her room was, as always, full of the four-letter-word. He thought about how he was doing as a father. He thought about her future. He clutched his arms across his chest silently. He was so worried for her. He was doing his best, but he was not a strong man. He knew that it was up to him alone to guarantee her future. He looked at his daughter, and saw the four-letter-word especially.

Monday, The Pear drove her to school. He told himself that he was doing the best job he could. She waved her feet above the floorboard, still slightly too short to reach it. She gave him a huge grin before running off to class. He headed to work.

The speckling in the ceiling tiles contained hundreds of words, or rather, hundreds of the same four-letter-word. His office was so full of it that he saw it on the back of his eyelids. Several times, his co-workers tried to talk to him, but despite seeing their mouths moving he could hear only one word.

She rode the bus home, and several hours later The Pear drove home. They ate dinner together, but mostly he left her alone. Today, the four-letter-word was especially bad, spelled out in his couch's pattern and on the spines of every book in his bookshelf. He must have read the same word ten thousand times today. The Pear tried to focus on other things, but could not. The news reports all sounded like one word to him. He went to bed early.

That night, there was no sleep for The Pear. He tossed and turned, ignoring the word spelled across the face of his alarm clock and the faint lettering visible in his bedspread. Finally, at four A.M., The Pear broke. He had been astoundingly resistant for astoundingly long, but every man has limits. The four-letter-word had finally worn him down.

He strode purposefully down the hall and silently entered his daughter's room. Now, he purposefully looked at the word spelled across every grain of wood, every wrinkle in the carpet, every ornate styling on the furniture, every splintered moonbeam through the window, every book on her shelf, every glowing constellation of stars on her ceiling, every fold of fabric on her bed, everywhere everywhere everything.

There was one thing unusually out of place amidst the clutter. Her little doll, her favorite toy, sat on her pillow beside her head, facing him. He stared at its button eyes while they stared mutely back. It was an old doll, worn by her love until its grin was lopsided and its yarn hair was nearly black with filth. It had one hand held forward, as if to invite him closer. Its head was cocked invitingly, mockingly, knowingly. He wanted very much to break it.

He crossed the room in three steps and knelt next to the bed, staring the doll in the face. The stitching of the fabric, to his horror, spelled out the four-letter-word as well.

“You ass,” he whispered to the doll, so silently that it made no noise outside his mind.

“Take her,” the doll whispered back.

He glared at it, but could not bear such a piercing gaze against his shame and looked down instead. From the weave of the carpet, a single word emerged. He looked at the soft, gentle curving of the R, with a single thrusting shaft.

“She is yours,” the doll hissed, and in the darkness it seemed almost to shift closer to him.

The Pear stared intently at the powerful point of the A, the sweeping legs spread wide.

“Take her now.”

The Pear saw the burgeoning fullness of the P, with a wide inviting curve.

“She is yours,” the doll whispered, voice echoing only inside his head. He was unsure if he heard the doll or merely his own thoughts.

The Pear looked at the straight back of the E, an undeveloped body of angles. He looked at his daughter, and saw the four-letter-word especially.