

# WE'RE ALL A LITTLE MAD HERE

by Liliana Heavey

*\*surnames have been omitted to protect the guilty*

YOU WEREN'T EXPECTING the story to end there were you? I sure hope not. I haven't even told you the new cow's name! For those wondering, it was Trogdor Destroyer of Grass. Anyway, when a vet came to inseminate our new milk cow, they noticed something strange about her.

"Um—" said the vet, "this isn't a cow. It's a hermaphrodite. That means it can't get pregnant or "Hi! My full chosen name is Liliana Sappho Heavey Anactoria Acorn, and I'm about to tell you about my life."

Did that sound self-centered enough? What if I told you the list of stories you're about to hear

starts with "The Man of No Name," ends with a quote from Alice in Wonderland, and that they all take place on a hippie commune? A little more interesting? I hope so. But before we can get into the fun stuff, does anyone want to know what a commune is?

In short, my commune is an intentional community called Acorn. We share income and housing and run a seed business together. We have a number of hours we work a week, and that work can be fulfilled in almost any way. Whether you are working on the farm, in the office, taking care of kids, or even

scrubbing toilets, the credit you get is the same. If you are contributing to the community, that's all that matters.

Consent is really important here. In a place where one building sometimes houses fifteen people or more, a person's bedroom is their sacred personal space, and "knock before you enter" doesn't need to be on the door to be understood. Unless you have green light (total or absolute) consent from a person, a good example of consent would be something like,

"Hey, can I hug you?"

"Yes, you can. Thanks for asking!" or "No, not right now," in which case that's it. No hard feelings.

Basically, if consent isn't your thing, then community probably isn't either. Sorry.

Most communes hold group consensus meetings to make decisions or decide to accept or reject new members, people who have just visited for a trial period to try on the commune life and see if it fits. We eat meals together, trade work for work with other communities, and complete taxes for everyone who lives with us. My community has been incredibly supportive of me, and I consider them to be my family.

Now that you've got a general idea of what Acorn is like, and maybe you've

even said an “oh how wholesome,” I’m going to take the liberty of disrupting the image in your head with a few of the strangest and scariest stories of my time there and hope it doesn’t completely ruin your picture of farm life.

*Let’s kick it off easy with:*

## 1. THE MAN WITH NO NAME

Our first story begins with a man riding a bike into uncharted waters. This man found Acorn online, emailed us, and when, after a week or so had gotten no reply, biked cross-country with no backup plan to pay a visit. Now almost anyone can visit Acorn, but not without communicating with us first. So when this man arrived, there were few people around, and it was merely by luck that, right away, he ran into the member StarFox. (Did I mention we love fun names?). StarFox heard his plan and didn’t turn him away, but his name was a different story. We already had a member called Mike, and having experienced the chaos that came of housing one too many Mikes, people were fed up with the name. StarFox told the man he could come in, but only if he left that identity at the door. A moment later they were inside and everyone left in confusion at meeting a stranger in their house who apparently had no name at all.

A party was held to give the poor guy a name, but so few people turned up that the decision was basically left to one person with a strong opinion. The man formerly of no name didn’t stay at Acorn for all that long, but to my knowledge he has kept the name Gilgamesh to this day.

That was one of the more lax Acorn stories. If I’m being really honest, those people “left in confusion at the stranger with no name” probably weren’t surprised at all. I could go into why, but let’s just say we meet a lot of characters, and it was much weirder that he biked from California without actually asking us first.

*We have a lot of pretty out-there animal stories, so here are a couple of the quirkiest ones:*

## 2. EXPLODING GOATS AND A PET NAMED COW AND HER HERMAPHRODITE FRIEND.

Welcome to part two, a story from the days when Acorn community still kept cows, pigs, and goats. The first half of this story is very true to its name, so watch out!

A fun fact about goats is that they have no sense of when their stomachs are full. They will just keep eating as long as there’s food, so you have to be careful how much you give them. The person who took care of our goats at the time knew this and always monitored the animals’ food. Of course, everything did not go as planned, and one day one of the goats escaped its enclosure and found its way to the alfalfa. Alfalfa was a favorite treat, but it’s a plant that expands in the stomach. As perhaps you can guess, the result of the animal reaching the unprotected stash wasn’t too pretty. It was StarFox (the same person who met the man once named Mike) who arrived just a little too late. They went running up to the scene in time to see the creature explode. I mean a literal goat explosion.

It was as though the food were a ticking bomb, and StarFox later had to try to explain what seemed impossible.

Hard to believe as it may be, I know this story to be true as I later found another goat in a similar situation but was able to get to it in time. Maybe you believed all that and maybe you didn't, but either way, time to lighten the mood? How about a ridiculous cow story? That "pet named Cow" was in fact a cow whose real name (Pandora) never stuck. Cow wandered onto our farm as a calf, clearly lost and unable to survive alone. StarFox (Welcome back again, StarFox!) took the calf in and bonded with her immediately. Being still so little, Cow lived indoors as a pet until she outgrew that life. She had been bred to be a meat cow, but at this point everyone loved her and had no intention of eating her or, of course, milking a meat cow. Instead we got another cow, this one meant for milking, and kept Cow as an outdoor pet.

This is the moment for a collective facepalm, sigh, and head turn. Once again, we're looking at Cow, but now we're thinking, "Oh the irony. We're about to eat our milk cow and milk our meat cow, aren't we?" That's exactly what we did, and I'm happy to say that at least that part went about as smoothly as could be expected.

### 3. SKETCHY NEIGHBOR MIKE AND HIS CRAZY THIEVING GIRLFRIEND

Directly across the road from Acorn is a place about as sketchy as a little farmhouse can get. At first glance, it looks abandoned. The yard is in complete chaos, looking rather like a junkyard, and

the house isn't much better. The roof is caving slightly. The yard (if you could call it that) is perpetually covered in random things including a large metal cage, unprotected from the elements. It's actually a 24/7 yard sale, but no one would ever know it without talking to the residents of the house. There are usually one or two rusty old cars there, and if you pass by at the right time you might see a black Sedan or even a big white cargo van pulling up or driving away. Those people never stay long.

"Who exactly is it who lives here? They don't sound like good news."

Yeah not so much. The cage alone comes with a list of unpleasant animal-related stories.

We call the owner Neighbor Mike. That man is worrisome enough on his own, but his girlfriend Sharron is the focus of this story. Sharron seemed harmless enough at first. She would come over to Acorn a fair amount, and while people mostly weren't huge fans of her, no one was uncomfortable. That was until she turned up at our friend StarFox's door in the middle of the night, bloody and desperately saying she had to go to the hospital. Poor StarFox, of course, leapt out of bed immediately to drive her forty-five minutes to the nearest hospital. As soon as they reached town however, Sharron insisted that they needed to stop at a gas station. Despite StarFox's protests that she needed help right away, they stopped. Sharron never came back, and Acorners were even less inclined to feel kindly toward her when they heard how StarFox had been used.

If you hadn't guessed yet, this was a setup for a drug ride so Sharron could meet

her dealer. She was banned from returning to the community, but that didn't stop her next move.

A few months after the setup, Sharron went to Acorn at night, but this time without the intention of being seen. She snuck into our office building and attempted to break into the cashbox kept there using a crowbar and hammer. She was, thank goodness, unsuccessful, and made the mistake of leaving her tools lying next to the dented safe to be found the next morning. But this was not quite the last of Sharron's plans. She hadn't gotten our money, but having gotten nice and cozy with the community in the past, she knew where we kept the keys to all our cars, and did not hesitate to take one to the city of Richmond and leave it there to gather dust. We presume she did this for the same reason as the setup. When we discovered what had happened, we contacted Sharron, but it was only through her daughter that we were able to have our car returned. We installed a new and stronger safe, moved our keys, and made it clear that we would notify the authorities if Sharron ever tried to enter our home again.

"All's well that ends well," one could say, but I admit I take care not to engage in conversation if Neighbor Mike and Sharron ever happen to be out when I walk down our road.

Our interactions with these neighbors may be a bit of a look into the darker side of Acorn. The fact is that this "utopian community" isn't all sunshine and quirky rainbows. People filter through Acorn like sand through a gold pan, and we can't always tell who might be dangerous.

People drink and make mistakes, and people lie and avoid responsibility. There was once a woman who went manic to an extent to which we could no longer take care of her. In the early years of Acorn, a man even burned down a building at night housing at least ten people. Miraculously, no one was hurt. These are only the times it's gone too far.

#### 4. "WE'RE ALL A LITTLE MAD HERE. YOU'LL FIT RIGHT IN."

We all know StarFox by now, right? I honestly didn't realize how many stories they would happen to be in, but here we are. We can create plenty of chaos on our own, I promise, but StarFox has certainly been a sort of main character throughout this "journey" if you will.

They've been in the middle of some drama and helped the community with said drama, but what about them as a person?

StarFox was a high functioning alcoholic with several mental health issues. They would have manic episodes and fits of rage. One moment they would be totally checked out, the next incredibly high intensity with a distinct lack of social skills. StarFox had a story of their own. It wasn't a perfect one, but Acorn accepted them all the same. It's true that having members with mental health issues hasn't always worked out for us, but StarFox truly flourished at Acorn. Someone who would struggle in the mainstream world was able to live freely in an accepting community.

The world is full of beautiful people, and some of them need help. For some

people, community turns out to be the help they need, but that can't be true for everyone. It can be easy to focus on the bad and say, "That community sounds like a terrible and dangerous place to live," but the way I like to look at it sees the good. It sees the commune's acceptance of people who need help. Maybe not everyone would think it's worth it, but I would rather live in a world which takes everyone as simply human, no more no less, at the risk of getting hurt, then a world that would rather hurt others who fit outside the lines. We won't judge you.