

THE MOLOTOV COCKTAIL

The Eyes



by Andrea DeAngelis

He only lets us out at night. We think it's a he, for father was always bigger than mother. Who we were before this endless cycle is decomposing, who any of our parents were, are only shrouds of thought. I can't remember them and they must be dust by now. We only live one night over and over again.

My favorite time is when he has not yet woken, when the light is dying and we aren't yet. That is when you might see us before the dusk slips away. At twilight, we run with the wild boars. Our shadows meld and splay in the greenish mist. Our pursuit gets us ready for him to hunt us.

I am older now than I remember, but I do not remember much except how he will kill us, slashing with a reaping hook as we run and fall. Our palms all scabs and scars. Hard and dark rusty globs under the surface, the damage never to completely heal, the raw and weeping skin growing translucent. I peel back my scabs, yellow-brown and crusty, to feel something again. Most of the jagged pieces peel away easily, only slightly catching around the outlines of my eternal wounds. If only I could wear another's flesh like him, I could get away. The wolf skin he wears flaps like wings as he chases us. Running and running, our lungs shrunk and gasping at the end of each night, when he always finds us.

Even so, it is beautiful here. I never appreciated the Sonian Forest when I was alive, when I could leave a mark that I exist, that this nightmare is only a nightmare and not my life. Sometimes we claw away at the bark, wanting to leave flesh behind as evidence, hoping someone will find us in this land of tall trees, fog and moonlight, mouths inside trunks, moss grafted onto skin, hollowing out, becoming desiccated again and again.

I don't remember how I got here but I know I will never leave. The night slits awake when his eyes open, those bloody irises and clots of black pupils will be the last thing we see in the glowing darkness. In those nameless hours, we die. He stares into us, boring into bone, while slashing, chopping and stabbing. Those eyes, great and large, fathomless. None of us has ever survived the whole night into dawn. I can still remember the sun, I want to feel it again.

Hell is recurring, that is how you tell it is hell. Sometimes there are only eight of us, other times eighty but there are never enough. He will never stop hunting us. You tell yourself that he is finished, satiated from gorging on all his killing, but the holes inside him only make him more ravenous.

The eyes will not die. He is the wolf he skinned alive. He doesn't need his hook to hurt me.

Which one of us will fall first tonight? Which one of us wants it over as quickly as possible? Prey that runs is usually chased. Prey that stands its ground may be able to bluff and stall the wolf. I've found my way to the deep river tonight, but he waits for me and I struggle against the current because I've never learned to swim. Is drowning worse than him breaking my spine? I will never find out because he will drag me out before I go under for one last icy time.

Peter, one of the older children (though we are children no more), after dozens of years, insists the hunter is a cacodemon. When Peter was living, he used to make up all sorts of tales and so we have trouble believing anything he says between wheezing and gasping for breath. He points out a dark red mass swirling under the skin of the hunter's broad back. But I wonder if it's the wolf's enlarged heart howling to escape. Peter says if we forgive him for killing then we will be free. But how can you forgive when you are being slaughtered? The agony only recedes when we are smashed into oblivion and the sky grays out.

Every night I see his eyes. I see them before me, behind me, to the right and the left and even inside me. You think you hear laughing, children laughing, but I haven't been a child for forty years. It is not laughter, it is mechanical and unbidden, it feels like metal teeth shredding. I used to love to run but now I'm raw with exertion, shaking and vomiting, dry heaving, breaking and crumbling into fallen leaves.

You believe in god but you overlook the devil. Your cars rarely stop for us and you shouldn't for he isn't done with his killing. He has killed us thousands of times and you could easily become his prey. It's happened before. As a driver swerves to miss our shadows fleeing across the road, he skids into the gray trees. The forest swallows the car and its passengers like a ripple contracting into the abyss. You shouldn't go near this ashen forest, you shouldn't get out of your car and walk into the fog, dizzy and stumbling. If you do, you will become lost and that is when he will stalk you and when he will have you.

Still, I wish you would hesitate, to witness our fixed looping existence. But you will throw your car in reverse. Time will then move forward for you. For us it is a cycle, a sickle of torture, endless and sharp. Wet ash by morning, coalescing from a single sprawling pool into individual phantoms, clots of darkening plasma, solidifying into limbs, flesh and fear, gathering ourselves to run and run. For though we are haunting, we are the haunted and always dying.



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